RESOURCES FOR LEARNING ABOUT
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES

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May 2012

The goal of this review is to position misuse of electronic communication devices in a deeper context of digital communication and youth. This list of resources focuses primarily on students and their use of electronic communication devices (ECDs). Also included are reports on the most talked about misuse: cheating, cyberbullying, accessing sexual/problematic/illegal content, and solicitation. The list of established research centers and summaries of nationwide studies below are resources for exploring these topics in greater depth.

These reports were primarily gathered from centers and organizations that have an interest in shaping the conversation and establishing social policy around youth and social media (see List of Centers and Resources below). Center-based reports concentrate the academic research of various disciplines by providing extensive literature reviews and publishing socially relevant findings. Additionally, reports from research centers are accessible to a wide audience. Such reports are often the subject of news stories and set the stage for public response to the issues surrounding digital communication and social media. To portray a complete and balanced picture of youth and digital communication, this literature review takes into account the methodologies and social context in which the reports are produced.

Following the list of centers and resources below, the first section describes key resources by center and in terms of trends and practices. Three subcategories of particular interest are mobile/smart phones and e-readers, social network sites (SNS), and technologies specifically built for the classroom. The second section sets forth summaries of relevant literature on ECDs.

List of Centers and Resources:

Berkman Center for Internet and Society - http://cyber.law.harvard.edu

Common Sense Media - http://www.commonsensemedia.org

Crimes Against Children Research Center - http://www.unh.edu/ccrc

Cyberbullying Research Center - http://www.cyberbullying.us

Digital Media and Learning Central (MacArthur Foundation and the UC Humanities Research Institute) - dmlcentral.net

Education Week - http://www.edweek.org

EdSurge - https://www.edsurge.com/

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age (previously the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use) - http://www.embracecivility.org/?page_id=35
FutureLab - http://www.futurelab.org.uk
International Association for K-12 Online Learning - http://www.inacol.org
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) - http://www.iste.org
Joan Ganz Cooney Center - http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org
Kaiser Family Foundation - http://www.kff.org
New Media Consortium - http://www.nmc.org
Pew Research Center - http://www.pewinternet.org
Project Tomorrow - http://www.tomorrow.org

Resources for Online Safety Curriculum:

CyberSmart (now a part of Common Sense Media) - http://cybersmartcurriculum.org/
iKeepSafe - http://www.ikeepsafe.org
NetSmartz (program of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children) - http://www.netsmartz.org

Descriptions of Key Resources

Key Resources by Center

Pew Internet and American Life Project http://www.pewinternet.org/

Pew has published quality demographic reports on issues of teens and technology including cyberbullying, video games, creative writing, social media, parents, strangers, and social networks. Pew continues to publish articles keeping up with rapid technological and data changes, including “Teens, Smartphones and Texting” (2012) and “Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites” (2011).

Berkman Center for Internet and Society http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/

The Berkman Center at Harvard University studies the complexities of cyberspace and works to address the legal and policy implications. “Youth and Digital Media: From Credibility to Information Quality” (2012) addresses the ways youth acquire knowledge from the Internet, and the newly drafted publication “What You Must Know to Help Combat Youth Bullying, Meanness, and Cruelty” (2012) includes information about cyberbullying as a piece of bullying culture with recommended interventions for both behaviors.
Cyberbullying Research Center [http://www.cyberbulling.us](http://www.cyberbulling.us)

The Cyberbullying Research Center provides up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents. A resource for parents, educators, law enforcement officers, counselors, and others who work with youth, the website includes numerous resources to help prevent and respond to cyberbullying incidents. Center directors, Drs. Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin, have co-authored multiple publications. Their third book, “School Climate 2.0: Preventing Cyberbullying and Sexting One Classroom at a Time” (2012), provides 10 years of research to underscore strategic approaches in an effort to foster a positive school climate while reducing teen technology misuse. Hinduja and Patchin also produced a listing of cyberbullying laws and policies by state, entitled “State Cyberbullying Laws” (2012).

Digital Media and Learning Central [http://dmlcentral.net/](http://dmlcentral.net/)

Digital Media and Learning Central is the online face of the University of California Humanities Research Institute, supported by the MacArthur Foundation. The site supports and disseminates current information about the emergent field of digital media and learning. Articles about electronic communication devices include NPR broadcast “Closing the Digital Divide” (2011), a new take on the shift from accessing technology to the application of technology and participation. “For At-Risk Youth is Learning Digital Media a Luxury?” (2011), another NPR story discussing the redefined digital divide, touches on budgetary issues and the defense of mobile technologies in the classroom.

Kaiser Family Foundation [http://www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)

In a large national study, the Kaiser Family Foundation evaluated the role of the media in the lives of 3rd to 12th graders. The study positions online and digital communication in the larger context of all media experiences rather than evaluating the internet, movies, magazines, music, TV, and video games independently. A sister study addresses electronic media in the lives of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.


Project Tomorrow publishes the findings of the national Speak Up Project, an online survey that collects the views of over 1.5 million K-12 students, educators, and parents. Project Tomorrow released “Learning in the 21st Century” (2010) in partnership with Blackboard Inc. to explore educators’ integration of “classic” technologies (laptop and desktop computers) with “emergent” technological devices (smartphones, e-readers and smartbooks), in order to create an infrastructure for student learning. The 2010 Speak Up Survey data gathered from over 379,000 respondents also illustrates the online learning shift in schools nationwide. A 2010 assessment of Project K-Nect also demonstrated a relationship between electronic communication tools and higher math proficiency levels.
Key Resources by Topic

Mobile/Smart Phones and E-Readers

The Pew Internet and American Life Project report "Teens and Mobile Phones Over the Past Five Years" (2010) presents the current demographics of ownership and use from a nationally representative study. It also positions the data on mobile phone use in relationship to other mobile and communication devices.

With seven out of ten teens owning mobile phones, there has been much discussion about the potential for mobile phone use in education. The executive summary from the Joan Ganz Cooney Center’s “Pockets of Potential” and the book *Toys to Tools* provide sound reasons to use mobile phones in learning environments and offer practical suggestions for implementation.

Despite arguments for their use, mobile phones are routinely banned from most classrooms. Beside the distractions the personal devices cause, cheating with mobile phones in class has become a major concern of educators. Common Sense Media commissioned a study on the use of mobile phones and the internet to cheat on tests and plagiarize in “Hi-Tech Cheating: Cell Phones and Cheating in Schools” (2009).

Moving to a larger electronic format, the e-reader, the Joan Ganz Cooney Center’s Quick Report “Print Books vs. E-Books” (2012) represents early analysis and comparisons of reading experiences between traditional paper books and e-books delivered on devices including the Kindle, iPad and NOOK.

Social Network Sites, Networked Publics, & Gaming and Multi-player Environments

Exploring the nuances of public spaces online can illuminate why certain sites have become popular, which activities attract youth, and how safety and privacy concerns of users are addressed. Facebook is one of the most common social network sites, and their user practices have often been the subject of sensational news stories. However, the history and technology of such sites have been given much less attention.

“Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship” (2007) is a comprehensive paper on the subject from the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*. Additionally, the work on social network sites by the Pew Internet and American Life Project provides demographic information on the usage patterns of teens online. Finally, the report “Living and Learning with New Media” opens up the discussion that is usually focused on Facebook to other frequented “networked publics” such as other social network sites, gaming communities, and virtual worlds.

Sexual solicitation and cyberbullying are among the most commonly discussed online risks to youth. These topics are discussed in “Enhancing Child Safety and Online Technologies” and the often-cited “Online Victimization of Youth” (2001) and “Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later” (2006). Among the key findings of these reports are: Victimization online is less than it is offline; minor-to-minor solicitation occurs more frequently than solicitation by adult predators; bullying is more common than sexual solicitation; and the risk factors of youth themselves (psychosocial make-up and family dynamics) are better predictors of risk than specific technologies or media. Curriculum resources on online safety for educators and parents can be found through CyberSmart, NetSmartz, Web Wise Kids and iKeepSafe.
A newer area of research demonstrates social media as a common source of information regarding youth suicide. “Where Do Youth Learn About Suicides on the Internet, and what Influence Does this Have on Suicidal Ideation?” (2011) asked 719 people between 14 and 24, where they heard about suicide on the Internet and how often they were exposed to the idea. The data raises concern when it pointed to online discussion forums associated with suicidal ideation. Research recommendations include greater efforts to increase resources for youth coping strategies, and leading away from suicidal ideation.

Technologies for the Classroom

Specific examples and implementations of technology trends such as 1:1 computing, virtual schools, and mobile learning can be explored in the archives of the National Education Computing Conference (now called the ISTE Conference) and Edweek’s Digital Directions magazine.

“Teacher Attitudes about Digital Games in the Classroom” (2012) is ongoing survey research, funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and conducted by the Cooney Center, and E-Line Media. The study explores teacher use of digital games in the classroom including, fiscal impact, benefits, types of games, and barriers to employing games in the classroom.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center’s "Take a Giant Step: a Blueprint for Teaching Young Children in the Digital Age” (2010) also addresses the integration of digital technology in the classroom, with a long-range foundational perspective and a special instructional emphasis upon underserved students.

Literature Summaries

1. Project Tomorrow (2012)

Project Tomorrow publishes the findings of the national Speak Up Project, an online survey that collects the views of over 416,000 K-12 students, educators, and parents. This study characterizes the nation’s perspective on technology in education. In the “Personalizing the Classroom Experience – Teachers, Librarians and Administrators Connect the Dots with Digital Learning,” key findings included:

- Increased personalized learning is occurring outside of the classroom with “Do it Yourself” supplemental online classes and applications.

- The abundance of mobile applications is becoming an obstacle for teachers and administrators. Choosing the tool, determining the quality of the learning instrument, and learning the evaluative standards, among the thousands of available applications is becoming increasingly difficult, especially for schools aiming for best practices and consistent implementation across classrooms.

- Teachers are using the same technologies as students, for professional tasks. These include webinars, multi-media presentations, online learning community participation, reading blogs and wikis, and using Twitter to communicate.
Debates are currently underway regarding the “Bring Your Own Technology” idea, which would allow students to bring a smartphone or tablet computer to school.


This Pew study indicates that one in four teens owns a smartphone. The number of teenage cell phone owners is up to 77 percent, from the 75 percent of teens who reported owning one in 2009. These figures are substantially higher than the 2004 figure that indicated 44 percent of teens owned cell phones.

Teen texting has risen from 50 texts per day in 2009, to 60 texts per user in 2011. Texting is now the dominant mode of communication, significantly lowering former landline and cell phone conversation reports.

New information shows that race, gender and age affects the likelihood of cell phone ownership. Teens 14-17 are more likely to have a cell phone, compared to teens 12 and 13 years of age. White teens are more likely to have cell phones than Latino teens, and more suburban teens have cell phones than urban teens. Young, teen boys are least likely to have a cell phone (47 percent).


The book is rooted in research-based guidance and accessible to adults contenting with or preparing for an intervention with cyberbullying. Each of the book’s chapters is authored by experts who have dealt with, and who are versed in the language and skill to deal with, identifying, preventing and responding to cyberbullying.


This book focuses in on the implementation of mobile technologies in the classroom and as research instruments. The text also discusses the nature of learning in an environment outside of the classroom and the advantages of flexibility involved with accessing information outside of predetermined locations.

Three sections comprise the book, theories and frameworks, design and implementation, and innovative pedagogies and research. Practitioners, for whom the book was designed, can find the history of mobile technologies, the uses and possibilities, and research supporting implementation strategies, in one place.


5. “Zero to Eight: Children’s Media Use in America” (2011)

The report presents the amount of time children spend utilizing digital media, segmented by screen use, platform and activity. Digital devices include television, computer, video game console, cell phone, iPod and iPad. The report also takes gender, race and socio-economic status into account, reporting notable differences in media use activities between groups.


A detailed composition of chapters covering technological vocabulary, leadership and policy, ethical standards, administration, design, and resource management appear in the first half of the text. This book begins to ground the use of classroom technologies (mostly web and desktop variety) in a uniform manner. For example, instead of trying new technologies and following wherever they lead, the text offers strategies for pedagogical planning followed by reverse engineering the outcomes to determine which platforms and technologies are most appropriate for the school’s specific goals.


7. “Spotlight on Technology in Education” (2011)

For the researcher or practitioner who feels as though there is too much to learn in order to effectively implement mobile technologies in the classroom, this book is for you. Chapters break technology pedagogies and pitfalls into manageable pieces and include tips for success and implementation. The book is also full of examples from institutions currently experimenting with new approaches to test-taking and online assessments, giving teachers a glimpse into the near future.


8. “Cell Phones in the Classroom: Are We Dialing up Disaster?” (2011)

Using the “Teens and Mobile Phones” (2010) report and others as a springboard for researching the feasibility of mobile phone applications in the classroom, this article explores the possibilities and implications of cell phone use in a pre-calculus high school classroom. The authors’ intent is to inspire discussion around the topic by making successful pilot programs available for other practitioners to review and consider.

Within the study, cell phones were used in three primary ways: Audience response, research, and to record work through photos and video documentation. For audience response, questions were asked and students texted in the answer. The polling tool was also used to check on student comprehension. Student responses were anonymous, inviting a new dynamic into the classroom. Research and recorded work included definition searches, peer review, and reflections of the class and the experience. The study closes with recommendations for practitioners considering the implementation of a similar program.


The report represents a thorough analysis of how mobile phones are utilized and how they fit into the lives of parents and teens. Data from 800 respondents to a Parent-Teen survey conducted in 2009 yielded the following information about teen mobile phone use.

Approximately 75 percent of all 12-17 year-olds own cellular phones. Text messaging is now the most common form of interaction among all teens, surpassing even face-to-face interaction. Using the call function of the phone is still considered important, with teens making or receiving about five calls per day. The survey also measured how often additional mobile phone functions were used, including a camera, gaming, social networking and shopping features.

Misuse of mobile phones is still present in the classroom. Although phones are banned in many classrooms and on campus entirely, 65 percent of teens report that they still bring their phone to school every day. More than half of teens who bring their phones (58 percent) have sent a text message during class.

Both parents and teens cite mobile phones as a “mixed blessing,” creating convenience and conflict at the same time. Parents and teens agree safety is a factor cell phones provide, but 26 percent of teens also report receiving bullying or harassing text messages or phone calls. Additionally four percent of teens reported sending a sexually suggestive image via text message, and 15 percent reported receiving a text of that nature.


Beginning with a definition of sexting, the document is aimed to help provide background for discussions and interventions dealing with the activity. Sexting resources also include overviews of research and media content, legal ramifications, and legislation-current and pending.


Drawing upon seven previous research studies and adding to the existing collection of literature surrounding youth and digital media, this report aims to improve understanding of the evolving patterns of young children’s media use. The report also indicates that tracking media usage now may lead to a preview of what lies ahead.

Findings revealed children have more access to digital media devices and are spending more time with them than ever before. Children still spend the most time with television at ages eight and under. Economic barriers still hold strong, as some children do not have access to newer digital technologies, even as the cost of digital devices are lowered. A final note in the report: “Kids like to use their media on the go.”


According to this report encompassing more than 2,000 young people across the United States, this group now spends an average of nearly 7.5 hours per day with media. In some instances youth between 8 and 18 sleep less than they stream music, video games, movies, books and websites. The ability to multi-task brings the day’s hourly total to 10 hours and 45 minutes of digital media exposure, seven days a week.

The report shows a marked increase in every form of media with the exception of reading. Newspaper reading time is now half of what it was five years ago, plummeting from a mere six minutes down to three. Books held on with 25 minutes of reading per day, up from the 21 minutes reported 10 years ago.

Twenty percent of the media is consumed on mobile devices, amounting to about 2 hours per day. “Old” content is still consumed at the rate of 56 minutes per day, through new means (television via Hulu or music via iTunes).

Patterns emerged in the data including those among age, gender and race. For example, 11-14 year olds spend more time consuming digital media than other youth. Boys consume more media than girls, with video games filling in the gap. Finally, differences were notable between Black, White and Hispanic youth. Black and Hispanic youth spend 4.5 more hours daily consuming digital media. Additional articles posit this is how minority youth are accessing television shows and other media that may not be present in the home. The only area where racial or ethnic differences in consumption did not appear was in print media.


Common Sense Media commissioned a study on teens and hi-tech cheating. High-tech cheating was defined as using a mobile phone to access or distribute content about tests or quizzes, or using the internet to find answers or plagiarize work. The position of this study characterizes the proliferation of communication technology as an “invasion” in the school space rather than as an opportunity for learning. The findings from the national poll of students and parents state that one in three teens admits to having cheated with mobile phones in school. The report relies on self-report for these data and does not discuss the frequency or the conditions under which the presumed transgressions are committed. Furthermore, the way in which the cheating was carried out was discussed (e.g., taking a photo, storing notes), but the testing situation was not described (e.g. a pop quiz, the SAT). Finally, the study also does not compare high-tech cheating with instances of offline cheating.

With this information in mind, the findings of this report are:

- One-third of teens with cell phones admitted to cheating with them; two-thirds of all teens say that others in their school cheat with cell phones.
- Half of teens admitted to some form of cheating involving the internet (e.g., accessing a teacher manual, downloading a paper).
• More than a third of students have copied text from websites and turned it in as their own work.

• Teens with cell phones send 440 text messages per week on average, 110 per week during class.

• Many students do not consider cheating with cell phones to be a serious offense or even consider it cheating at all.

• Parents are realistic about kids cheating but have a hard time believing that it is their kids, or that it is happening in their schools.

• Nearly two-thirds of students with cell phones use them during school hours regardless of the school policies.


This executive summary examines over 25 hand-held learning initiatives and presents interviews with experts in mobile technology research, industry, and policy. The report states that children under 12 are one of the fastest growing segments of mobile technology, and that 93% of 6 to 9 year-olds lives in homes with a mobile phone. However, capitalizing on the potential for learning faces a number of key challenges. The primary disadvantage is “the potential for distraction or unethical behavior; physical or health concerns; and data privacy issues.” Additional challenges encompass cultural norms and attitudes that do not support mobile learning, significant variation in access and technology, and poorly designed devices for young students or for learning goals. Today many of the initiatives that use mobile devices for learning are “fragmented and lack the resources to scale up.”

The report indicates five areas potentially improved by mobile learning: fostering anytime anywhere learning, addressing underserved children, improving social interactions, providing better fitting-learning environments, and personalizing learning experiences.

This summary states, “while student safety is paramount, classroom bans are not realistic in the long term.” Schools are called to “modify and gradually eliminate classroom bans” as the benefits of mobile phone learning outweigh the potential disruptions.


15. “Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying” (2009)

This book helps educators understand the consequences of cyberbullying and provides strategies for identification, prevention and response. The discussion focuses on the way technology can magnify this behavior. The book includes real students’ experiences of cyberbullying. In addition, the book includes recent research on cyberbullying, the connection to social networking, and a discussion of the legal issues surrounding the topic.


This white paper combines twenty qualitative studies of youth focusing on issues of participation, networked publics, peer-based learning, and new media literacy. It states: “Today’s youth may be coming of age and struggling for autonomy and identity as did their predecessors but they are doing so amid reconfigured contexts for communication, friendship, play and self expression.” In particular, this paper explains some of the practices of youth in networked publics, which include social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace.

In these online spaces, youth can be “always on” via a computer or mobile device and in contact with others. This online presence requires ongoing maintenance and negotiation through private and public communication. In fact, these activities are often complex and demand efficacy with technology and communication strategies. Youth are creating knowledge, establishing identity, and building relationships using social media, even though the traditional school environment might not necessarily value this as important work. The paper states, "youth can benefit from educators being more open to forms of experimentation and social exploration that are generally not characteristic of educational institutions."

Unlike much of the media rhetoric, most youth online are not seeking to build relationships with people they do not know. Instead, participation in networked publics allows individuals to cultivate relationships that already exist in familiar offline contexts such as school, religious organizations, sports, and other activities. The authors characterize these activities as "hanging out" online in order to extend existing friendships.

The paper also looks at the interest-driven practices of youth online. These individuals use the internet and participate in networked publics to find information and to explore specialized activities, such as gaming, fanhood and academics. These online groups connect youth with others who share their interests and, in doing so, may connect them with people who differ in age, gender, or location. The paper defines the term "geeking out" as the activities which youth engage in to improve skills or knowledge in these specialized communities. The authors state: "Geeking out often erases the traditional markers of status and authority." While anonymity can be seen as a potential risk, it also can provide opportunities for youth to be judged solely on their skills rather than facing the normal authoritative barriers to speaking out and showcasing expertise.


This report written for state attorney generals comes from the Internet Safety Technical Task Force centered at The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. A research advisory board collected and reviewed a number of academic publications on this subject, including the Youth Internet Safety Study, for a complete and balanced look at the online risks to youth.
The report also offers conclusions from a review of technologies for internet safety, stating that the “youth online safety industry is evolving... A combination of technologies, in concert with parental oversight, education, social services, law enforcement, and sound policies by social networking sites and service providers may assist in addressing specific problems that minors face online.”

The literature review looks at three main risks: harassment, solicitation, and exposure to problematic content. The review provides a critical context to these risks by comparing offline and online incidents.

The literature review begins by stating that research in the recent past has often been misunderstood and mischaracterized. One of the most frequently cited statistics about solicitation is that one in five or one in seven minors is sexually solicited online. The characteristics of the victims, perpetrators, and transgression explain the context of such a finding:

- **Internet sex crimes against minors have not overtaken the number of unmediated sex crimes against minors, nor have they contributed to a rise in such crimes.**
- **Overall sexual offenses against children have gone steadily down in the last 18 years.**
- **Sex crimes against youth not involving the Internet outweigh those that do.**
- **Majority of sexual molestations are perpetrated primarily by individuals the victims know offline, mainly by family members or acquaintances. Forty-four percent of Internet sexual offenders known to youth victims were family members.**
- **Majority of cases of sexual solicitation involved adolescents, not children.**

Studies of online harassment and cyberbullying suffer from a lack of clear definitions and measures, and thus have inconsistent findings. Studies report that somewhere between 4%-46% of youth report incidents of cyberbullying and internet harassment. The report states that cyberbullying or harassment “may involve direct (such as chat or text messaging), semi-public (such as posting a harassing message on an email list) or public communication (such as creating a website devoted to making fun of the victim).”

- **Cyberbullying is not reported to occur at higher overall rates then offline bullying.**
- **Consistent with offline bullying, online harassers are typically the same age as their victims.**
- **The Bureau of Justice Statistics shows a steep decline in offline bullying from seventh to twelfth grades, while online harassment tends to peak later in eighth grade and declines only slightly.**
- **There can be an overlap between cyberbullying offenders and victims.**
- **Less than half of online harassment is related to school bullying, either through location (occurring at school) or peers (offender or target is a fellow student).**

Some youth might be more at risk online than others. The characteristics of youth who are at risk online are similar to those of youth at risk offline. Youth who are vulnerable in one online context are usually vulnerable in many contexts. Below is information on behaviors or circumstances thought to be risky:
• **Online contact with strangers.** There is no consensus on whether talking to strangers puts youth at risk or if at-risk youth are more likely to talk to strangers.

• **Posting of Personal Information.** A small minority of teens are posting the most sensitive contact information such as phone number on a public profile. A study of MySpace showed that 9% of users posted a full name, .3% a phone number. However, 57% posted a picture and 27.8% included the name of their school. More males were also found to have public profiles and females were more likely to have private profiles.

• **Sharing of password.** Youth who share their passwords run the risk of being impersonated online and having their accounts used in acts of harassment.

• **Depression, Abuse and Substance.** Depression, physical abuse, and substance abuse are all strongly correlated with various risky behaviors that lead to poor choices with respect to online activities.

• **Poor home environment.** A poor home environment full of conflict and poor parent-child relationships is correlated with a host of online risks (higher online sexual victimization and increased online harassment). Positive home environment inoculates youth against a host of dangers.

• **Intensity of Online Participation.** Though there is a correlation between online risk and high levels of participation, online participation does not predict risk.


15. Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship (2007)

The authors of this journal article define social network sites (SNSs) as “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 these connections and those made by others within the system”

Different SNSs support varied interests and practices but may share similar technological features such as sending private and public messages, photo-sharing, video-sharing, blogging, instant messaging. SNSs approach the issue of visibility and privacy, both of personal profile and of networks, with varied levels of user discretion. However, almost all require confirmation by both individuals when a relationship is established. Academic research on SNSs has focused on personal information management, friendship maintenance, network visualization, online/offline connections and privacy issues.

The most striking feature of SNSs is the ability “to articulate and make visible… social networks.” While youth have been congregating in unmediated spaces offline throughout history, often to the dismay of adults, exposing one's friendship network is not a common offline practice.