Anti-social' networking in Northern Ireland: An exploratory study of strategies for policing interfaces in cyberspace.

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Abstract

Ten years after the Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland remains a divided society as signified by the persistence and even proliferation of interface areas, often divided by so-called 'peace walls' and intermittent conflict between rival communities on either side. Recent media reports have suggested that online interactions between rival interface communities on Web 2.0, the section of the Internet that revolves around user-generated content, may be undermining efforts to foster better intercommunity relationships, as demonstrated by the use of Bebo to organise rioting in Londonderry (April 2008) and the posting of videos showing rioting at the Ardoyne shops in North Belfast (July 2009). This paper will explore the strategies being deployed by community groups and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to prevent incidents of recreational rioting in their areas, with a particular focus on how they respond to suspicious activity on social networking websites. While authors such as Gaines and Mondak (2008) argue that Web 2.0 'publicises socializing,' this may afford nation-states greater powers of surveillance over their citizens. Morozov asserts that the use of social media to organise flash mobs has enabled authoritarian regimes such as the Belarusian government to both monitor and arrest protestors since 2006 (EDGE, 2009). Interviews with a number of interface community workers and members of the PSNI will determine the extent to which these agencies are monitoring social networking websites and how this influences their modus operandi. While authoritarian regimes use Web 2.0 to stifle dissent and actions in support of it, the focus in Northern Ireland is very much on promoting the safe and responsible use of sites such as Bebo. However, this approach may have little or no impact upon the anti-social behaviours of young people who use sites such as Bebo to organise so-called 'recreational riots.'

Keywords: Social networking sites, Internet Safety, Recreational Rioting, Northern Ireland.

Introduction

Zittrain (2008) asserts that strategies to protect the 'generative spirit of the Internet' must "blunt the worst aspect of today's popular generative Internet and PC without killing these platforms' openness to innovation" (p.150). The tension between the regulation of online activities and the preservation of the right of 'generativity' amongst Internet users is particularly evident in the 'architecture of participation' synonymous with the Web 2.0 universe, Tim O'Reilly's (2005) descriptor for the section of the World Wide Web that promotes bottom-up communication via platforms such as weblogs and social networking sites (SNS). Gaines and Mondak (2008) suggest that social networking websites 'publicise socialising' and allow for the exploration of different facets of an individual's identity in front of a potential global audience. While some scholars have suggested that these sites have the potential to encourage the development of social skills amongst teenagers and even

create bridging social capital between different groups (Crook and Harrison, 2008; Ellison et al, 2007), concerns continue to be raised amongst global policymakers about the potential sexual exploitation of children on these sites, as well as their potential misuse by young people themselves via the disclosure of sensitive information and anti-social behaviours such as cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008).

This article adds to the policy debate over how to promote Internet Safety on Web 2.0 platforms by focusing on the strategies employed by key stakeholders to prevent social networking sites being used by young people to organise anti-social behaviour in contested urban spaces in Northern Ireland. Recent reports in the Belfast Telegraph have suggested that young people who live in close proximity to sectarian interfaces, the barriers between Catholic and Protestant districts that local residents often refer to as 'peace walls,' have used Bebo to organise street riots in contested areas of North and East Belfast with the perpetrators often posting videos of these attacks on Youtube (Internet used to plan city riot, 2008; Ardoyne violence videos posted on Youtube, 2009). This paper sets out to explore the strategies deployed to prevent the use of social media to organise incidents of what has been called 'recreational rioting' in contested areas of Belfast, a phenomenon defined by Jarman and O'Halloran (2001) as 'clashes between young people in interface areas that 'occur out of boredom and bravado rather than having an overtly political basis' (p.3). It does so by reviewing the relevant theoretical perspectives on Internet Safety and empirical evidence on the use of social networking sites by young people, and presenting the findings of a preliminary set of interviews with community workers and a representative from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Background

The purpose of this article is to explore strategies to prevent the use of social networking sites by young people to plan street riots in interface areas in Northern Ireland. This is perhaps a less well-known and under-researched example of how social networking sites have been used to mobilise people against the wishes of the ruling government. Much of the recent literature on the use of social networking sites to mobilise young people has focused on its role in the organisation of protests in authoritarian nation-states such as Belarus and Iran. The use of flash mobs, a term used to describe the seemingly spontaneous mobilisation of people in public places to perform a specific act before dispersing, allowed young people in Belarus to highlight their opposition to the Lukashenko government plans to ban political demonstrations in May 2006. They did so by using social media and SMS text messages to invite young people to eat ice cream in a public square in Minsk. Images of the protestors being arrested by the police were transmitted worldwide via sites such as Flickr and these were in turn recirculated by bloggers such as Ethan Zuckerman (Shirky, 2008).

The most well known use of social media to coordinate protest has been seen in Iran. Some Western media outlets described the use of Twitter to organise and publicise demonstrations against President Ahmadinejad in June 2009 as the first 'Twitter Revolution.'[i] Despite shutting down Facebook for a few days before the Presidential Election, the Iranian government appeared unable to control the flow of information from its citizens to the Western news media about the alleged electoral fraud that had resulted in Ahmadinejad being returned to office ahead of opposition leader Hossein

Mousavi. Morozov takes a more skeptical view of the events in Belarus and Iran. He states that the shutting down of Facebook in Iran was a symbolic act designed to show that the Iranian government still 'had the power to do it' (EDGE, 2009). Contrary to the perception that Iran was powerless to stop these demonstrations because they were organised via user-generated platforms, he suggests that the use of sites such as Twitter made it easier for the Belarusian and Iranian governments to monitor the activities of the protestors in Minsk and Tehran. This paper will consider whether social media grant similar powers of surveillance to the PSNI, and will investigate whether this publicly available data is used to arrest those involved in street riots in interface areas.

Moral Panic? Media framing and adult perspectives on Web 2.0 in Northern Ireland

Interface areas are defined here as disputed territories that are contested by Loyalist communities, the predominantly Protestant neighbourhoods from which Loyalist paramilitaries who previously used political violence in support of the union with Great Britain drew support, and their Republican counterparts, the predominantly Catholic neighbourhoods from which Republican paramilitaries who previously used political violence in support of a united Ireland drew support during the conflict. While studies conducted by Leonard (2008; 2010) and the Centre for Young Men's Studies (2009) have linked social networking sites to anti-social behaviour in these areas, public knowledge about this activity has tended to be based on media reports of violent clashes between Catholic and Protestant youths in areas such as the Ardoyne district in North Belfast and the Short Strand in East Belfast. This has invariably taken the form of a reference in the report to a statement from a PSNI spokesperson stating that the street riots were organised via social networking sites. The Belfast Telegraph reportage of the Ardoyne riots in June 2009 has proved the exception to this rule, with its online edition using user-generated Youtube videos to show how young people engaged in street riots following a contentious Orange Order march in the predominantly Catholic area (Ardoyne violence videos posted on Youtube, 2009).

The media framing of these incidents is arguably congruent with the discourse of 'moral panic' that has surrounded the use of social networking sites by young people since the mid-nineties. This was a period in which reports about the dangers of 'online sex predators' started to circulate in the US news media causing widespread alarm amongst parents and children in the United States (Lawson and Comber 2000). The Media Literacy Audit commissioned by the Office of Communications (Ofcom) suggests that Northern Irish adults remain the most cautious in the United Kingdom when it comes to entering their personal information online, with only 31 percent of participants stating that they had set up a social networking profile in 2009. The Audit also found that only 56 percent of parents who had children aged between 5 and 15 years old believed the Internet's benefits outweighed the risks associated with its use. A similar pattern emerges from the Children's Audit, which found that Northern Irish children were the least likely in the United Kingdom to be allowed to use the Internet at home without supervision. Although it is not possible to attribute this cautious approach towards Internet Safety amongst Northern Irish adults to the discourse of 'moral panic,' it is fair to say that media reports of Bebo being used to organise street riots are likely to reinforce pre-existing attitudes towards new media technologies in Northern Ireland.

Social Networking sites and the management of online risk by young people

Young people in Northern Ireland appear more comfortable than their parents in their use of new media technologies and appear to have embraced the participatory culture associated with social networking sites such as Facebook. Much of the empirical evidence points to there being little to differentiate between how young people use social networking sites in Northern Ireland and their peers in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Ofcom Children's Media Literacy Audit in the Nations (2010) found that Northern Irish children aged between 5 and 15 years old were no more or less likely than their peers in England, Scotland and Wales to maintain a social networking profile. Indeed, the study found that 43 percent of children in Northern Ireland checked their social networking profile at least once a week, 2 percent higher than the average across the United Kingdom. This finding was congruent with previous research into patterns of social networking site use amongst children in the region. Lloyd and Devine (2009) found that 48 percent of 10-11 year olds in Northern Ireland maintained a social networking profile despite the membership of these sites typically being restricted to those aged 13 years old and over. The study also indicated that there was little difference between boys and girls in terms of their use of sites such as Bebo and that 29 percent of the respondents stated that they used these sites several times each week. This finding resonated with the results of the Ofcom Children's Media Literacy Audit (2010), which showed that 22 percent of 8-11 year olds had set up a profile on a social networking site.

In terms of the purpose of using social networking sites, empirical evidence also points to a convergence between the experience of Northern Irish Internet users and their peers elsewhere. A recent Ofcom (2008) study of social networking practices suggested there were five distinct groups of users in the United Kingdom:

Alpha socialisers –users who use these sites sporadically to meet new people.
Attention seekers – users who post pictures because they crave attention.
Followers – people who use these sites to keep up with the lives of their peers.
Faithfuls – people who use these sites to get back in touch with old friends.
Functionals – users who use these technologies for a particular purpose.

Potentially all of these users might post sensitive information on sites such as Facebook. A preliminary investigation into social networking practices in interface areas in Belfast found that communicating with family and friends and posting pictures were the most commonly reported purposes of social network use amongst interface residents (Reilly, 2010). Only a very small percentage of the respondents in this pilot study could be considered alpha socialisers. Few teenagers admitted to using sites such as Bebo to make contact with people who lived on the other side of the 'peace wall' and with whom they were not already familiar. This finding resonated with much of the current research in the field that indicates that the majority of teenagers who use social networking sites do so to sustain existing offline relationships rather than to contact strangers (Ellison et al, 2007; Watch Your Space Survey, 2008).

The Lloyd and Devine study (2009) points to the potential online risks that children may face on these platforms, with a small minority of 8-11 year olds (17 percent) confirming that they had met someone in person who they had made initial contact

with on a social networking site. The Watch Your Space study (2008) also found that 40 percent of teenagers in the Republic of Ireland had met someone who they had first contacted on Bebo, with boys more likely to engage in this activity than girls. While there was no evidence to suggest that these contacts had been with 'online sex predators,' this finding nevertheless demonstrates one of the ways in which the behaviour of young people on social networking sites may leave them vulnerable to potential harm in the real world. Livingstone and Helsper (2007) argue that it is the children with the most Internet skills rather than the most self-efficacious who are the most likely to encounter risks on social networking sites (636).

A preliminary report into stakeholder perspectives on online risks to UK teenagers found that the worst things that young people were likely to encounter on social networking sites were 'rude words, being subject to nasty personal messages, unwanted sexual advances and exposure to unwanted information and impersonation of identity' (CEOP, 2008: 11). Livingstone and Brake (2010) suggest that the disclosure of sensitive and personal information and the 'experimental nature of peer communication' are the two adolescent practices that are most likely to increase online risk for children and teenage Internet users (78). In terms of the former, social networking sites make this personal information – whether it is idealised or an extension of the real-life personality of its owner - available to a potential and often unintended global audience, a phenomenon boyd (2008) refers to as 'hyperpublicity.' Potential threats emerging from the disclosure of this information might include social embarrassment, stalking, or perhaps even identity theft (Gross and Acquisti, 2005).

The policy debate about how to promote the safe use of social networking sites has been based on an implicit assumption that young people are likely to reveal sensitive information about their real-life identities on sites such as Bebo. The ThinkuKnow Internet Safety programme has been taught in UK schools since 2006 (UKCCIS, 2010). This programme has sought to encourage young people to set their social networking profiles to private in order to avoid the disclosure of sensitive data to Internet users who might use this information for illegal activity such as identity fraud or for the online grooming of adolescents. The issue has also been highlighted on the social networking sites themselves, with the users of Facebook receiving a message asking them to check and update their privacy settings in December 2009 (boyd and Hargittai, 2010). Although this particular update was prompted by changes made by Facebook itself to its default privacy settings, it nevertheless served to make its users more aware of the need to protect their personal information from the attention of 'unwanted visitors' to their profiles.

Several studies between 2006 and 2009 suggest that although young people are becoming increasingly vigilant about the sharing of personal information on their social networking sites, a significant number still choose to post personal information on publicly accessible profiles. As far back as 2006, a study of US college students found that three quarters of Facebook users knew exactly what they were sharing on their profiles but that a significant minority had limited understanding of how open their profile was to unintended visitors (Acquisti and Gross, 2006). However, there have been some indications that the moral panic surrounding online predators on sites such as MySpace in 2005 and the privacy updates by social networking sites in 2009 have prompted young people to make their profiles private (boyd, 2008; boyd and Hargittai, 2010). The evidence from the United Kingdom also points to an increasing

awareness amongst young people about the need to restrict public access to their profiles, with teenagers 'fairly but not always' careful in their online communications (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008). A recent study found that 78 percent of children aged 12-15 years old were likely to keep their profiles private (Ofcom Children's Media Literacy Audit, 2010). Boys were more likely to allow their profile to be seen by anyone compared to girls who appeared keener to restrict access to their personal information. Although there have been no studies of the attitudes of Northern Irish teenagers towards privacy settings on social networking sites, it is reasonable to assume that the patterns that emerge from these two studies would apply to adolescent social networking practices in Northern Ireland.

Internet Safety and social networking sites in the United Kingdom

The focus of policymakers in the United Kingdom has tended to be on cyberbullying, online grooming of children by pedophiles, and preventing young people from accessing illegal or harmful content on social networking sites (Byron, 2008). Cyberbullying in particular has been identified in a number of surveys as one of the most frequent threats that minors face, as Instant Messaging and social networking sites enable peer-to-peer harassment in the offline world to be communicated in the online sphere (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004). One of the key recommendations of the Byron review into children and technology was that there was a need for a coordinated approach towards children's digital safety amongst parents, the Internet industry, voluntary bodies and the government. The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) was created in September 2008 to bring together these stakeholders and has overall responsibility for the promotion of events such as Safer Internet Day (9 February 2010) and raising public awareness about digital safety. A number of initiatives have been launched to promote the responsible use of social networking sites amongst young people ranging from the launch of the ThinkuKnow programme in primary schools in England in September 2009 to the development of the CyberMentors website to provide peer support for the victims of cyberbullying.

The First UKCCIS Child Internet Strategy was launched in December 2009 with a mission statement that referred to the need to provide 'high quality controls to stop children seeing harmful and inappropriate content online and monitor their behaviour (p.5). A key pillar of this strategy focuses on the need for the Internet industry to make it easier for users to report illegal or harmful activity on social networking sites and to ensure that children are not exposed to age-inappropriate content such as pornography. A key recommendation was that Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) website should become the one-stop shop for Child Internet Safety in the United Kingdom. The primary purpose of CEOP is to 'protect children, young people, families and society from pedophiles and sex offenders, and in particular those who use the Internet and other new technologies in the sexual exploitation of children' (CEOP, 2010). CEOP has provided Internet Safety training materials to teachers, community workers, police officers and child protection specialists in the United Kingdom since its formation in April 2006. Alongside the Internet Watch Foundation, an organisation that also seeks to minimise the availability of illegal and offensive online content, CEOP has lobbied social networking sites to adopt the 'Report Abuse' icon to allow users to flag inappropriate content and behaviour on their sites. This function allows social networking site users to report harmful content to CEOP directly for investigation. This campaign received

widespread media coverage in April 2010 when CEOP condemned Facebook's refusal to carry the 'Click CEOP' button on its site. The BBC reported that Facebook eventually agreed to install a 'panic button' on its site after months of negotiations with child protection specialists and the UK government (Facebook unveils child safety panic button, 2010).

A key theme that emerges from UK Child Internet Safety Strategy is that young people must be empowered to use new media technologies but also be aware of the potential risks of online communication. This is congruent with both the principles for Safer Social Networking adopted by the European Union (2009), and academic studies of adolescent social networking practices (Hinduja and Patchin 2008; Livingstone and Brake, 2010). What is also clear is that efforts to reduce the risks associated with social networking practices are based on a multi-agency approach towards the promotion of Internet Safety, and a combination of both peer-to-peer and conventional forms of surveillance on these sites.

Research Questions

Specifically, four research questions emerge from the preceding literature review. These are:

1) What is the level of awareness amongst key stakeholders such as community workers and the Police Service of Northern Ireland about the use of social networking sites by young people to plan anti-social behaviour such as street riots in interface areas?
2) To what extent is there a coordinated approach between these stakeholders towards the monitoring of social networking sites to obtain information about potential use by young people in the organisation of anti-social behaviour in interface areas?
3) Do these stakeholders perceive that Internet Safety campaigns in Northern Ireland have been effective in promoting the responsible use of social networking sites amongst young people who live in interface areas?
4) To what extent is there a coordinated approach between these stakeholders towards the promotion of Internet Safety in interface communities?

Semi-structured interviews with nine community workers and one Education Advisor from the PSNI Community Safety Branch were held to investigate these research questions between June 2009 and July 2010. The police officer provided a written response to the interview questions, as she was unable to make herself available for interview during the period of data collection. This Officer was invited to participate in the study because she was responsible for writing and distributing Internet Safety training materials that were used in schools and community centres, and therefore was able to comment on the strategies used to prevent the use of these sites for anti-social behaviour. It was not possible to establish the age of the officer but it was confirmed that she had over three years experience working in this role. Contact with the community workers was arranged through the Belfast Interface Project (BIP), an umbrella non-governmental organisation incorporating 22 community groups across Belfast whose purpose is to promote positive intercommunity relationships in contested interface areas across Belfast. A total of 13 community groups did not respond to the invitation to participate in the project. Characteristics of groups who

responded and those who did not were examined for systematic differences between the two groups and none were found in terms of group size, community identification, or area of Belfast in which they were based. Face-to-face interviews were held with six of the community workers in their respective community centres in Belfast, one in a city centre coffee house, and two of the interviewees were contacted via telephone. All of the community workers had at least two years experience working in interface areas and all were male and aged between 25 and 40 years old. Due to the persistent threat of violence against community workers and police officers in these areas over the past three decades (Community Relations Council 2008), it was agreed that the identity of each interviewee would not be revealed in the study. Thus, interviewees are identified in this study according to the area in which they were based. All of the participants agreed that the interviews could be recorded for analysis after the period of data collection.

Ten questions were asked during each community worker interview relating to how social media were used by members of rival interface communities and community groups to interact with one another. The community workers were asked to comment on how sites such as Bebo were being used by young people in interface areas and what strategies, if any, were being deployed to prevent social networking sites being used to plan anti-social behaviour. They were also asked to give an opinion on the role of community groups in the promotion of the responsible and safe use of sites such as Bebo.

The interview with the PSNI Educational Officer consisted of 15 questions relating to the role of new media in their community safety programme, and in particular the strategies deployed by the police to prevent the use of social networking sites by young people to plan street riots. In order to investigate Morozov's thesis about social networking sites being used for surveillance, the officer was asked whether the PSNI were monitoring these sites to gather intelligence about potential incidents of street riots in interface areas. The interviewee was also asked to comment on the resources that were used by the PSNI Community Safety Branch to promote Internet Safety and how effective they felt these campaigns had been in Northern Ireland.

Results

1.Stakeholder awareness about 'anti-social' networking is based primarily on anecdotal evidence.

All of the community workers confirmed that they were aware of incidents of street rioting that had been organised on social networking sites. Two of the North Belfast community workers stated that the violence that marred the lighting of the Christmas tree at Belfast City Hall in December 2009 had been organised on Bebo. A West Belfast community worker also asserted that violence between youth gangs on the Springfield Road/Shankill interface was organised via SMS text messaging and Bebo. A common theme in the interviews was that many of the participants in these street riots were friends with members of the 'other' community. An East Belfast community worker reported that the so-called 'recreational rioting' in their area had been organised on Bebo by children who knew each other from the local integrated college. This interviewee that the violence in their areas should be characterised as

anti-social behaviour rather than a return to the sectarian violence synonymous with the 'Troubles:'

Rioting is designed to get a bit of craic with the PSNI, young people self-justify their violence, defending their community, feel as if they have missed our on the conflict
(East Belfast community worker 1)

There was much support amongst the interviewees for the thesis that this was anti-social behaviour rather than a return to the 'Troubles', with one community worker suggesting that some people were always likely to use social networking sites 'for what its not mean to be used for.' However, two of the interviewees were uncomfortable with the use of the term recreational rioting, which they felt depoliticized this violence. In the words on one West Belfast community worker:

I think there is also a sectarian dimension to it, children and young people may not know, or have met, anyone on the other side but there is a sense that they are the enemy
(West Belfast community worker 1)

The study found that only one of the interviewees maintained a social networking profile themselves. One of the West Belfast community workers reported that he had been 'so scared' by the CEOP training that he had received that he had cancelled his membership of social networking sites such as Facebook and had refused to allow his children to set up their own profiles. Much of the evidence pointing towards the use of sites such as Bebo by young people to organise anti-social behaviour was anecdotal in nature:

It's anecdotal, no hard evidence. Kids tell you, teachers, different community workers.

(East Belfast community worker 2)

There was a perception shared by all of the interviewees that community workers often lacked the technical skills to use social media effectively. One East Belfast community worker stated that he had until recently used an administrative assistant to answer his emails for him and was 'something of a backwoodsman' in relation to the use of mobile technology. This often left the interviewees reliant upon others for information on the use of sites such as Bebo for anti-social purposes. For example, one North Belfast community worker stated that his teenage daughter had made him aware of discussions amongst young people in their area about a planned street riot between Catholic and Protestant youths. Another interviewee suggested that youth workers often had greater awareness of the 'anti-social' networking practices adopted by young people than community workers, by virtue of their familiarity with new media technologies:

Young youth workers get it [Bebo], and they use it, and they've used it for years. Sometimes with community workers, sometimes teachers as well, it's a bit more this dangerous thing that you need to be very careful with.
(North Belfast community worker 2)

The PSNI Educational Officer declined to comment on their level of awareness of this activity or on what impact social networking sites were having on community

relations in Northern Ireland in general. The interviewee suggested that the PSNI were aware of the use of social media by young people in Northern Ireland to plan street riots but that this should be viewed in the context of UK-wide initiatives to limit anti-social behaviour in the online sphere. The officer stressed that the PSNI needed to use these sites to engage more with not just young people but also the general public:

The Internet is as prevalent and popular a communication medium in Northern Ireland as it is in any other part of the UK. Bearing this in mind, PSNI have adopted the use of social networking sites to address not only young people, but also the general public.

2.These stakeholders do not routinely monitor social networking sites to obtain information about street riots.

There did not appear to be a coordinated approach towards the monitoring of publicly available social networking profiles for signs of anti-social behaviour. These stakeholders did not look at social networking profiles for information that might help prevent incidents of so-called 'recreational rioting' in interface areas. Community workers reported that they were only able to crudely monitor social networking practices of young people by 'peering over their shoulders' when they used communal computing facilities in their community centres:

We keep an eye on what they are using it [Bebo] for. They use it to communicate with people in the same room, not with the outside.

(West Belfast community worker 1)

One East Belfast community worker confirmed that young people were banned from using Bebo because they had been using it for anti-social activities such as drug dealing:

They are not allowed to use Bebo on it, cos we found them mucking about on it. We didn't like some of the things they were doing on it.

(East Belfast community worker 2)

It was acknowledged by all of the interviewees that they could only influence the social networking practices of young people within their community centres. However, one of the North Belfast community workers stated that the PSNI had been monitoring social networking traffic prior to the violent clashes in Belfast city centre in December 2009 at the request of the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, an umbrella organisation for community groups across Belfast.

The PSNI Education Advisor confirmed that there were no specific PSNI strategies to monitor the use of sites such as Bebo by young people to organise anti-social behaviour in Northern Ireland. The PSNI did not monitor social networking sites on a regular basis due to the privacy settings on these sites, and there needed to be a legitimate purpose for them to do so:

We don't routinely monitor social networking sites. There are new privacy settings on most and some of this is now deemed private information, therefore we require a specific purpose to be monitoring.

There was a strategy in place to address anti-social behaviour in interface areas. The interviewee asserted that in 2009 the PSNI had run a series of drama workshops for young people aged between 13 and 16 years old that dealt specifically with the topic of so-called recreational rioting. These workshops had been designed in conjunction with local councils and the Northern Ireland Policing Board and delivered in schools across Northern Ireland:

The drama was designed specifically to deal with the topic of rioting, and peer pressure placed on young people to become involved. The drama looked at consequences, both long term and short term, which young people will face if they engage in anti-social behaviours such as rioting.

The interviewee also confirmed that these workshops were supplemented by 'bespoke lessons' in secondary schools that dealt with issues such as Public Order Offences and Gang Behaviour.

3. CEOP plays a key role in Internet Safety campaigns in Northern Ireland

The study suggested there was a coordinated approach towards the promotion of Internet Safety in interface areas between these key stakeholders. One community worker referred to CEOP training as the reason why they encouraged young people to restrict public access to their social networking profiles. Three of the community workers confirmed that they had received CEOP training from the PSNI and that this Ambassador training programme was to be rolled out in other interface areas shortly. One of the interviewees stated that their community group intended to send its staff on this course again after it had proved popular in 2009:

Training is going to happen in other interface areas, we did Ambassador training and we intend to do it again

(West Belfast community worker 1)

The 'bespoke lessons' in secondary schools were a key part of the PSNI strategy to engage with young people in these areas. One module entitled 'Uses of the Internet' was specifically designed to promote safe and responsible use of the Internet amongst school children. This was said to have been amongst the most requested lessons for PSNI officers to deliver in schools:

As a requested topic, this would be in the top 5 of our most requested lessons for officers to deliver as part of our Citizenship and Safety Education programme.

Resources were also provided to parents, children, and community groups upon request, as per the CEOP strategy to promote Internet Safety in the rest of the United Kingdom. This included information on how to report cyberbullying and harmful material using the CEOP red button on sites such as Bebo. In terms of resources, the PSNI Educational Officer confirmed that she was a member of the CEOP Education

Advisory Board and often adapted CEOP training materials for use by PSNI officers in schools:

All PSNI officers who deliver these messages to young people, parents, teachers and community groups have received training and resources from CEOP and from the PSNI's own Education Advisor.

The PSNI Education Officer was unable to provide copies of these lessons due to copyright restrictions. However, it was made clear that industry partners such as Microsoft and Hewlett Packard played a key role in the promotion of Internet Safety in Northern Ireland, in much the same fashion as elsewhere in the United Kingdom. For example, the interviewee referred to the role played by these corporations in promotion of the most recent European Union Safer Internet Day and in the delivery of Internet Safety lessons in secondary schools across Northern Ireland.

4. Key stakeholders feel that Internet Safety campaigns are effective but may not reduce the level of anti-social behaviour in interface areas.

The consensus amongst the interviewees was that these campaigns had been well received by people in Northern Ireland but were unlikely to stop young people using sites such as Bebo to organise anti-social behaviour. While by the very nature of their work these stakeholders might be expected to report that these campaigns were successful, this was a persuasive theme throughout all of the interviews. For example, the PSNI Educational Officer reported that they had received positive feedback from the public about their 'bespoke lessons' in Internet Safety:

The public are very receptive to having appropriately trained PSNI officers delivering talks and lessons on Internet Safety.

Three of the community workers suggested that strategies to promote safe and responsible use of social networking sites would have little or no impact on the level of anti-social behaviour in interface areas. SMS text messaging was said to be as important a tool of communication for young people who participated in anti-social behaviour such as street riots in interface areas:

Texting, to a lesser extent social networking sites, are being used to arrange these sorts of activities.
<div align="right">(North Belfast community worker 2)</div>

Bebo would be one of the means of doing it [organizing street riots]. Mobile phones another one, text messages and stuff.
<div align="right">(East Belfast community worker 2)</div>

The consensus amongst these stakeholders was that young people were likely to organise anti-social behaviour using other communication tools if their access to sites such as Bebo is restricted.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that there is a multi-agency approach towards the promotion of Internet Safety in Northern Ireland and that key stakeholders perceive that this is an effective and proportionate response to the anti-social networking practices of young people in interface areas. Bespoke Internet Safety lessons are provided by the PSNI to secondary schools throughout Northern Ireland in conjunction with stakeholders such as community groups, industry partners, and agencies such as CEOP. However, this preliminary study of stakeholder perspectives on Internet Safety suggests that these strategies are unlikely have any significant impact upon the level of anti-social behaviour in interface areas. The consensus amongst the interviewees was that this form of anti-social behaviour could be organised via SMS text messaging if sites such as Bebo were no longer available to young people situated in or around interface areas.

There are three issues that emerge from this preliminary study that merit further investigation. First, the perspectives of young people should be explored in relation to the use of social networking sites to organise anti-social behaviour in interface areas. With the exception of the Lloyd and Devine study (2009), most recent empirical studies in Northern Ireland have tended to focus on adult perspectives on Internet Safety and have neglected the attitudes of young people towards social media. What is clear from this study is that children and young people are being shown how to report content on these sites such as pornographic images, online harassment, or approaches from online predators. However, these strategies do not appear to empower young digital citizens to take appropriate action against their peers who use these technologies to plan anti-social behaviour in the real world.

Second, this study also suggests that youth workers might have a greater awareness of the social networking practices of young people in Northern Ireland than the older community workers who operate in these areas. Much of the evidence about the use of Bebo to organise street riots presented here is anecdotal in nature and appears to resonate with the discourse of moral panic that surrounded the reports of sex predators on MySpace in the mid-nineties. One of the interviewees suggested that many of the community workers were suspicious about new media technologies and lacked the technical skills of youth workers who were members of sites such as Bebo. Further exploration of the attitudes of these two stakeholders is needed in order to develop strategies that address the online risk behaviours of children in Northern Ireland.

Finally, there remains a need to address the causes of so-called 'recreational riots' in interface areas. This study suggests that efforts to promote Internet Safety have had little or no impact upon the behaviours of those young people who engage in street riots in interface areas. While community workers and the PSNI consider this behaviour to be comparable to anti-social behaviour in other regions of the United Kingdom, a more convincing thesis is provided by Leonard (2010) in her study of young people's attitudes towards interface violence. She argues that violence between young people in interface areas is a product of the political context in which its participants grow up, and positive intergroup contact is needed to promote better community relations in areas such as North Belfast. Future research should consider the role of sites such as Bebo in consolidating both negative and positive offline friendships in these interface areas, and the implications of these interactions for community relations in Northern Ireland.

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