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## **Youth Justice and Social Media – problems and possibilities for practice**

Naomi Thompson and Ian Joseph

### **Abstract**

This chapter begins by exposing the lack of literature that exists relating to youth justice and social media. Current debates about young people, crime and social media are explored and critiqued. Following this, examples of social media in practice are presented. The first provides an example of young people using social media to evade the police and community orders within their local areas, demonstrating the importance of practitioners understanding and keeping pace with how young people use social media. We then explore how social media has been used to enhance youth justice practice. These examples are used to analyse and explore the key issues around young people and social media for youth justice as well as to develop some concrete recommendations for practitioners for using social media. These recommendations are grounded in a consideration of the ethics of using social media in practice. Overall, the chapter argues for a positive rather than a punitive approach to using social media as a tool for working with young people in roles relating to youth justice. The chapter aims to: recognise current debates relating to social media, crime and young people; identify problems and possibilities of social media in youth justice arenas; and consider the ethical issues of using social media in practice; make recommendations for positive, as opposed to punitive, use of social media by practitioners.

### **Introduction**

Young people's use of online spaces and the links to anti-social, or even criminal, behaviour is currently a key issue of debate. Media hype and 'moral panics' around this currently focus on issues such as cyber-bullying, sexting and the exploitation and grooming of young people into radicalised or abusive situations. The suicide of Hannah Smith in 2013 and the links to cyberbullying sparked a media furore (although the 2014 inquest later found she had sent abusive online messages to herself) (see, for example: BBC, 2013; Davies, 2014). The media has also actively engaged in current debates on sexting among young people, reporting on both calls for schools to report perpetrators to police (where images

of young women in particular are shared without consent) and the calls to be wary of criminalising young people around this issue (see, for example: Sawer, 2016; ChiaraHerald, 2016).

A dominant media discourse about young people and social media is one of them as vulnerable to exploitation by criminals. The role of social media in the grooming of young people into Islamist radicalisation has received significant media attention with its use to make contact with, engage and prepare the three young women from Bethnal Green to leave for Syria in 2015 one of the most high-profile examples of this (see, for example: Khan, 2015). Similarly, the grooming of young people as victims of sexual exploitation has also been a recent media focus (see, for example: Sawer, 2016).

Recent policy has also begun to consider the role of social media and online spaces in issues relating to crime and anti-social behaviour. The Counter Extremism Strategy (Home Office, 2015) has a significant section on social media and its role in the grooming of vulnerable people, particularly the young, into radicalisation of different forms. The Serious and Organised Crime Strategy (Home Office, 2013) considers cybercrime in detail, as part of the developing forms of organised crime, though not specifically in relation to young people. Policies relating directly to youth justice, however, have yet to explicitly consider social media either as a vehicle for youth crime or in the responses to it.

There is a significant absence of research into youth justice and social media, meaning that little understanding has been sought and gained in responding to moral panics about the role of social media in crime and anti-social behaviour among young people. A literature search using key terms such as 'youth justice' and 'social media' fails to find anything at all, demonstrating that the two have yet to be explicitly considered together by researchers. The related research that does exist tends to focus on the same specific and limited issues as the media and focuses primarily on young people's vulnerability online.

Examples of this research include Ditch the Label's (2013) large-scale study into cyberbullying which found that 7 out of 10 young people in the UK have experienced cyberbullying. Research commissioned by the NSPCC into sexting and young people has found that there are clear links between sexting and cyberbullying and that threatening behaviour online is more likely to come from peers than strangers (Ringrose et al, 2012; Phippen, 2012). However, there is also an ongoing concern with the exploitation of young people online by strangers in research relating to child sexual exploitation (CEOP, 2013) whilst

the notion of 'online radicalisation' requires further academic scrutiny (Neumann, 2013). Within the research that exists that relates to young people, crime and social media, the focus tends to be primarily on young people as potential victims rather than as perpetrators, although in some of the issues explored above they are considered as both.

There is a lack of research and understanding as to how social media might impact upon and be used in youth justice beyond these limited issues. In particular, there has been a lack on exploration into how young people's use of social media impacts on their offline lives, routines and behaviours. Perhaps the only example of academic commentary on this in the UK is in the aftermath of the riots of summer 2011. In the LSE's (2012) investigation into the riots, they found that although the use of Facebook and Twitter for inciting the riots had been over-stated by the media during the events, the free Blackberry messaging service BBM had been used much more substantially to organise people and share information:

'This extraordinarily efficient – and secure – communications network was a key tool for many who took part in England's riots, as an easy way to share information on where looters were, safe routes home, and what police were doing.' (LSE, 2012: 31)

Whilst there were public calls to shut down the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter during the riots, the researchers' analysis of Twitter activity found that incitements to riot were largely responded to with criticism and reported to police. The site was used much more significantly in organising the clean-up operations with such tweets having a far greater reach than those relating to incitement (LSE, 2012). Academic research into how people's offline behaviour is influenced by online activity is extremely scarce across subjects, disciplines and continents, not just in UK youth justice. One of the only examples of such is the large-scale research in America by Bond et al (2012) which found that people's offline voting behaviours in the 2010 US elections were influenced by posts made by close friends on Facebook. However, these rare examples do suggest that people's behaviour can be influenced either positively or negatively by their interactions on social media.

Another key gap in the research is any consideration of how young people's use of social media could be harnessed as a tool within practice relating to youth justice. There are ethical issues to consider in using social media as a tool in work with young people and particularly in an arena such as youth justice. In

particular, the use of social media as a means of surveillance of young people is questionable. Young people are often unaware of how their public social media profiles may allow others to see into their personal lives and this has led to negative consequences for some. For example, when Kent's Police Crime Commissioner employed a Youth Crime Commissioner in 2013, she made a point of employing a young person not from a privileged background into this role as she felt this young woman would relate well to other young people. Unfortunately, the media uncovered previous tweets from the young woman's public Twitter profile, exposing that she had made claims about sexual activity and drug use online among other potentially offensive topics (see, for example: Kisiel, 2013). The young woman subsequently had to step down from her role as Youth Crime Commissioner, demonstrating how in the age of social media, young people's personal lives are subject to a level of scrutiny that those of previous generations were not. In the past, young people's 'showing off' among friends was more easily forgotten than it is today where their social media presence often means they are under the 'public gaze'. This young woman's early misdemeanours, or perhaps her exaggerated claims of such, were used to 'catch her out' in this instance and, following the media reporting of the story, are likely to haunt her for years to come.

It is clear that practitioners aiming to support young people should not be attempting to 'catch them out' in the way the media did to this young woman. However, whether and to what extent they might use social media as a means of surveillance has yet to be debated in any depth. Conradie (2015) found, in research with youth workers, that there were considerable ethical dilemmas in how practitioners might share their own personal information or access that of young people through social media. Creating work profiles to 'friend' or 'follow' young people means there is an imbalance of power in what is shared and there is a clear argument against practitioners using their personal profiles to engage with young people online. Conradie also found that some practitioners were using social media to search for personal information about young people, justifying it through the notion that anything shared publicly on their profiles as information that is in the 'public domain'. However, young people may not be fully aware of how they are sharing such information and who with and so there is a clear ethical question about whether informed consent has been given in this context. Cheal (2014) has argued that, in line with their right to privacy within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people have a right to privacy and dignity in online as well as offline spaces. Arguably, this means them

being equipped to understand and consent to who their information is shared with. It is arguable then that practitioners working with young people have a responsibility to educate them as to how they are sharing information online and empower them to control who sees into their personal lives. It is ethically questionable for them to intrude into young people's online spaces without their knowledge or consent. Because of the ethical questions raised by the use of social media for surveillance, this chapter will focus on developing recommendations for the positive use of social media in youth justice practice as a means of engagement. It does not advocate for the use of social media as punitive tool.

This links with wider academic debates where, for example, Darke (2011) argues that a 'prevent as enforcement' approach has been over-used in UK youth justice and is ineffective. Similarly, Hughes (2011) critiques the 'law and order' discourse in the UK that focuses on the crime and not the vulnerabilities of the perpetrator. Hughes compares the responses to youth crime and anti-social behaviour in England with that in Victoria, Australia where the needs of the young person rather than the crime and its punishment is the focus of interventions – arguing that this is more effective. Similarly, Case and Haines (2015) advocate for a 'children first, offenders second' approach that treats young offenders, first and foremost, as children rather than as 'mini adults' with the same level of responsibility as actual adults. They suggest a more positive approach to youth justice is needed and their model has been tested in Swansea for a number of years and is now being implemented in other parts of the UK.

Whilst media hype often focuses on the negatives of young people's engagement in online social spaces, virtual communication has been long recognised as a tool for building community (Rheingold, 1993). It has been acknowledged for two decades that the digital communication that takes place within cyberspace is neither more nor less real than other forms of social interaction, with the capacity existing to construct, maintain and mediate virtual communities through electronic networks (Jones, 1997). Moreover, recent technological advances have played a role in accelerating social change (Rosa, 2013). This increased pace of change has implications for the speed at which concerns about community safety shift and the ability of policing to appropriately respond. Digital technology is seen as having huge potential for changing the relationship between government and citizen through empowering communities and encouraging civic participation (Loveridge, 2014). Rapid changes in information and communication technology are creating new opportunities for cybercrime and, as such, are also having

profound effects on modern day policing not only in the UK but in developments across Europe (Denef, 2011).

There is, however, a lack of research into how young people use social media in positive and negative ways. As such, there is much catching up to do by both researchers and practitioners in regards to understanding young people's use of social media to interact, communicate and belong, particularly in relation to youth justice. Conradie (2015), in research with youth workers, found that there is a lack of practice guidance on using social media in work with young people and that neither policy nor practice have kept pace with advances in online technologies. She found that a lack of policies and specific guidelines within Youth Services has led both to some practitioners avoiding using it where it might enhance their work and others engaging in questionable forms of practice through social media. Whilst she found that many managers were generally in support of their staff finding ways of harnessing social media, they were also unclear as to how to guide them in doing so. Key issues included what information practitioners should be able to access about the young people they work with through social media profiles and vice versa. What is clear is that there is much work to be done in exploring how social media might be used in work with young people more generally and in relation to youth justice. This chapter aims to explore and develop some recommendations for the latter.

### **Examples from practice**

#### Evading authority

A few years ago, one of this chapter's authors worked as street-based youth worker in a small city in the north of England, that is surrounded by a number of small suburban villages that are in close proximity to each other, a short distance from the city and all within or just outside its ring road. A good bus system operated in the city and between the different villages. I worked for a ward out of the north of the city that included a few of these closely populated villages. Whilst youth crime in the area was actually relatively low, perception of it was high within the communities of this ward.

Because of the prevalence of complaints from residents of the local communities about groups of young people 'hanging around', a number of police measures were used in an attempt to prevent young

people gathering in groups of a size that was perceived as threatening by others. Groups of young people were regularly 'stopped and searched', with recent anti-terror legislation allowing police to search people without evidence of wrongdoing. Temporary police orders were implemented in quick succession of each other such as curfew orders, where young people had to be off the streets in the evenings, and dispersal orders, where no groups of two or more young people were permitted to gather together in the evenings in public spaces.

As a street-based youth worker employed by the local authority these measures were at odds with our work engaging young people on the streets as they began to gather in more hidden spaces that were not only more difficult to find, they were less likely to be safe and more likely to involve trespassing onto private land. Indeed, young people told us that the very reason they had chosen to gather in the more central community spaces, where they were perceived as a nuisance, such as outside the village shops, near main bus stops or community buildings, was because these places were well lit.

Young people were criminalised by these orders, not just because previously legitimate behaviour became forbidden, but because they were pushed to gather in illegal spaces. Essentially, such orders only served to reinforce a sense of exclusion among local young people, sending a message to them they were not part of their communities, that they were problematic outsiders and cementing a feeling of hostility and of 'them and us' between young people and the police as well as their wider communities. Whilst the intention of the orders was that young people would not gather at all, the young people told us that it also felt like *their* safety was not a priority. When they were found by the police on patrol in the area in groups of more than two during the dispersal order, for example, the police would order them to split off into ones and pairs and would wait while they all walked away from the gathering in different directions. Although, some of the youngest were taken home by police.

From our ongoing engagement with the young people, we observed that the police orders only motivated the young people to create their own spaces for community and belonging together as the excluded group. Modern technology meant that these spaces could be online as well as physical spaces, and online social networking also offered the opportunity for them to organise themselves and communicate with each other about where the physical spaces might be.



In one of the communities that was perhaps most aggressively targeted by the curfew and dispersal orders, we continued for a while to find the local young people in new, less open spaces, such as between blocks of garages or in the dark space behind the village shops. The young people told us about how the police began to find them in these places and move them on, after further complaints were made. Eventually, one evening in this particular community we did not find any young people at all, despite having been working with them regularly at that time, on that particular evening, over a substantial period.

The next evening, we were working in one of the villages outside the ring road and we encountered a larger than usual group of young people outside the local shops. When we approached we realised it contained not just young people we knew from that particular village but also young people from the one we had visited the evening before, as well as others we did not know. The young people explained to us that they were using an online messaging service to liaise with their friends from the two local high schools about where police were targeting and which areas were 'safe' to gather. Over time the groups we encountered became larger and the young people increasingly came from further afield, including from the villages and suburbs south of the city to those in the north. Some evenings we did not see young people at all. Others, we encountered up to 50 at a time in one space. In the village just outside of the ring road, where we had first encountered this migration of groups, the local co-op invested in a mosquito alarm (a high-pitched alarm that only people below a certain age can hear). The use of these alarms, whilst by private rather than public investment, arguably only reinforced the sense of exclusion felt by the young people. It is notable that such alarms, in their original forms, were developed to emit frequencies that no humans could hear and were used to deter mice from people's houses or cats from gardens. Whether the use of a technology developed to scare away animals is appropriate as a tool of age discrimination is a whole debate in itself that there is not space to develop here. The young people moved from gathering at that village to another in our area before disappearing altogether for a while, later explaining to us they had been meeting in a village outside of the boundaries of the area we worked in.

This process of migrating to different areas was only facilitated by the use of online messaging through which young people were able to not only create and gather in an 'online space', but to organise themselves to meet in physical spaces that transcended the geographical boundaries of the local

authority youth workers for that particular ward, as well as move between areas of different police responsibility.

This case study demonstrates the futility of the geographically bound police orders imposed on the young people, not simply because they only served to reinforce a sense of exclusion among young people, but because advances in social media allowed the young people to evade these orders by moving between physical boundaries. The online space arguably also served as an 'un-intruded' place for them to gather and communicate in virtual form. It also reinforces how practitioners, in this case both police and youth workers (but the argument extends to all those working with young people), need to keep pace with young people's use of social media. They need not just to understand how young people are using social media but to adapt their work accordingly. In this case, working within the geographical boundaries of a particular area hampered both the police and the youth workers' practice. The young people's use of online messaging demonstrates their ability to use social media to create community, organise themselves and communicate in a social space within which they define who is included or not.

For an age group increasingly excluded from their geographical communities through being seen as problematic or even criminalised, it is unsurprising that online spaces have become more significant in young people's lives. The young people in this case study were, in one sense, building a virtual community, as discussed earlier (Rheingold, 1993; Jones, 1997). However, they were also, and perhaps more significantly, using social media to organise offline activity. Their use of online messaging has clear links to the LSE's (2012) findings about the use of the same during the riots in 2011. Just as the US research mentioned earlier found that people's offline voting behaviours in presidential elections were influenced by posts made by close friends on social media (Bond et al, 2012), it is arguable that the young people in this context may also be using social media as a space for influencing the offline 'political', community and protest activity of their friends.

Using Social Media positively in practice

In order to counteract any implication that social media is only ever a negative influence, we wish to also highlight the work of one of the chapter's authors in which he is involved in research and practice around the increasing concern about youth involvement in gang activity and serious violence. This example of the positive use of social media emerged from responses to the senseless killing of a thirteen-year-old boy in a deprived area of London. This took place at a time of a growing Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector consensus about shortfalls in the ability of mainstream services to both adequately understand how and why young people become involved in serious youth violence as well as to keep pace with the tools and technologies which might be used in the response. The death of the young man provided the impetus for a close friend of the deceased to work with his community and local organisations to foster community action aimed at tackling youth violence at the local level. The 'One Big Community' (OBC) was thus set up in 2013 as a London-wide youth-led coalition committed to ending youth violence by engaging young people directly in decision-making processes and empowering them to make real bottom-up change. Quickly progressing into a youth led coalition of 40 organisations, led by a 25 strong youth management committee, it set out to devise and deliver a consultation programme that would provide youth perspectives as counter-narratives to 'taken for granted' understandings of gangs and young people. This consultation enabled the direct involvement of over 4,500 young people in a critical debate on how far current policy and practice effectively tackles youth violence, using up-to-date online technologies as one of its tools, and attracted regional press coverage<sup>i</sup>. One of the consultation events was 'One Big Debate', an online opportunity for young people to share their views and experiences of gangs and violence. The event explored issues raised directly by young people, through using key questions to guide a live online debate and via a survey. This was the first stage of a more extensive youth consultation.

Although the press and other traditional methods were also used, online technologies were the primary means of advertising the event, disseminating the date, time, location and how to sign up the debate via email blasts and via social media. The event started with 150 on-site participants gathering in the main hall of a south London school before being split into groups and taken into classrooms around the school where they had access to computers for the online debate. The debate was structured around tweet responses to ten questions that had been developed by the OBC management committee and were introduced at appropriate junctures over a six-hour period. During this exchange of views and

opinions, young people at the venue were joined by others from all over the country and even some from outside of the UK. The discussion attracted over 3,600 tweets, reaching a calculated 20,000 people and trended top of the UK Twitter rankings with the hashtag #OneBigDebate.

After the event, under the supervision of the OBC management committee, a group of volunteers analysed the results of the survey and Twitter responses.

**Table 1.** Results of the One Big Debate Survey

	Yes	No	Don't know
1. Do you know any young people who have died/been seriously injured as a result of youth violence?	69%	31%	0%
2. Do you believe there is a solution to youth violence	62%	19%	19%
3. Do rivalries that lead to youth violence start at school?	58%	25%	17%
4. Do you trust the police?	20%	57%	23%
5. Do you believe the police can keep you safe?	25%	60%	15%
6. Do you think there would be less youth violence if there were more job opportunities for young people	87%	5%	8%
7. Is all youth violence associated with gangs?	6%	94%	0%
8. Is enough attention paid to female victims of youth violence	10%	60%	30%
9. Is the media a contributing factor to youth violence	72%	9%	19%

10. Would you like to be actively involved in decisions about community safety?	84%	8%	8%
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Analysis of the Tweets from during the event showed an overwhelmingly positive online response to the overall debate, the following reflective of many others:

@DA\_KATieM - I was! #**onebigdebate** the questions made them our young people really stop & think. Well done!

Questions that attracted the largest number of responses and strongest views focussed on two issues in particular. A long series of retweets demonstrated that although many young people encountered violence in their everyday routines, the media were seen as propagating a culture of fear. One person summarising the exchange of opinion about the role of the press tweeted:

@JohnLoughton - #**OneBigDebate** Media must stop treating youth like Aeroplanes. Only report on ones that crash

Crucially, the overwhelming view was that many did not see 'gangs' as a major cause of experienced violence, with only 6% directly attributing it to gang activity. Debates on this topic prompted the largest number of retweets with many reflecting the following view:

@RyanDMGray - #**OneBigDebate** gang is too vague a term. The word gang could refer to multiple things, we need to be more precise with terms and definitions

Overall, it is clear that the One Big Debate event allowed for the positive use of social media to engage young people and practitioners in discussion about some key youth justice issues. There are some key positive recommendations that can be drawn from this case study for the use of social media in practice. Most pertinently, it challenges the dominant negativity about young people's use of social media by using it to build community and foster critical debate. In this case study it is used in both a positive and ethical way to engage with young people, as opposed to as a means of surveillance.

## **Developing youth justice practice around social media**

Social media is huge part of young people's lives and this is unlikely to change. Young people need to understand the impact their engagement with social media might have on their lives and practitioners need to understand how they use it and for what ends, as well as how online activity links to offline behaviour. Young people seek both private spaces (through messaging services, for example) and public engagement (through public postings on Facebook and Twitter, for example) in their online communications. Practitioners need to understand and, indeed, respect the nuances in young people's online activity and develop clear protocols for how, where and when it is appropriate to engage with young people in their online worlds. The marginalising of young people in public spaces appears to have informed their use of online spaces in the first practice example above – and their online communications certainly informed their offline activity as they sought spaces to gather without scrutiny. As such, marginalising or monitoring young people in their online spaces is not what we argue for here. There is clear potential for practitioners' engagement with young people in understanding and sensitively using social media. Positive online campaigns can be, and indeed, have been, used to combat negative perceptions of young people. For example, the #notinmyname campaign sparked after the 2011 riots by NCVYS (the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services) for young people to make their stand against the riots and to demonstrate that many young people did not support them. Practitioners can, as such, use social media to encourage collective debate and online community rather than avoiding it, invading it (as a means of surveillance) or seeking to shut it down.

Young people are already using online communications to organise themselves and coordinate action. The use of social media messaging services in the first practice example above for young people to organise themselves is strikingly similar to how it was used in the 2011 riots (LSE, 2012). The use of Twitter for more positive activism in the One Big Debate makes a strong case for how social media can be channelled for constructive debate with young people, rather than viewed as an

entirely negative phenomenon. Again, the finding that the use of social media, particularly Twitter, was used more substantively to organise the clean-up operations rather than the riots themselves in 2011 highlights the potential of social media activism for positive action (LSE, 2012).

The biggest issue that prevents youth practitioners from using social media is the lack of clear guidelines available for how to do this (Conradie, 2015). Before it can be used by youth justice practitioners on a large scale, the appropriate policies and procedures need to be developed and these are currently scarce, if not completely non-existent. Alongside this, more research is needed as to how practitioners can use social media to enhance their work with young people and to inform such policies. The protocols developed need to be reflexive and able to evolve as technology advances and the sites that young people use change. There should be some clear underlying principles that relate to young people's privacy and rights as well as the professional boundaries of practitioners – alongside specific guidelines for different sites.

Alongside clear guidelines for practice, training needs to be developed and provided to youth justice practitioners – again, this needs to be flexible, responsive and informed by research – but with clear overall principles around rights, privacies and professional conduct online. In particular, youth justice practitioners need to understand not just how young people may engage in or encounter problematic behaviours online but also how online activity informs offline behaviours. They need to be able to work with young people's use of social media and not simply against it, fostering online dialogue for positive change, debate and action as in the One Big Debate example above. They also need to be aware of the fluidity of borders online – where geographical boundaries no longer exist. As seen in the first practice example, young people are migrating between and moving beyond different geographical areas facilitated by their online communications. This has implications for practitioners such as youth workers, police and other professionals who have a specific geographical remit. Collaboration and communication across geographical areas will be crucial in keeping pace with young people's use of social media to organise themselves, rather than simply removing



'problems' from one authority area into another. Young people have demonstrated, both in the practice example above and through their online communications during the 2011 riots, that social media allows them to navigate between and across geographical boundaries according to where is being targeted punitively or where they are currently undisturbed. This sophisticated use of social media to communicate quickly and effectively about where to gather is too efficient for area-bound orders and practitioners to keep pace with.

Any policies and training developed around the use of social media in practice need to consider the ethics of online engagement. As mentioned, young people's rights particularly in relation to privacy need to be maintained. Practitioners need to consider what is appropriate in terms of online interactions. For example, it would not be appropriate for professionals to use their personal social media accounts to engage with young people and they also need to recognise the power dynamic that exists if they use professional accounts to connect with young people's personal profiles with access to their personal lives. It is arguable that professional 'best practice' would be to not become 'friends' or 'followers' of young people's social media profiles but to create pages or groups that the young people can choose to connect with and to what extent to engage with. Such a strategy makes it less easy for practitioners' social media contact with young people to involve surveillance of them – or at least that they can only view what the young person has made 'public'. Whilst youth justice does involve some level of surveillance or monitoring of young people, this should be treated with the same respect for public and private space as offline surveillance would be, with anything shared only with 'friends' or 'followers' treated as private space online. This would fit with the ethical 'good practice' suggested by Baker (2013) for research with young people online – and practitioners should arguably maintain similar ethical boundaries. It should also be recognised that young people are not always aware of what can be viewed publicly on their social media profiles and therefore their consent to view anything public cannot be assumed (Baker, 2013). It would be ethical therefore to ensure that it is made explicit to young people what the purposes are of engaging with them via social media, and how their data will be used, as would be done for any data they share offline. The

implications of the Data Protection Act (1998) as well as safeguarding legislation should be considered for online engagement in the same way they are in offline engagement, with young people made fully aware of their rights to confidentiality as well as the legal limitations to this.

As outlined in the discussions in this chapter already, it is not engagement with social media as a form of surveillance of young people that we advocate for – but for using social media as a positive rather than a punitive tool for practice. Young people also need to be educated and made aware of the limitations to their privacy on social media and of their rights to control what is available to whom. They need to be supported in learning how to use social media constructively and how to deal with negative encounters online. They need to protect themselves on several levels including from abuse in order to combat bullying, to preserve their mental health from the anxieties that can be caused by online encounters and visibility, and to prevent the most extreme tragedies such as suicide. They also need to be aware of what is appropriate behaviour online, to avoid being the perpetrator of anti-social or even criminal online behaviour – and to avoid unwittingly incriminating themselves with what they share online, as in the case of Kent's Youth Crime Commissioner discussed earlier.

## **Conclusion**

Social media poses some clear challenges and opportunities for youth justice. Young people's online engagement needs to be understood as to its impact on offline behaviours as well as in terms of what behaviour is problematic in the online spaces themselves. Young people and practitioners need to understand the boundaries between public and private space online and young people should be made clearly aware of how any data they share with practitioners online will be used. We have argued for a positive rather than a punitive use of social media, resisting the 'law and order' and 'prevent as enforcement' discourses which have been found to be less effective than positive engagement in youth justice practice (Darke, 2011; Hughes, 2011).

As such, the key practical implications developed in this chapter are around the possibilities of social media to work collaboratively with young people. There is also a need for education for young people in using social media positively, highlighting issues around privacy, incrimination and cyberbullying among others so they are fully aware. Organisations such as CEOP have made some clear ground on this but recent media examples of the problematic use of social media by young people suggest there is still some way to go.

There is a need for clear guidelines, bespoke training and more research into engaging with young people online as youth justice professionals. Until these guidelines are in place, practice cannot be developed in a consistent, ethical and explicit form. Individual organisations need to begin to develop clear procedures as well as clear aims as to the purposes of engagement with young people online that are explicit to young people as well as practitioners.

From an ethical perspective, the use of social media as a form of surveillance into young people's private lives is questionable. A simplistic analysis of the first practice example above could lead to a recommendation for more surveillance of and intrusion into young people's online spaces. This is not what we argue for here. The second example demonstrates how social media can be used in a positive way with young people and it is this that we advocate for. The first highlights a need to keep pace with how young people use social media. This knowledge can be used to develop positive interventions with young people that draw on their chosen methods of communication, rather than used as justification for 'spying' on them in their peer group spaces.

Young people will continue to seek out spaces to build community and interact with their peers. Indeed, the first example demonstrates that the more we insist on intruding into these spaces in a punitive fashion the more they will seek new spaces. Therefore, our key recommendations are that young people's right to belong and create community space online are respected but that these spaces can be used appropriately by sensitive practitioners who wish to engage with them there in positive and collaborative ways.

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<sup>i</sup> A notable example is the ITV London report on the Greater London Authority 'Wall of Silence' debate in the main Chamber at City Hall: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ALuVlKV0yk&feature=youtu.be>.