Teens' Everyday Information Practices on Mobile Media: "Catching Up" and "Reaching Out"[1]

Jefferey Boase

Junoh Kimm

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junoh kimm
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
junoh.kim@mail.utoronto.ca

Jefferey Boase
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
j.boase@utoronto.ca

ABSTRACT

Mobile media have become a central part of everyday life for many teens. In this study, we examine how teens use the media to access diverse information to maintain and reconnect with different personal relationships. Based on semi-structured interviews with 81 teens from ethnically and economically diverse backgrounds, we find that teens generally have broad networks of ties with whom they communicate through both face-to-face interactions and mobile media. To maintain these networks, the teens in our study use information that they either unexpectedly encounter or purposely seek out on various platforms available on their mobile devices to "reach out" to dormant ties and "catch up" with active ties.

KEYWORDS

Teens; Mobile Media; Information Practices; Communication Networks

ASIS&T THESAURUS

Mobile communications (1256)
Information behavior (805)
Human communications (972)

INTRODUCTION

Teens are now coming of age at a time when mobile media have created unprecedented access to both people and information (Ranie & Wellman, 2012). Globally, teens are not only at the forefront of adopting new information and communication technologies (Ling, 2010; International Telecommunication Union, 2017), but they are also pioneers in setting new social norms and establishing new practices in the digital world (Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2016). To teens, mobile media are often an important part of their cultural, academic, and social lives, whereas to some adults, the rapid adoption of new technology and changes in everyday practices can be deeply disconcerting. To this day, research on mobile phone use has suggested contradictory findings about its implications in teens' everyday lives.

Concerns about the social implications of mobile media can be formalized in two contradicting hypotheses; (1) the material properties of mobile media are inherently limited in hosting genuine social interactions (Turkle, 2015; Twenge, 2017); and (2) mobile communication heightens connectivity with like-minded familiar relationships, at the expense of connections with people with diverse ideas and backgrounds (Campbell & Kwak, 2012; Wilken, 2009; Habuchi, 2005). Meanwhile, several youth media studies (e.g. Vickery, 2017; Livingstone, 2016; boyd, 2014; Ito et al, 2008) have highlighted the possible supportive role that mobile media play in extending teens' daily participation in diverse networks as they make their way toward adulthood.

Recently, studies have indicated that smartphones can facilitate increased interaction with weak tie relationships that have the potential to provide diverse support and information (e.g. Kobayashi, Boase, Suzuki & Suzuki, 2015; Schock, 2016). With the wide adoption of smartphones and contrary perspectives on the implications of teens' digital media engagements, there is an increasing need to understand how teens manage, reconnect, and strengthen their personal relationships using mobile media.

In this paper, we focus on the relationship between mobile media and personal networks by examining how teens use the media, as material *means*, to seek and encounter socially relevant information for staying in-touch or reconnecting with different individuals who can provide valuable support and ideas of the world around them.

For the purpose of analysis, we refer to dormant ties as those social connections that are relationally distant but can still be reached for support and information. These relationships can be thought of as those who were "present at one point in time, and absent in another, [and] may eventually return to the network" (Marin & Hampton, 2019, 3). Such loosely connected ties are more likely to provide information that is not readily available in one's immediate social circle (Granovetter, 1983; Burt, 1992). While interactions with close friends and family provide strong emotional support and a sense of belonging, reconnecting with dormant ties can provide new instrumental information, such as career opportunities, references, or suggestions regarding where to apply for college (Lin, 2001).

To understand teens' use of mobile media, we draw on the concept of everyday information practices (Savolainen, 1995; 2007; 2008). We understand information practices to include both active and less-directed practices (McKenzie, 2003). Recognizing that teens' use of mobile media is not

always deliberate or strategic, this paper presents the ways in which teens maintain and reconnect with their personal network ties using mobile media as part of their everyday information practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Teens' Everyday Information Practices

Teens in this study are at a point when they need to explore and learn various ideas about themselves, others, and the world around them to make "meaningful life choices" (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2006). Our approach to studying this population is different from one that assumes teens are in a transitional period characterized by rebellious behaviour and a lack of reason (e.g. Hall, 1908). We recognize that adolescence is a social invention that emerged out of political, social, and economic agendas (Hines, 1999). In this research, teenage participants themselves and their daily experiences are respected as legitimate stories. This approach emphasizes a more nuanced exploration of teens' everyday experiences and practices of mobile media.

From the late 1970s, information research began looking at the mundane lived experiences of individuals (Case & Given, 2016). Reijo Savolainen argues that "everyday information practices may be understood as a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources" (2008, 3). In contrast to work or specific task-oriented goals, everyday information is an overarching approach that encompasses diverse information engagements. This accounts for various mundane and socially embedded information practices that are both "active" and "less-directed" (McKenzie, 2003).

The transitional period of coming of age is a unique context that shapes their encountering, seeking, using, and sharing of information. Savolainen notes that "there is a need for empirical studies relating the spatial and temporal factors of information seeking" (2006). Within the body of scholarship studying human information behaviour (Bates, 2010), a growing body of work has explored how different populations in transition have diverse information practices that include both active and less-direct information seeking (e.g. Allard & Caidi, 2018, on Filipino migrants' and their translocal information practices).

The exploration process of encountering, disassociating, and reconceptualising information is particularly important for individuals situated in transitional periods. People in transitional periods often face difficulty when imagining what information they need and how to find it (Allard & Caidi, 2018). With the structural limitations and social restrictions that teens experience today (boyd, 2014; Vickery, 2017), teens are often under pressure to make their first major life-decisions without sufficient exploration and preparation. This research thus accounts for lived information experiences such as exploring, leisure activities, everyday sociality, and unanticipated information encountering from globalized diverse activities teens have on mobile media.

Personal Networks and Information.

Information behaviour studies have consistently found that "people choose other people as their preferred source of information" (Johnson, 2004; also see Lu, 2007; Shah, 2017). Structures of social network impact information flow, access, and use (Erickson, 1996; Hersberger, 2003; Haythornthwaite, 2005, Schutz, 2009; Veinot, 2010). Teens tend to be embedded in strong peer-based social structures and interactions because they are separated from adults for most of the day (Chudacoff 1989).

Despite the dominance of local peer-based interactions, digital media has the potential to allow for more diverse connections by blurring the boundaries of time and space (Ranie & Wellman, 2012). However, personal networks are not fully mobilized from the constraints of time and space. Rather they take a "hybrid" form, whereby day-to-day in-person social interactions structure opportunities for future connection on mobile media (Hampton, 2016). Personal networks consist of diverse ties, such as loosely connected "weak ties" (e.g. old classmate friends on Facebook, or followers on Instagram) and closely connected "strong ties" (e.g. family and best friends).

The characteristics of personal networks exogenously condition the types of information and resources that an individual can access (Lin, 2001). Access to quality information and resources is dependent on the individual's ability to connect and develop networks of diverse social ties and communities with valuable information (Burt, 1992). This requires one to develop a robust communicative skillset for "investment in social relations" (Lin, 2001, 19). While the ways in which relationships facilitate information flow is relevant, teens have information priorities and practices different from adults because of their stage in life and their sociocultural spaces. Teens require a large pool of information where they can explore and experience different options to make long-term decisions, particularly where their education and careers are concerned. Meanwhile, their everyday practices are different from those of adults as they are embedded in a different type of peer-based society and culture. This study thus expands on previous work by examining how mobile media are used in everyday information practices to maintain active network ties and reactivated dormant network ties.

Mobile Media for Network Investment and Management

Having a robust personal network is important during transitional periods, such as coming of age or relocating. However, network studies consistently find people who undergo transitions typically lose about one-third to one-half of all ties who used to provide information and social support (e.g. Small 2017; Ikkink & Tilburg 1999; Coleman 1988). This is particularly notable with students after graduation (Bidart and Lavenu 2005; Roberts & Dunbar 2011; Suitor & Keeton 1997). These findings are consistent with more recent studies on student networks (Small 2017; Small, Pamphile, & McMahan 2015). The "persistent and pervasive" (Hampton, 2016) connectivity facilitated by mobile media may help to compensate for these network

declines by helping teens engage their peer-networks (boyd, 2014).

By allowing individuals to acquire and maintain an awareness of the social dynamics of ties within their networks, mobile media as a *means* may support teens in nurturing different types of relationships. Selfies or tweets shared by teens, for example, may seem unproductive or distractive activities, but they often serve a supportive role "to maintain robust learning ecologies and peer network" (Vickery, 2017). Studies on interpersonal communication have consistently found the significance of non-verbal interactions that serve to establish, maintain, and manage different social relationships and increase communication capabilities (Malinowski, 1943; Musolf, 2003; Pavlidou, 1994). The everyday practices teens have on mobile media may nurture relationships and initiate interactions with diverse ties.

Using digital media, teens share information that allows them to develop diverse social relationships (Vitak & Ellison, 2013). By feeding teens' knowledge of how others are doing, such information can lower the initial psychological and social barriers to initiate a conversation with individuals, particularly when reconnecting with dormant relationships. This paper focuses on this issue by exploring how teens understand their information practices on mobile media and the implications of these practices for maintaining and reactivating network ties.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The three governing questions for our exploration are:

1. How do teens use mobile media to interact with their personal networks?

2. What information practices do teens have on their mobile media to connect with their *active* social ties?

3. What information practices do teens have on their mobile media to connect with their *dormant* social ties?

METHOD

We draw on explorative and semi-structured interviews conducted in 2016 with an ethnically and economically diverse sample of 81 high school students living in the Greater Toronto Area. We interviewed this number of participants as in order to cover many other issues which were part of a larger project. We determined that we had interviewed a sufficient number of participants when saturation was reached in regards to the many topics that we covered (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The male-female ratio held fairly even at 52 percent and 48 percent, respectively. Our 81 participants were between the ages of 15-19 and 51 percent of the participants reported low-income household.

The interviews were approximately 30 to 40 minutes long and held one-on-one in quiet public spaces, such as libraries and community centres. The majority of the interviews occurred in community centres where administrators provided permission to recruit teens. Some of the recruitment also occurred through word of mouth, where teens knew a participant or had seen the recruiting

advertisement, and contacted the interviewers directly as a result. Interviewers focused their recruiting efforts in neighborhoods that were diverse in terms of neighborhood-level incomes and the ethnic composition of the residents. This recruiting method was designed to explore a variety of voices and perspectives during the interviews. Interviews were conducted and transcribed by a team of five trained graduate students. The first author then iteratively developed and applied codes as he immersed himself in the reading and rereading of these interviews. In this way, the codes emerged from the data, and allowed us to identify certain themes across multiple interviews. The interviews were manually transcribed to ensure the researchers would understand more nuanced information. We then iteratively developed and applied codes as we immersed ourselves in the reading and rereading of these interviews. The emergence of codes and themes that are shared by this diverse array of respondents suggests the existence of common perspectives and understandings.

The semi-structured interviews first started with a series of general questions focused on the various types of daily communication, including face-to-face and email. Drawing name generator technique (Fischer, 1982), interviewers then asked respondents to provide the first names of the following six specific types of individuals: (1) someone with whom they "enjoy socializing" (Wellman, 1979); (2) someone with whom they "discuss important matters" (Burt, 1984; Marsden 1987) (3) someone who holds "significantly different values and beliefs" from themselves; (4) someone with whom they are "on good terms, but who is not part of their close core group" (Coser, 1975; Granovetter, 1983); (5) someone who has provided them with "information that helped accomplish something important" (McAllister & Fischer, 1978); and (6) someone who has helped them to "significantly rethink matters that are important" to them. For each of these ties, participants were asked a set of follow-up questions regarding how they communicate with them and other aspects of their relationship. At all points during these interviews, interviewers actively tried to listen to the participants and sought to understand the purposes, consequences, and stories behind their mobile media practices. As the collected data is sensitive, we use pseudonyms when quoting from the respondents.

FINDINGS

Participants

In the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to complete a short survey that included questions about their backgrounds, such as their parent's occupation and education level, the number of siblings living in the same household, activities that they do outside of school, and how they communicate using different types of media. Responses indicated that the teens in our study came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (e.g., their parents were truck drivers, teachers, and dentists) and family structures (e.g. single parent or single child families), reflecting the economic and cultural diversity of the city. During the interviews, 12 teens mentioned their immediate

family connections in China, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the United States. The male-female ratio held fairly even at 52:48 and all participants were between the ages of 15-19. They had varying mobile data plans, while 10 participants did not have any data plan on their devices. Most participants described school and home Wi-Fi as providing their main connection to the internet. All participants were using two or more social media platforms with varying degrees of activities. While education performance was often mentioned as a daily concern, 15 participants reported that they were not satisfied with their education. Participants often had mixed feelings about school, and their feelings about it usually depended on their daily moods. Hana (18) described, "Sometimes I just have a bad day and I don't wanna be at school, and others it's like — I'm okay and happy."

An Overview: Network Information Practices
Despite varying degrees of limitations in data connectivity and accessing devices at school and home, the teens with whom we spoke described drawing on a wide range of mobile media to browse, seek, use, and share information about their networks. This information is often strategically collected, but also passively utilized to maintain relationally, culturally, and geographically diverse ties. Overall, our results indicate that mobile media are deeply embedded in teens' everyday lives as a means of obtaining information that helps them to reach out and catch up with diverse network ties.

Q1. How do teens use mobile media to interact with their personal networks?
For most teens in our study, mobile media are used to interact with friends and family. Their usage often depends on knowledge of their personal networks, and whether network ties might be attempting to contact them. When asked how often she checks her mobile phone, Jean (17) said,

> Throughout the day. Sometimes I don't always check it, like sometimes I'll check it on an hourly basis, while other days I'll check it, on like a, daily basis. So like, if I'm not expecting anybody to contact me on Facebook, then I probably won't check it until like the end of the day or the morning.

As discussed at the beginning of this paper, some scholars have argued that mobile media are incapable of fostering supportive interactions. To the contrary, the teens we interviewed are comfortably using a wide range of mobile media for both affective and instrumental interactions. Many teens explicitly described different practices associated with different mobile media, as seen in the response of Adam (17) when we asked about his daily mobile phone use.

> Different apps for different things. I'll use texting for quick messaging, see what's up, talk about homework, what's on tests, links, stuff like that. Email, check files and whatnot. For Snapchat, it is like what's going in

school — say if someone's doing a presentation we'll record them or something interesting.

Concerns that mobile media do not allow for supportive interaction often hinge on the assumption that mobile media do not provide enough social cues for successful or meaningful interactions. We find no evidence to support this view. Awareness of social cues is most notable when participants compared face-to-face interactions with mobile communication. Face-to-face communication was reported to be more phatic in nature, "random", and is often influenced by temporal and environmental factors. Lae (19) explained, "[f]or in-person, it is whatever that comes up. Usually, there are more people around so we talk about different things. Pretty random." In-person social practices generally consisted of less-goal-oriented phatic interactions with "no substance" (Jeff, 15), influenced by the temporal, "what's going on in my mind at that time" (Tin, 16), and spatial, "where we are" (Dawn, 17) factors. In contrast, teens were more strategic and purposeful with their mobile communication where they felt more "in-control" of the flow of interactions. They often strategically use mobile media, such as text messages, in a near-synchronous manner that facilitates constant continuous open-ended interactions. Uno (15) articulated why he chooses text messaging for specific types of interactions.

> Unlike talking, I think with text messages, you are looking at the words you are saying, there's a lot more review that goes into it. You can read over something and know that's going to come across weird, instead of just blurting it out.

When teens are discussing times when they have connected to people who are in a notable position in their networks or have more exclusive information, particularly regarding school and university admissions, they clearly articulate the different implicit cues associated with each type of media on their devices. Amy (17) described,

> I use email for school and like other important application stuff. It just seems formal. When you go on it, you are emailing a teacher or someone that is like in charge, right? Texting is so easy because it's always like… I guess … It just feels different. Social media is not very appropriate for these people.

Their media practices are not solely based on the content or purpose of the communication, especially as many mobile media are starting to offer similar functions (e.g. time-lapsed content sharing on Snapchat, WeChat, Instagram, and Facebook). They are rather dependent upon the nature of the relationship, such as the relational closeness or the norms of their community. Galen (15), for example, "prefer[s] calling over texting" with his "close friend" because, "texting is just kind of... you don't hear the sincerity inside their voice, and what they want to say." Meanwhile, he stated that text-based media (e.g. email, texting or WhatsApp) are his default communication channels for "not so close people" who often provide him information about university applications and volunteer works. Similarly, Elise (17) chooses WhatsApp and texting

with her mentor from a summer camp to "talk about school, what's needed in school to keep it steady average, and what's needed to get a good scholarship and stuff, because that's what our camp friends use to communicate."

In short, the teens we interviewed showed a strong awareness of their mobile media use. They intentionally used a variety of mobile media – such as text messages, voice calling, etc. – and their media selection was based on a variety of factors. In many of their comments, the teens further demonstrated an awareness of social cues, and could describe how these cues factored into their use of this technology. These results are in stark opposition to the view that teens are passively manipulated by mobile media, and that mobile media use is necessarily detrimental to their relationships and day-to-day resources.

2. What information practices do teens have on their mobile media to connect with their active social ties?

One of the most notable practices that we observed among the teens was the extension of their daily face-to-face interactions through various mobile media, which help to keep connections active across time and space. Teens described these short and frequent interactions as "catching up." This practice of catching up helps them to maintain their active relationships with parents, classmates, siblings, and "best-friends." Indeed, our participants often reported that the majority of their calls and texts made on their devices were to coordinate their daily schedule with parents. Vishal's (16) mom is a frequent flyer and they rely heavily on mobile media for their daily interactions. He described,

> She does tell me she is going on a flight or to make sure I brush my teeth and do all the chores. Saying I love you… take care before she is going on a flight and she calls me a lot so we just talk.

These short-burst catching up practices symbolically maintain their relationships by sharing content that can vary from humorous videos, found while "randomly" browsing on social media, to mundane day-to-day activities. Rather than conveying specific information, these practices often carry more phatic messages similar to the face-to-face interactions. This reaffirms and keeps connections active across different platforms. Maya (18) described,

> On Facebook, I usually text and call her. Snapchat is like, when I wanna snap of me doing something [and] send her, and Instagram is like when I see a funny video and I will just DM [direct message] her… It's like catching up, like how are you and stuff. I'll just text a couple of words.

We find that mobile media are not only used to connect directly with ties, but they are used as part of the information practices that proceed from and shape those interactions. As part of everyday information practices, teens in our study use and share information that they encounter and seek out on various mobile media to connect with active ties. In particular, social networking media such as Facebook and Instagram are often used to obtain network information resources to genuinely connect with diverse ties and increase awareness of their relationships. Bryce (19) explains his Instagram use with his classmates as follows,

> Just like, pictures of them, like a basketball game, they would record a little bit of the basketball game. … If I see a nice picture, or if he does something good on basketball, I'll be like — 'Oh, that was a nice shot.'

Socially relevant information obtained from mobile media often becomes a resource to catch up with relationally weaker ties. Like many, Hana (16) acquires information about her new classmate whom she describes as being, "not that close yet." This information then becomes an icebreaker for, "getting to know each other" better. She explains,

> I see something like the vacation they went [sic], something cool. That kind of stuff on Instagram. Then, usually [I use] Facebook message to talk about her vacation, [asking] how was it, but we usually talk about school stuff, homework, or like things the teacher said in class. Things I don't get.

With distant ties who are not part of the core social group, such as an acquaintance from work or someone from an after school program, our participants used mobile media to artfully catch up. Teens often use and share the information resources they encounter from mobile media to send friendly messages to show their interests in a tie's daily activity or hobby. Sunny (17) is not "exactly interested" in dancing, however, when she sees her friend's post about dancing practice, she responses as a way to keep on good term with this friend. She described,

> We see each other once a week in person. We usually text, "How're you doing?" [I see her] Facebook posts about 3 times a week. Usually about herself dancing. [I] don't often direct message her, but sometimes [I do] to share her dancing stuff about YouTube. We're only on social media, [we don't] text and call.

Similarly, Tony (15) connects with ties with varying degrees of closeness using mobile media. He said that social media on his smartphone is particularly useful when connecting with his classmate outside of his core group of friends. The interactions with these ties would not have been active without mobile media. He explained, "I don't know, it's just to talk to different friends, so, like, I really don't need to hear sincerity in their voice — It's awkward."

Teens articulated their mobile media as a way to extend their everyday interactions with family and friends. They use the information that they encounter on mobile media – particularly mobile based social media – during their interactions with both relationally strong and weaker ties. These catching up practices often facilitate phatic information exchanges, which reaffirm and maintain their personal networks.

3. What information practices do teens have on their mobile media to connect with their *dormant* social ties?

The participants in our study generally describe reconnecting with dormant ties as "reaching out." In comparison to other means, teens find mobile media are "easier" for tie reconnection. This is especially true when they use mobile media to connect with ties that help them to accomplish something important, rethink important matters, or learn something new. Most of the teens in our study shared the view that, "[mobile communication is] more convenient and just easy to reach out" (Nadia, 17).

Lorna (18) used to live in Jamaica until her family immigrated to Canada two years ago. The physical distance introduced by the cross-border migration has negatively impacted her personal network. As a result, her migration experience has been challenging. In fact, she struggled to think of just one close friend in Canada. Other than her parents, a large part of her network is based in Jamaica. While the two-years absence of the face-to-face interactions poses a challenge to keeping her ties intact, mobile media play a key role in reaching out to these ties that have become dormant. Reaching out to dormant ties in Jamaica gives her a sense of belonging and comfort during the challenging time. She said,

> If I have, like, myself might have problems, like that I have something I don't want to talk to anyone else [about], like [I] talk to her about it.

When discussing her experience of reaching out to a friend that she has known for 8 years, she mentioned,

> We met in grade five. She was new to the school. But, I mean, we were not really close ever since I left Jamaica but… we talk, but like once … I asked how she's doing. She would ask me how was Canada and, like, if I find a new friend or how is has been, or when [I will] come see her, or yeah, stuff like that.

During the emotionally taxing period of resettlement, practices for reaching out on mobile media provide access to emotional support from both frequently contacted close friends, and from dormant ties back home.

Even teens who did not experience such a significant life transition like Lorna go through several network changes as they move from elementary to middle school, and middle school to high school. Most teens we spoke to had friends who were very close at one point in time, but are no longer close. Wendy (17) articulated,

> I was friends with them from elementary school. I think we were fairly close. But we are not as close [as] we're in high school now. We texted stuff like we should meet up or talking about general school stuff.

Reconnecting with ties that are not part of teens' core groups is particularly important as these ties can provide them information that is not available in immediate environments. Reaching out to dormant ties mostly occurred when teens sought information that helped them accomplish something important, such as finding a part-time job, completing a task at school, or finding extracurricular activities. Marc (15) said,

> I text my sister's friend if I'm needing help with, like homework or school. They're in university. I'm connected with her on Facebook and Snapchat. She typically posts if she's travelled somewhere.

Marc does not directly communicate with this tie after she entered university. He encounters information about what's going on in this person's life while he is "just sort of scrolling through the feed" on Snapchat. This information acquired during social media browsing becomes a social resource that he uses to start interactions when he needs help with his school work.

Most of our participants repeatedly mentioned that they always need help with their homework. Their descriptions implied that they understood that their networks contained resources, and that it was necessary to use information when reaching out to network ties to obtain these resources.

Similarly, Sergey (16) explained his Facebook use,

> I'd say I use Facebook may be 3 to 4 times a day and I only really talk to people. I don't really post anything. I don't really like browsing, but I just every now and then I browse my newsfeeds and talk to people about it. It makes the conversation less awkward sometimes. Like, how was the trip? Or like, you know, everything alright with whatever, but mostly I just talk to people who either I don't have their number or we [are] both online at the same time and typing is a little faster than texting.

Teens generally had an expectation that social networking applications, particularly Facebook, are useful for reconnecting with dormant ties. Many teens we interviewed did not share or post anything on those applications, but rather kept them as address books to reconnect with their ties in the future. Indeed, participants were only interacting with a limited number of contacts on these media. While many teens strategically use socially relevant information resources to genuinely reach out to their dormant ties for instrumental resources, some teens kept different media accounts active on their devices solely for any potential reconnections with their dormant ties. Chris (15) does not "interact [with anyone] publicly on Facebook." When we asked him in what situation he would Facebook message someone who had helped him significantly rethink matters that are important to him, he said,

> We used to be better friends but we kind of drifted apart. Maybe... If I need, like, homework. Because I don't have, like, photo-texting. So, if they're going to send me pictures of their homework. I might only get them in this way.

Teens' mobile media have two roles in facilitating their practice of reaching out. First, they provide teens a chance to encounter information about how others are doing either directly or less-directly. These information resources then become a way of starting a genuine interaction that helps

them to reconnect with the dormant tie. Second, teens have general expectations that mobile media with social networking functions, particularly Facebook, act as address books. That is to say, they view them as repositories of contact information that can be used to locate and connect with dormant ties in the future. Most teens we interviewed did not have the actual phone numbers of their dormant ties, but rather they find mobile networking applications to be the "go-to" channel to reconnect.

DISCUSSION

This article examines various information practices that teens have on mobile media and the implications for maintaining and reconnecting their personal relationships. Contrary to scholarship that views mobile media as necessarily detrimental to personal relationships, we find that teens actively use mobile media to connect with a variety of ties. We describe the ways in which teens encounter socially located information about their ties on mobile media and use these media to reach out and catch up with relationally varied ties. In the discussion that follows we focus first on the findings regarding catching up with active relationships, before proceeding to discuss the findings regarding reaching out to dormant relationships.

Catching Up With Active Networks

Early mobile phones were limited in facilitating diverse information and social practices. They were largely used for social grooming and coordinating activities (Ling & Yttri, 2002). The limited calling and SMS texting functions of mobile phones contributed to the development of the telecocooning hypothesis (Habuchi, 2005; Kobayashi & Boase, 2014), which holds that mobile communication hinders network diversification and expansion (Campbell & Kwak, 2012). Today, mobile media allow for multiplex, spatially unbounded, and highly frequent information practices with a broad range of ties (Schrock, 2015). Despite the new technological functionality of mobile media, our participants had robust networks rooted in the offline world.

The teens in our study use mobile media to catch up and maintain their networks of active ties. With active ties, teens often send short burst signals rather than long formal communication to catch up. Licoppe (2004) refers to this type of activity as "connected presence." Catching up practices include leveraging the information they either encounter or seek, to start a conversation, or share their daily events with the activated ties. These practices promote social cohesions and intimacy. Similar to the telecocooning hypothesis, Ling's (2008) notion of bounded solidarity is that mobile interaction fosters intimacy, cohesion, and shared rituals within a particular social realm that insulates one's social network.

While the short catching up practices are to extend shared norms and belongingness beyond physical co-presence, we also found that these practices exist with relationally weaker ties. This finding reveals an understudied aspect of mobile interaction among teens. It run contrary to the telecocooning hypothesis, which assumes that constant interaction with strong ties will necessarily come at the expense of interaction with weaker ties.

Another important and understudied finding of this study is that teens maintain daily information practices through mobile social media platforms that are critical to maintaining active tie connections. Their casual browsing of social media apps provides them with information that they can use as part of catching up. Although adults may view this type of activity as unnecessary, it serves the important social function of meditating active social connections.

Reaching Out To Dormant Ties

In this paper, we found that teens often consider different relational factors, such as closeness, frequency of contact, community, and the other person's preferences when deciding how to start conversations with dormant ties. Their approach to reconnection shows that information practices are a key part of this process.

Sometimes teens purposely seek out information that they can use to reconnect with dormant ties, and other times they happen upon this information during their daily use of social media apps. The great diversity of information platforms and technologies available on mobile devices today have increased both the chance of encountering information about their network and the ability to seek out the information. This increases connectivity, convenience, and exposure to information about network ties, such as their vacations, life changes, what they like or think throughout the day. In turn, this shared information allows teens to reactivate dormant ties.

Teens reach out to ties as they identify information gaps, information needs, and information resources. When teens reach out to dormant ties, they often start by liking a person's post, poking them, or sharing culturally embedded images such as digital memes or interesting articles. These specific practices vary between the participants and they often evolve, reinvent, and recreate these practices over time. This finding does not support concerns that mobile media are manipulating teens and their use of this media is passive (Turkle, 2015; Twenge, 2017). We find that teens are using social media on their own terms, and that they are often changing these practices as needed. Teens use "tactics to negotiate" (de Certeau, 1984) the material properties of mobile media to fit in their everyday practices.

Future Research

The two information practices for network management observed in this study, reaching out and catching up, shed light on questions about the potentially positive role that mobile media can play in teen life. Nevertheless, the current study has not explored the negative consequences of these social connections. As Portes (1996) and other network scholars have pointed out, although they provide important benefits, social relationships can have downsides. Peer pressure, bullying, and other negative influences all exist within personal networks. Although this was not a theme that came out of our interviews, future researchers would do

well to explore the situations in which catching up and reaching out disadvantage teens.

Another limitation of this study is the sample population and its size. We have not explored the role that mobile media play in facilitating information and network ties among other sociodemographic groups, such as teens living in low-income families, and teens in smaller urban, or rural towns. Further exploration is needed to determine whether teens in these environments use mobile media in ways that are similar to the participants in our study. Additionally, while this exploration provides insight into different practices teens have on their mobile media for their network management, a larger scale study would be required to see if these findings exist in the general population.

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