David Bowie

Social work and social media in changing times:
Look out you rock'n rollers

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Deb Stanfield

This presentation offers:

- Results of a 2014 survey of NZ social workers and their use of social media

- Results of a 2015 survey of social workers using a NZ social work Facebook page.

- How social work literature is making sense of social media

- Discussion points about the behavior of social workers in the social media landscape, the role social workers could play in this realm and the challenges facing them.

Background

- Relationship between **media (journalism) and social work**; collaborative teaching opportunities (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013).

- Relationship between **media and social media** (or new media).

- Relationship between **social media and social work** and its place in social work education (Stanfield and Beddoe, 2015)

15 years

New Zealand social workers have been invited by their profession to engage with the World Wide Web at least since 2001, to make full use of its resources, to be critical of its globalisation agenda and to promote its unique bicultural practice model (O'Donoghue, 2001).

Social media defined

❖ In 2004, Web 2.0 was introduced, offering the public a new kind of relationship with the World Wide Web. Prior to this time we were able to **consume** large amounts of information contained on the internet. After 2004 however we were more able to **create** material, leading to the concept of an online "participatory culture." (posting responses, rating, sharing and commenting).

Themes in the Literature

- The relevance of social media to social work (social justice, advocacy, person-in-environment)

- The application of ethical, professional behaviour to the use of social media

- The growing use of social media in social work education. (Megele, 2015, Westwood, 2014). *Twitter essay, blogging assignments, professional identity and behaviour.*

- The call for a social work analysis of social media in society. For example:

More than half the world does not use the internet
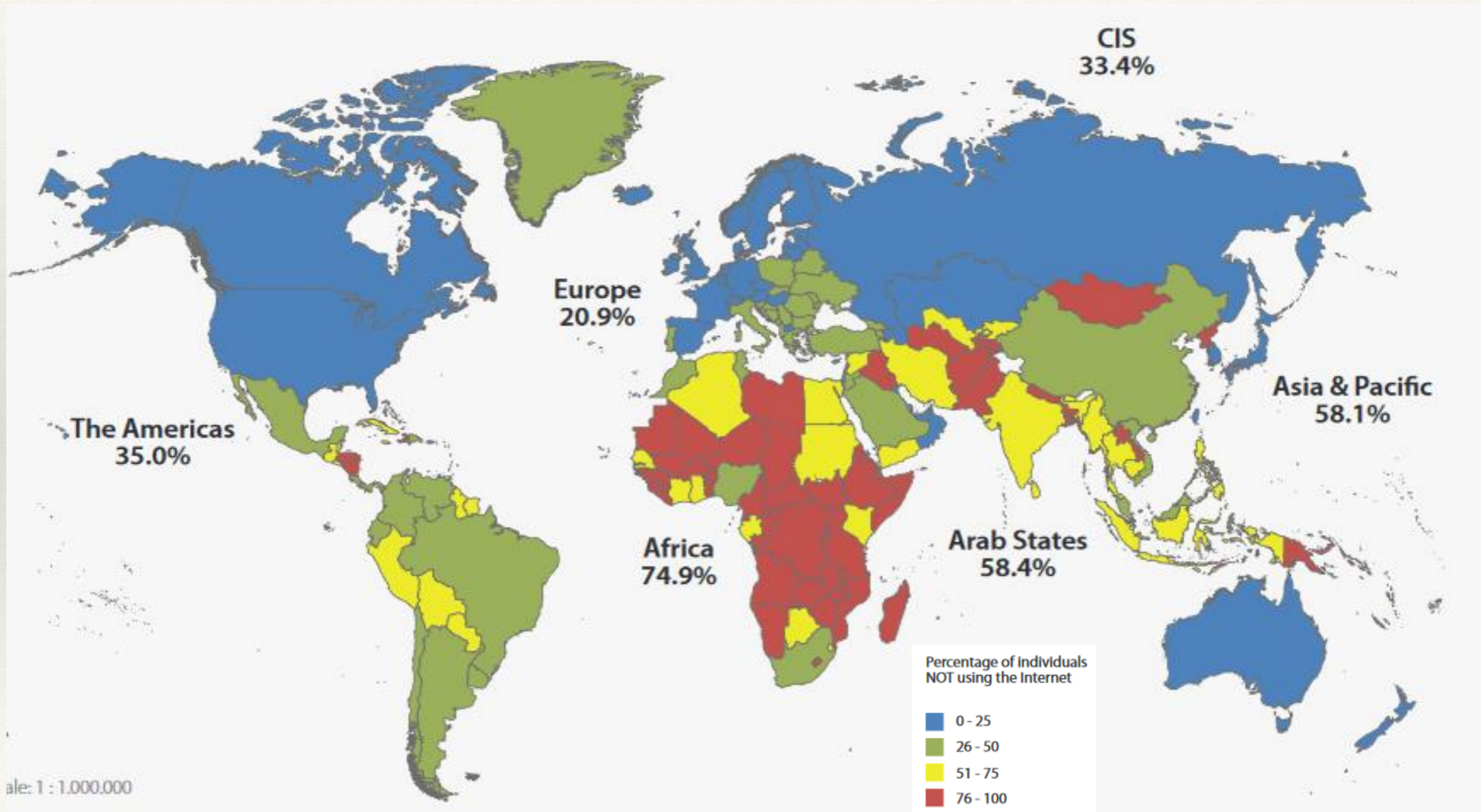
International Telecommunication Union, 2016

Digital divide/disadvantage NZ

INTERNET USE:

(% of 'sophisticated' users of the internet (ie, using more than one device, engaging in a range of internet activities)):

❖ **Income**: under $35K (45%) ………. over $140k (91%)

❖ **Age**: 16-21 (91%) 30-44 (88%) 45-59 (71%) 60-69 (49%) <70 (21%)

❖ **Ethnicity**: Māori (63%) Pasifika (62%) NZE (68%) Asian (98%)

❖ **Rural (56%) Urban (74%)**

❖ *"Proportion of non users is gradually decreasing, so this minority is even more at risk of being overlooked/disadvantaged" (over 90% of NZ use the internet IN 2015, 79% in 2007)*

(Crothers et al, 2015, p. 25)

The social work challenge

❖ Competence to engage in social media has arguably become an imperative for all professions, however it is put forward that the social work profession should be more highly engaged in media activities given its principles of social justice and commitment to social change - activities which require an expertise in networking, communication skills and "media consciousness" (Briar-Lawson, 2011).

Gaps in the literature

The literature makes a strong case in principle for the professional use of social media by social workers, and guides us in its ethical use.

We **don't know** much about how social workers *are* using social media, or what they *think* about it.

Survey: Do you use social media for professional social work reasons?

❖ 3430 members of ***Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers*** *(ANZASW)*

❖ *Of the 342 respondents,* **47% (n158) answered "yes"** *to this question, and were then prompted to answer a series of questions designed to capture their behaviour related to this use. The remaining* **53% of respondents (n181) answered "no"** *and were prompted to answer a different set of questions designed to capture their decision making around this non-use.*
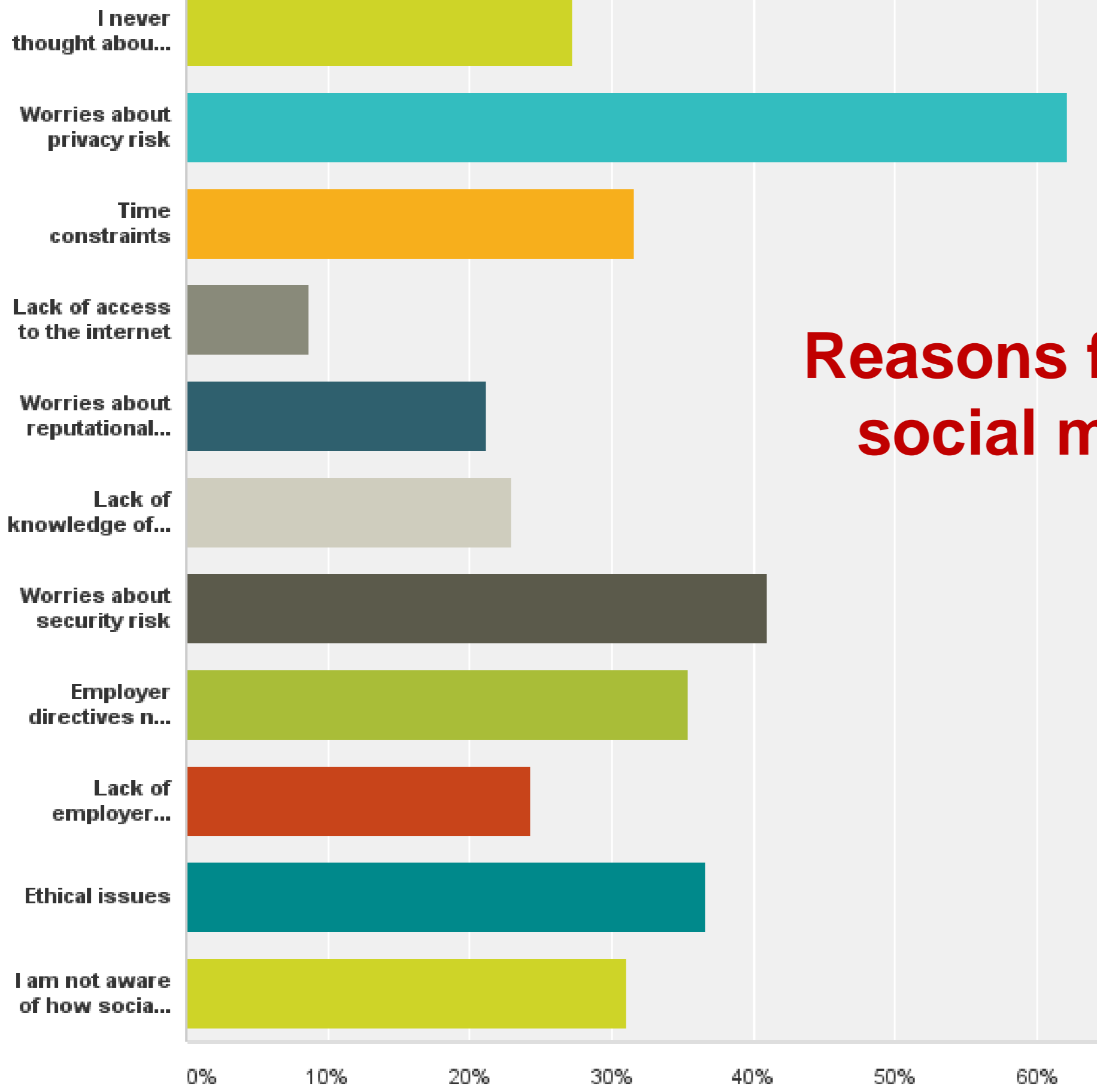
Age groups compared: users (yes) and non-users (no) n=308
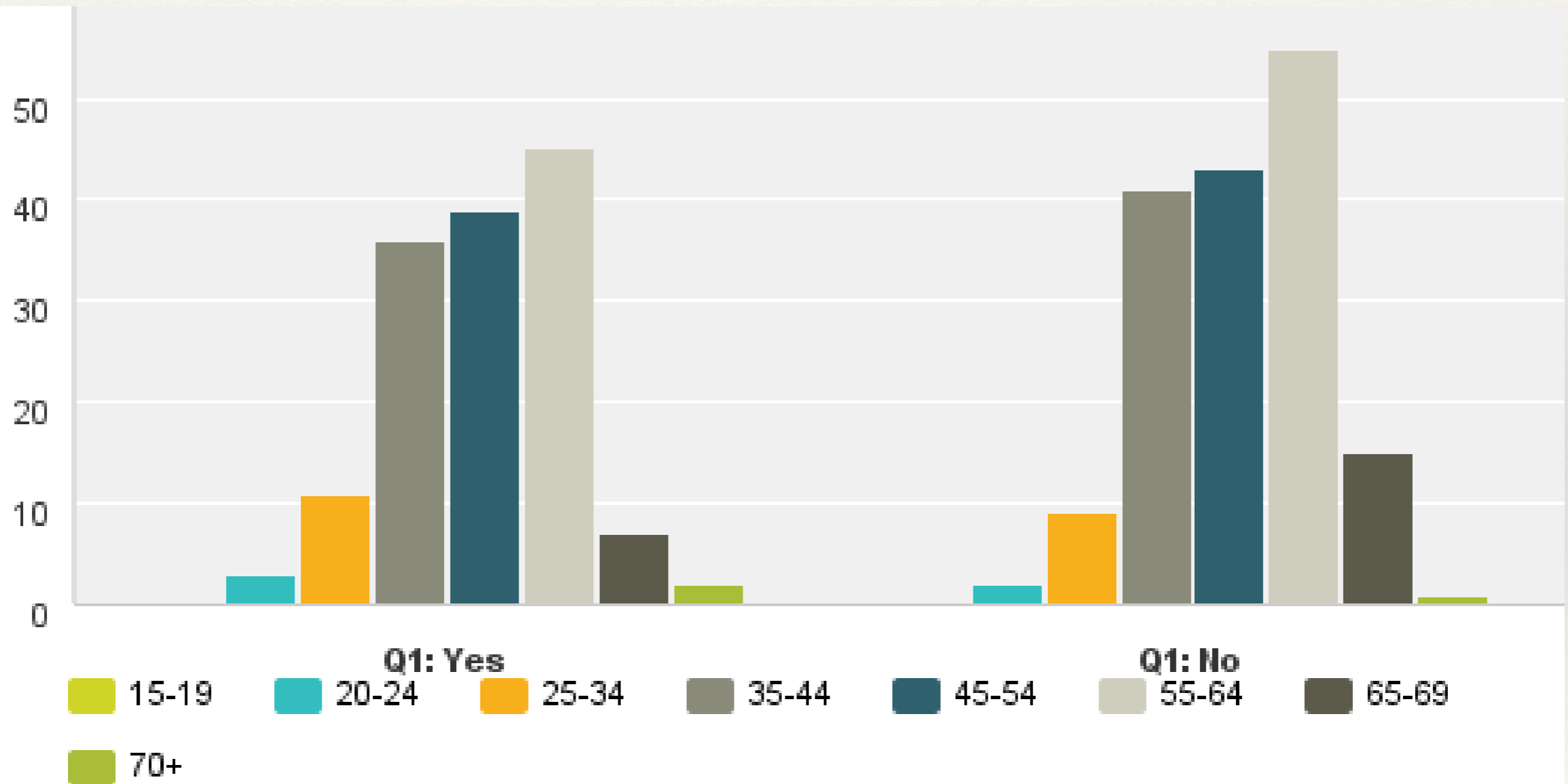
Reasons for using social media n=140
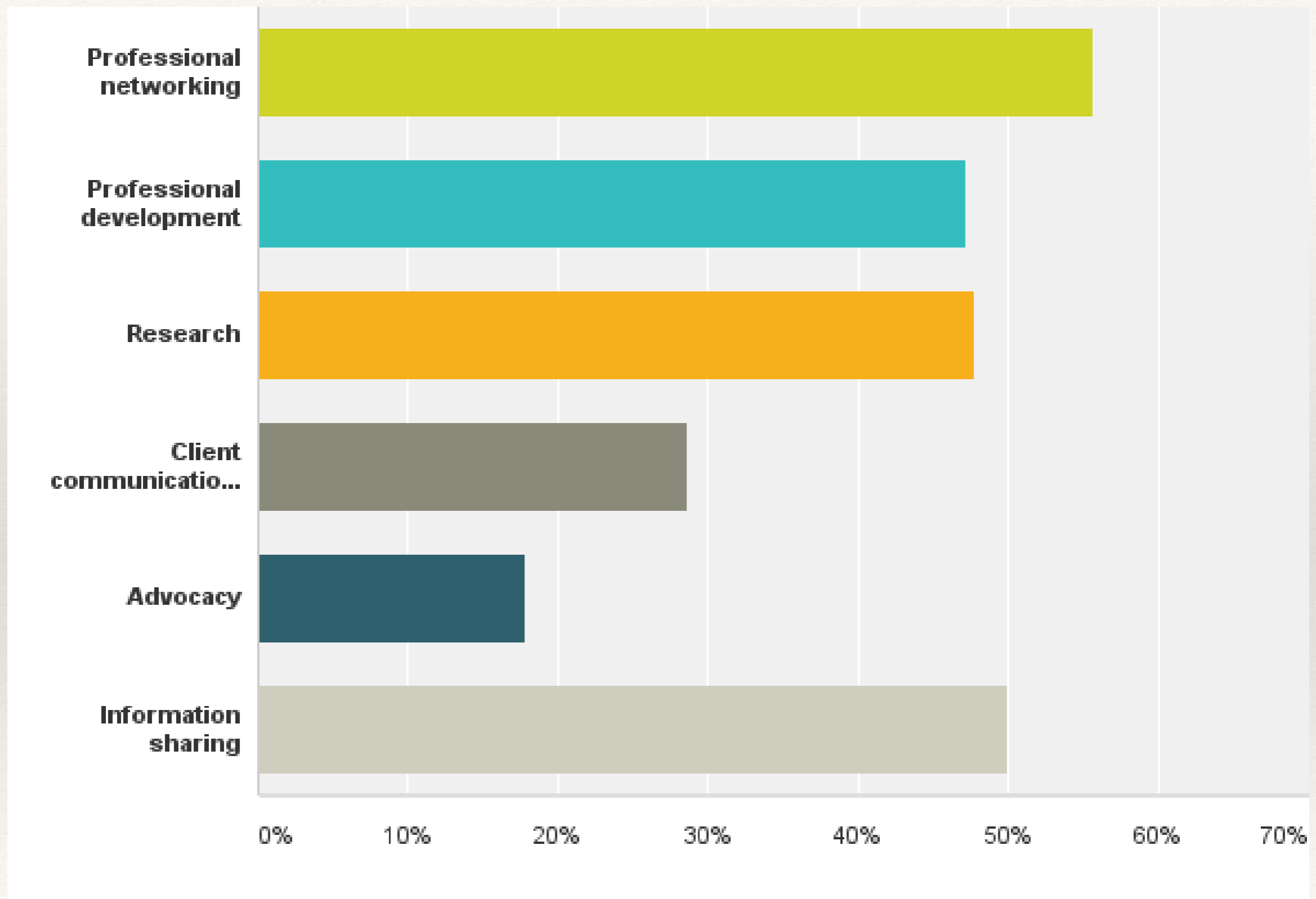
Reasons for not using social media n=161

Key Informant Interviews

- Selected leaders in the New Zealand social work community were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews as key informants.

- 12 interviews were conducted: social work managers, academics, senior practitioners, clinical/practice leaders.

Themes

- **The use of social media:**

  - The place of **identity** in social media use

  - **Utility** – actual use, including bans and technical challenges

  - Kanohi ki te kanohi

  - Double edged sword - benefits and barriers; promise and perils

- **The potential use of social media (changes)**

  - Relevance to social work - what we could be doing

  - Challenges from participants - education, management, leadership

Challenge - ethics

❖ … if I think back to things I used to think and believe 15-20 years ago, it's not what I think and believe now but in the future those comments might come back to haunt me because there'll be a Facebook thread that I participated in once a million years ago. So we have to actually accept a more human side of ourselves as well. I don't think it's just saying in our personal lives we need to be more ethical, I'm actually saying also in our professional lives we need to be more forgiving and open, and allow a bit more grey in there (#5).

Challenge - activism

❖ I don't see a lot in terms of social work discussions being prominent on social media. So it doesn't seem as out there as compared with some other professions or interest areas. I know there's a huge amount of activism that goes on online. But I don't see social work specifically, as a profession, being very prominent in that (#3).

Challenge – responsiveness

❖ One of the things which was interesting is the Christchurch quake, you would've thought there would've been some community social work lead initiatives around community development but there wasn't. If you then step back and you look at hey you've got social entrepreneurs like the student army that then do things and they're coming from outside of social work rather than within social work, so what we're tending to lose is that social entrepreneurial response and we've become very institutionalised in terms of how we are operating (#6).

Challenge – be critical

❖ ….. social workers need to be involved, at some level. It may not be using social media to do client work but being familiar with it enough so that when something associated with social media comes up in client work that you have the potential to understand and make sense of what's going on, in a balanced way, not a knee jerk reaction (#4).

Challenge – global network

❖ One of the things I can tell you clearly as a Māori woman who is very connected to her own people – my own whanau, their whanau, their cousins and wider whanau, and also whanau from other countries, and Canada particularly, I've got connections there – is that the net itself has provided a means of bringing us together(#11).

Overall emerging theme – knowledge development

* Survey respondents – preliminary statistical analysis of data shows need for education/training about social media for social workers

* Key informant interviewees – emerging themes from thematic analysis also highlight need and desire for training

* Literature overwhelmingly supports need for the profession to develop expertise.

To post or not to post?: Perceptions of the use of a closed Facebook group as a networked public space

❖ New Zealand 2015 Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand Facebook page (850 members)

❖ Survey - What did members value? What were the problems? What factors influenced participation? (n=53)

(Ballantyne, Lowe & Beddoe, 2016)

Valuable or very valuable:

❖ feeling connected to a wider community of practice was recognised by (80%)

❖ being able to post and share information on issues relevant to the social work community (77%)

❖ obtaining access to information (75%)

❖ links to open access journal articles and other professional development materials (74%)

❖ Feeling empowered, able to take a stand, and question and challenge the views of government (47%)

Agreed or strongly agreed:

- **volume of posts was overwhelming (10.5%)**

- **policy and political discussion were polarising (12.5%)**

- **many posts were not relevant (12.5%)**

  ❖ **64.5%** had recommended the SWANZ Facebook group.

  ❖ **37.5%** indicated they had considered leaving the group:

Thirteen participants (27%) offered their reasons for considering leaving the group, and twelve of the statements made referred to the tone of the contributions made by some individuals who were described as "dominant", "bullying", "rude", "offensive" and "aggressive."

Where to next ….

- ❖ Focus groups to explore interest in attaining knowledge:

- ❖ What do NZ social workers want to learn about social media, and how do they want to learn it?

Opportunity

❖ Social media provides opportunity to engage with the profession on a global scale, to access analysis of current events, research and learning resources, and to participate actively in social change (Ballantyne, 2013).

To use rather than to be used by technology

To be technologically literate:

* ❖ "enables social workers to harness tools on behalf of clients and communities as well as to analyse and critique technology's disruption of the interface between the individual and the environment" (Wolf and Goldkind, 2016, p.9).

Turn and face the strange changes

Thank you

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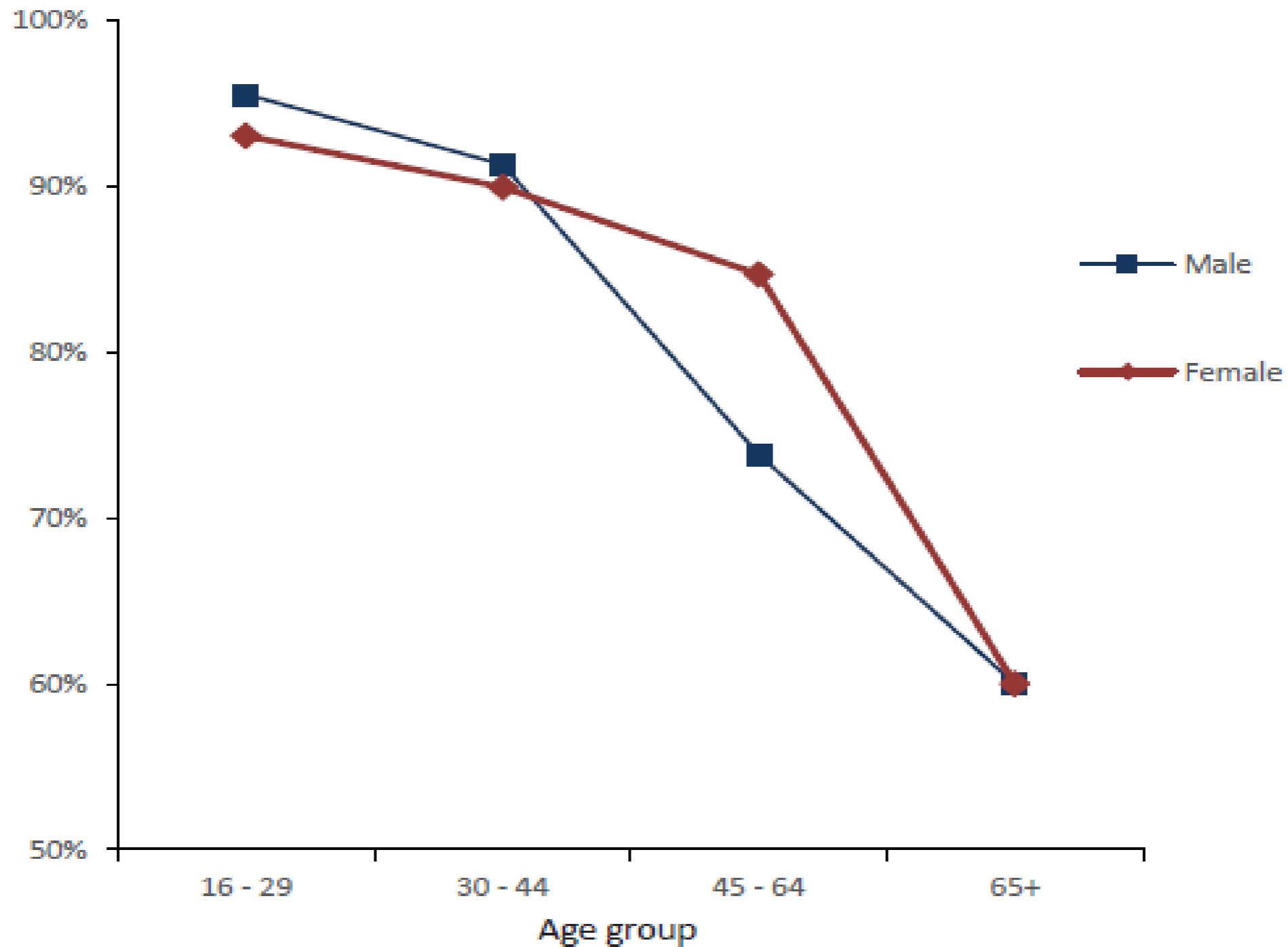
The times they are a-changin'

Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly agin'
Please get out of the new one if
you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'

❖ **(Bob Dylan, 1964)**

Social media usage by age and gender

Base: Internet users (n = 1258) | Usage rates calculated from Q23. *Are you a member of a social networking site or sites*