

The Trustworthiness of Digital Photographs Accessed and Stored on Social Media Platforms

Survey Summary Report for Participants

December 16, 2014

Researcher and Author:

Jessica Bushey

Doctoral Candidate

School of Library, Archival and Information Studies

University of British Columbia, Canada

jbushey@mail.ubc.ca

1. Introduction

The survey on The Trustworthiness of Digital Photographs Accessed and Stored in Social Media Platforms is part of a larger doctoral research project at the University of British Columbia (UBC) School of Library, Archival and Information Studies that explores the overarching research question: How do we ensure the trustworthiness of digital photographs held within social media platforms? The aim of the research project is to explore contemporary photographic practices involving mobile phones and social media platforms to determine the impact on future access to visual records of the twenty-first century. The research is supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Doctoral Award.

The aim of the survey was to obtain some objective data on individuals' use of social media platforms in the context of contemporary digital photographic practice. Additional data is being gathered throughout the research project, through one-on-one interviews with selected survey respondents, review of North American case law specific to digital photographs in social media platforms and analysis of existing Terms and Conditions Agreements between members and social media providers.

The objectives of this project are as follows,

- Explore whether current policies and practices regarding the management and storage of digital photographs in social media platforms affect the public's trust in them;
- Identify issues raised by members of social media platforms regarding how digital photographs are created, managed and preserved;
- Analyze the differences and similarities between social media platforms and established archival institutions in their approaches to managing and preserving digital photographs collections;
- Understand users' attitudes towards the use and preservation of digital photographs vs. traditional film-based photographs; and
- Make recommendations to assist individuals and organizations (both creators and preservers) in assessing the risks and benefits of uploading, managing and storing digital photographs collections in social media platforms.

2. Methodology

The research on trustworthy digital photographs accessed and stored on social media platforms began with a literature review. After a thorough exploration of the fields of archival studies, journalism and the law, it became clear that a lack of empirical studies addressing digital photography and the online environment from the users' perspective existed. Thus, a survey was constructed in order to gain a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

After running an initial pilot survey, comments were gathered and the survey instrument, a self-administered questionnaire was revised to be more accessible and to gather a broader range of responses. In Spring 2014 the final questionnaire, composed of thirty-one questions aimed at eliciting basic information related to the activities and expectations of individuals using social media platforms to access and store their digital photographs was launched. The survey questionnaire was made available through an online survey service for a period of two months and participants were invited through posts made to photo-sharing (e.g., *Flickr*) and social networking applications (e.g., *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn* etc.), as well as listservs and the crowdsourcing application Mechanical Turk. Both close-ended and open-ended questions were designed to invite respondents to share their activities, experiences and expectations of social media platforms for accessing and storing digital photographs.

In total, there were 612 survey respondents with a completion rate of 82%. The basis of this summary report is the 502 respondents that completed the entire survey questionnaire. These respondents are distributed among 22 countries with the majority from North America and the United Kingdom.

3. Findings

3.1 Respondent Demographics and Account Types

The majority of survey respondents are under fifty-years of age, with a significant percentage (38%) between the ages of 19 and 29 years old (Figure 1). Survey respondents were asked to select the social media platforms they use from a list of photo-sharing and social networking sites. Almost all survey respondents (90%) use Facebook. The top five photo-sharing and social networking sites used by survey respondents are: Facebook, Twitter, *Dropbox*, *Instagram* and *Flickr* (Figure 2).

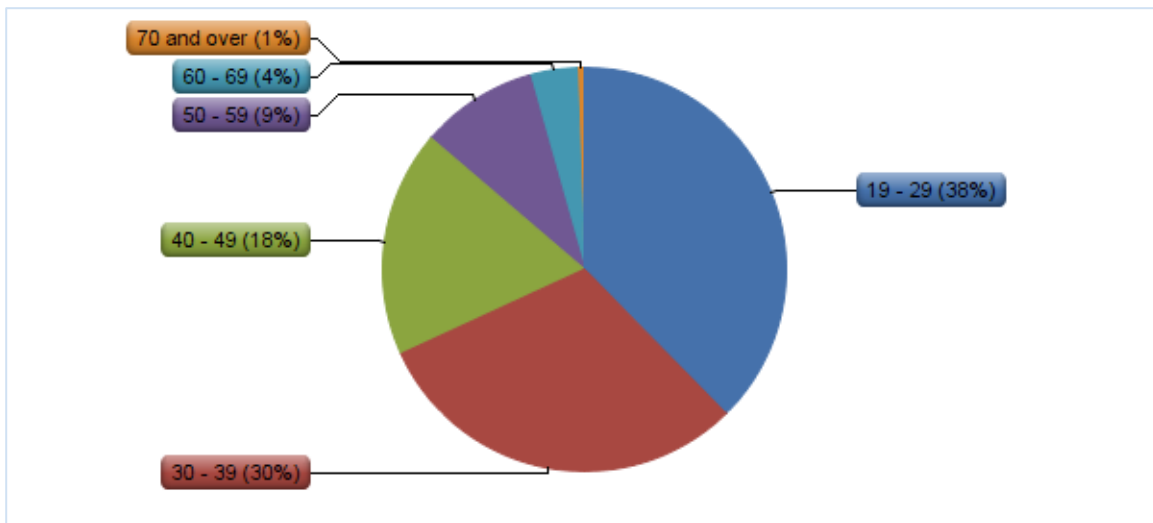


Figure 1. What is your age?

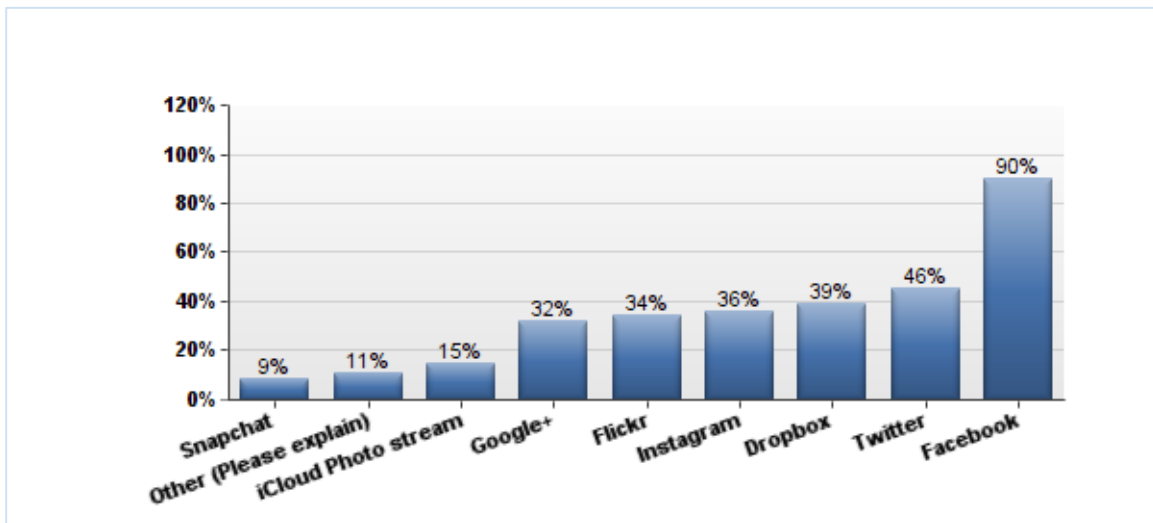


Figure 2. Which of the following photo-sharing and social networking services do you use?

The majority of survey respondents (82%) currently hold free social media accounts (Figure 3). When asked if they would be willing to pay for their accounts in the future, only a small percentage of respondents (14%) selected yes, with the majority of respondents undecided (51%) on the issue (Figure 4).

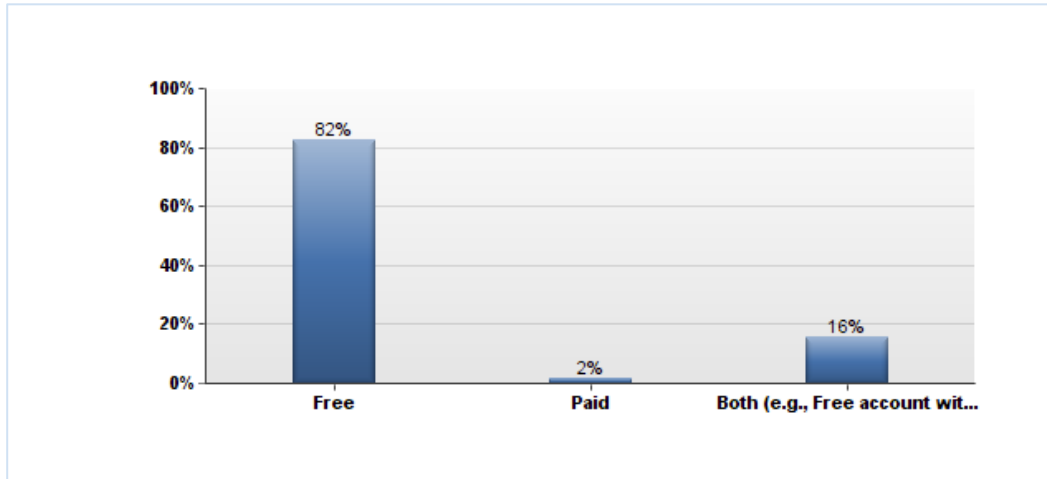


Figure 3. Which of the following types of memberships / accounts do you have?

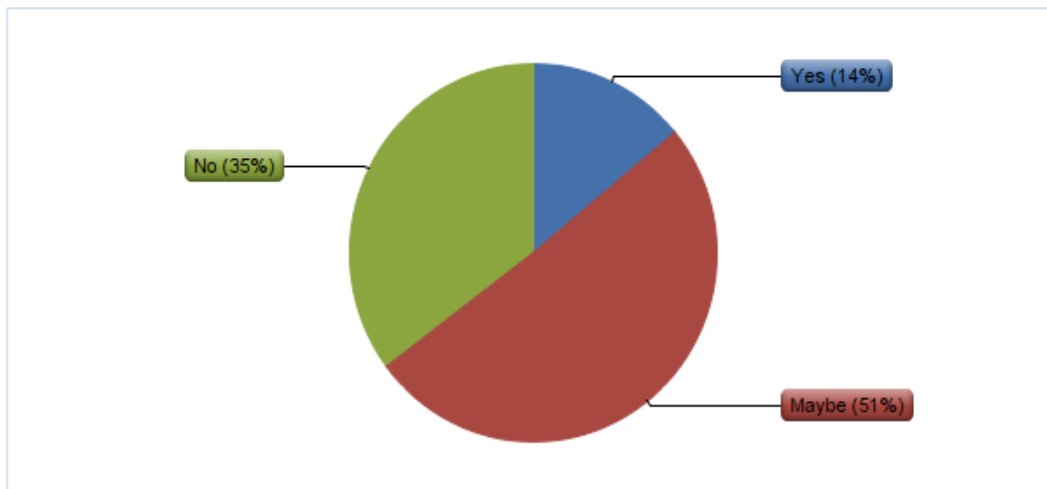


Figure 4. If free memberships / accounts became unavailable, would you be willing to pay for photo-sharing and social networking services?

3.2 Photographic Practice and Social Media Platforms: Capture & Use

When discussing the type of photographic practice, the majority of survey respondents (67%) describe their practice as amateur (Figure 5) and their main reason for using social media platforms as personal (60%) (Figure 6). The duration of memberships vary, with the majority of respondents (92%) holding their accounts between 2 and 10 years (Figure 7). Of this group, over half (47%) of the respondents have had their social media accounts between 6 to 10 years.

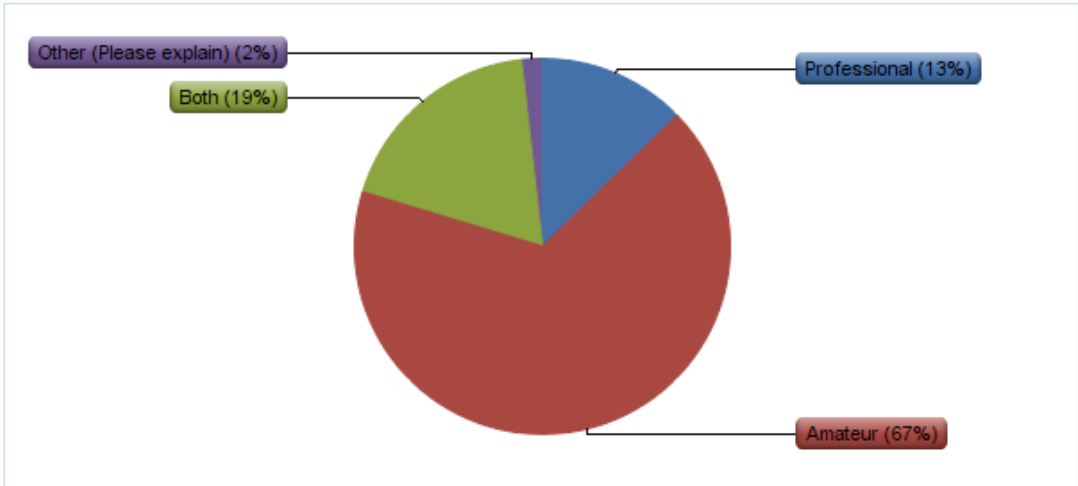


Figure 5. Your digital photographic practice is best described as:

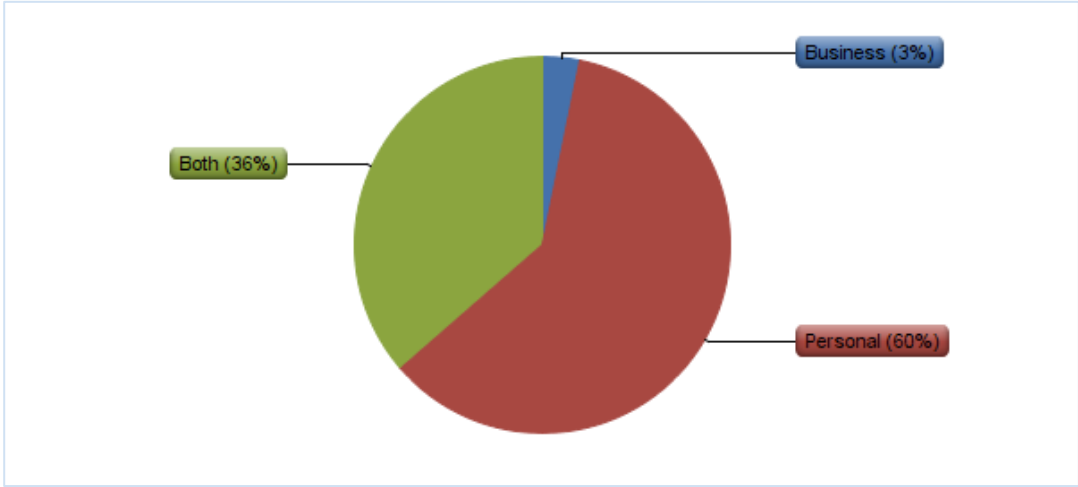


Figure 6. In general, you use photo-sharing and/or social networking services for:

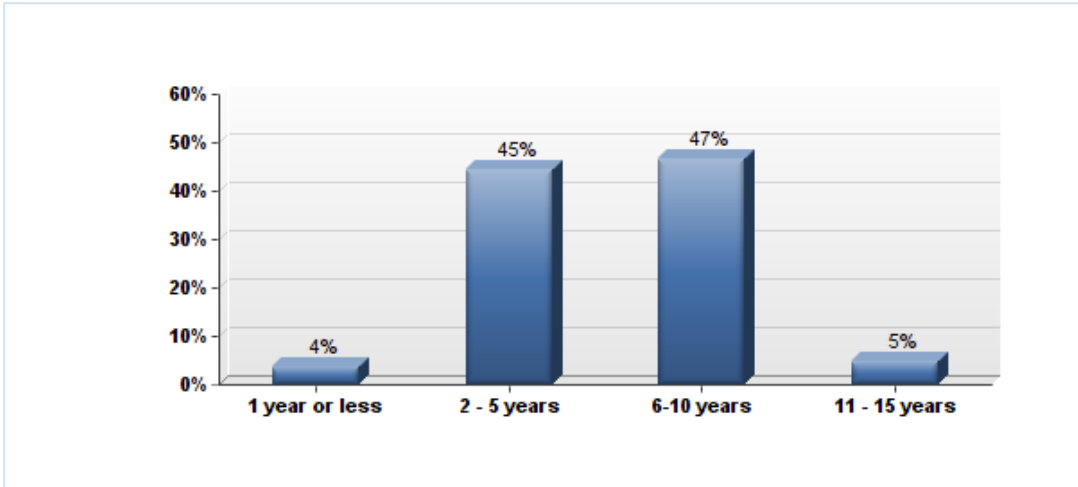


Figure 7. How many years have you been a member of a photo-sharing and/or social networking site?

Photographic practice typically commences with the capture of an image. The most frequently used devices by survey respondents for capturing digital photographs are smart phones/mobile phones and designated digital cameras (Figure 8). As seen in the graph below, survey respondents “very often” and “always” use smart phones, whereas digital cameras are used “occasionally”.

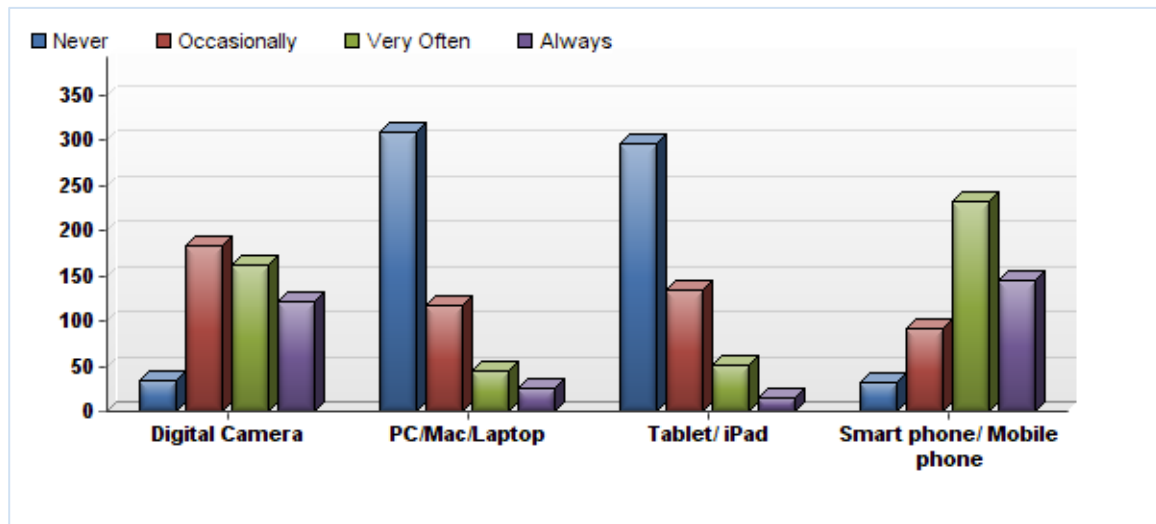


Figure 8. In your photographic practice, how often do you use the following devices for capturing digital photographs?

The primary activity of respondents when using social media platforms is sharing their digital photographs with others (Figure 9). By contrast, the activities of access (11%), management (9%) and storage (8%) are secondary. Features of social media platforms that support sharing are considered by respondents to be “very important” (Figure 10).

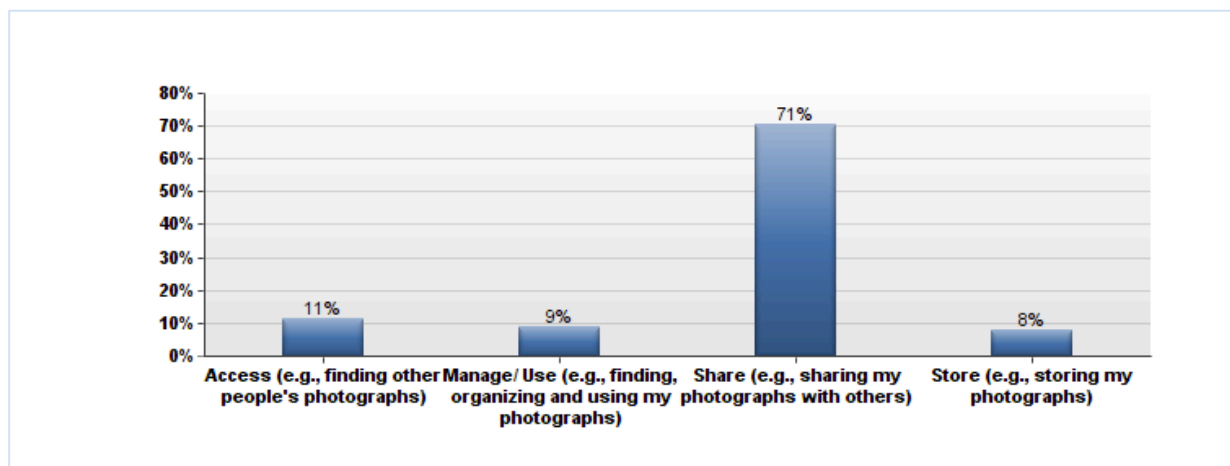


Figure 9. What is your primary activity when using photo-sharing and social networking services as part of your photographic practice?

#	Question	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Important	Very Important	Total Responses	Mean
1	Access Images	14	41	47	229	171	502	4.00
2	Manage/ Organize Images	38	49	97	188	130	502	3.64
3	Share Images	11	18	31	195	247	502	4.29
4	Store/ Save Images	49	52	68	192	141	502	3.65

Figure 10. When using photo-sharing and social networking platforms, how important are the following features of the service? Please rate the features according to importance.

3.3 Photographic Practice and Social Media Platforms: Control & Metadata

The majority of survey respondents (84%) controls who can access and use their digital photographs stored on social media platforms (Figure 11). Controlling access and use is very important to survey respondents as a method of protecting their personal privacy and the privacy of others.

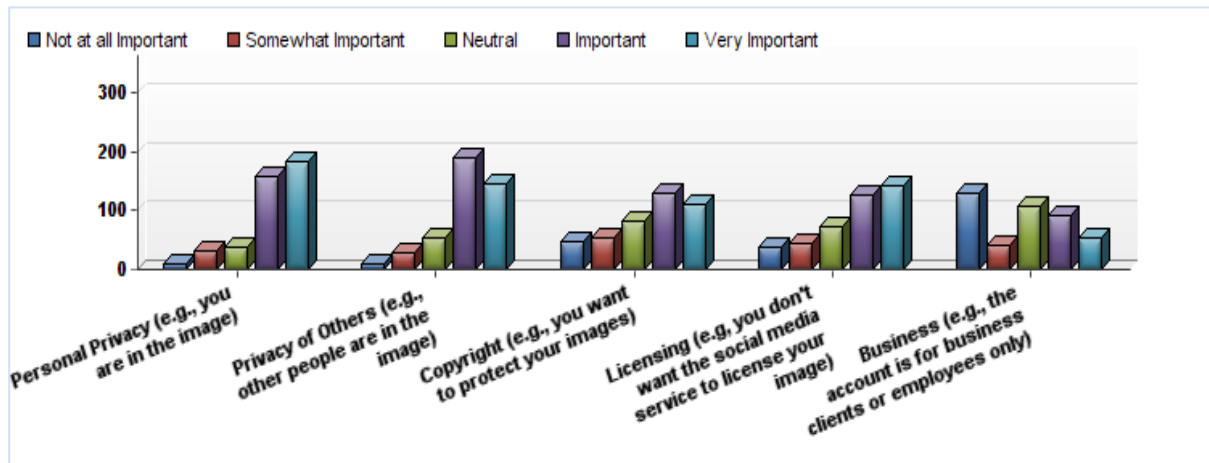


Figure 11. When controlling access to your digital photographs, how important are the following reasons? Please rate the reasons according to importance.

Further procedures aimed at controlling how digital photographs are accessed and used include the addition of information, referred to as metadata, about the creation of the photograph, which provides valuable information about its context (e.g., name of the photographer) and content (e.g., subjects presented in the image). Just over half of all survey respondents (52%) identified procedures in which they add metadata about the creation of their digital photographs before uploading the image files to the social media platform (Figure 12). Of the 502 respondents, 259 identified the name of the photographer as “very important” information to attach to the digital image file; whereas, the subject of the photograph and the place that the photograph was taken are considered “important” information (Figure 13).

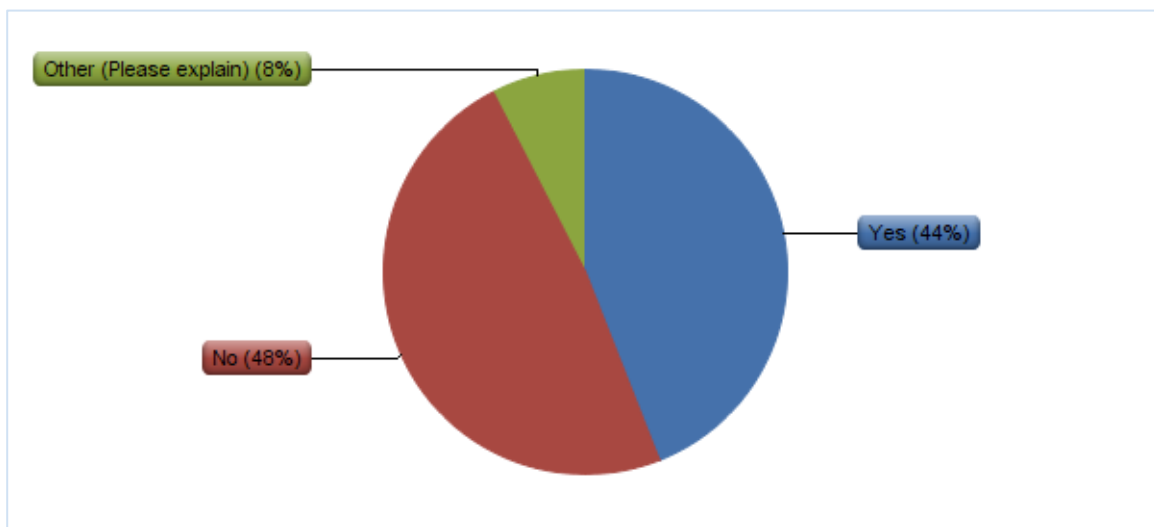


Figure 12. Before uploading your digital photographs to photo-sharing and / or social networking sites, do you add information (i.e., metadata) about the creation of your photographs (e.g., who took the photograph, where, when, why) to your digital image file?

#	Question	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Important	Very Important	Total Responses	Mean
1	Name of photographer	41	33	26	74	85	259	3.50
2	Title of photograph	43	27	66	83	40	259	3.19
3	Place where photograph was taken	19	26	56	109	49	259	3.55
4	Date of photograph	19	34	60	99	47	259	3.47
5	Subject of photograph	21	35	48	104	51	259	3.50

Figure 13. When adding information to identify your digital photographs, how important are the following types? Please rate the types of information according to importance.

The majority of survey respondents (75%) identified procedures in which they add tags, comments, rating and likes to their digital photographs after uploading to social media platforms (Figure 14). These actions contribute additional information about the context and content of the digital photograph, and may provide information about how the image circulates between members within the social media platform. Traditional approaches of adding copyright symbols (e.g., watermarks) and more recent creative commons licenses to control how people use digital photographs are not being used by the majority of survey respondents (72%) (Figure 15).

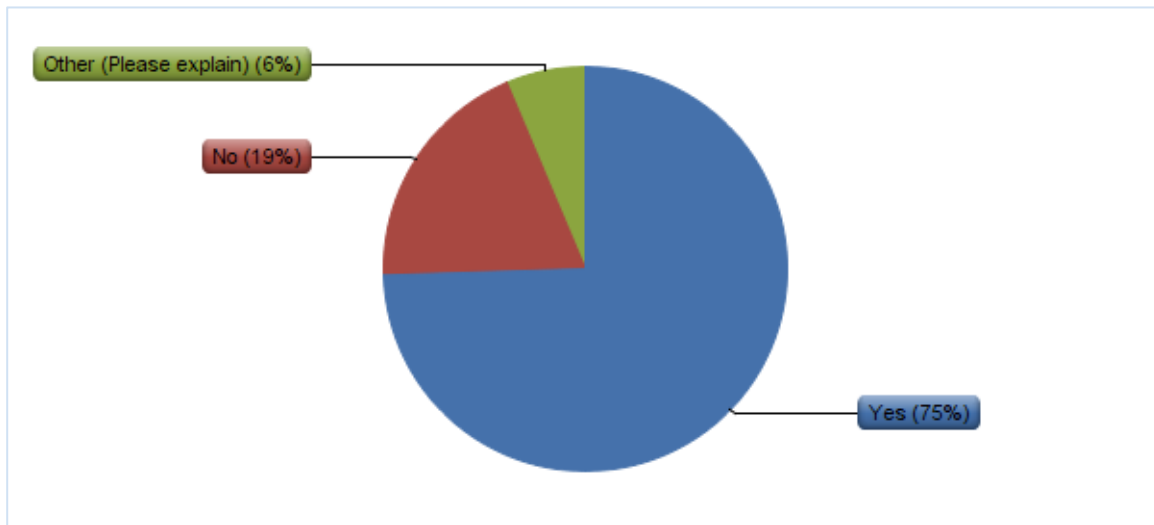


Figure 14. After uploading your digital photographs into photo-sharing and social networking sites, do you add tags, comments, likes or ratings?

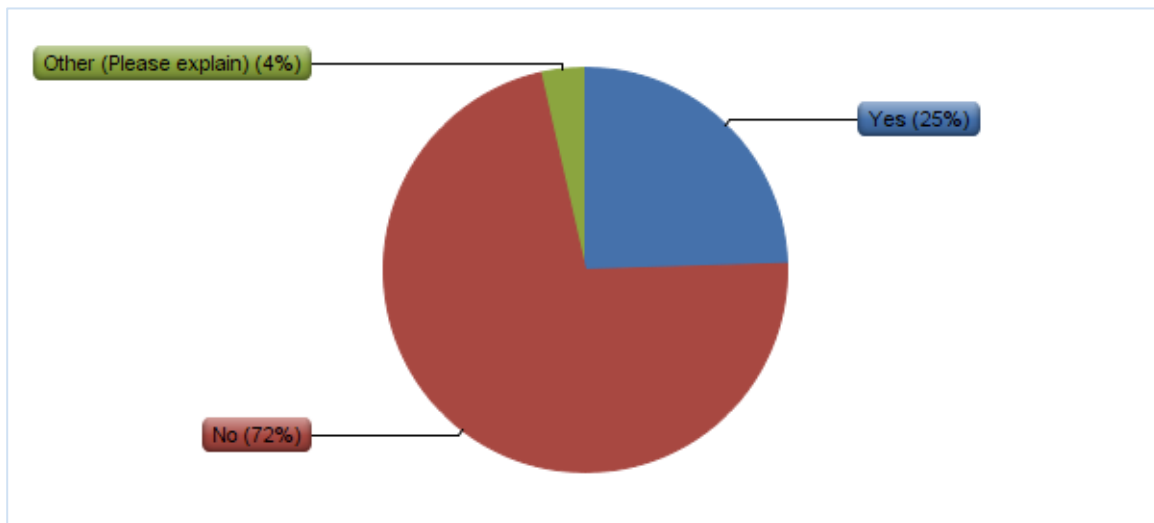


Figure 15. Do you use watermarks, copyright symbols, or creative commons licenses to control how people may use your digital photographs that are accessible on photo-sharing and social networking platforms?

3.4 Photographic Practice and Social Media Platforms: Management & Storage

The majority of survey respondents (69%) has downloaded their stored digital photographs out of social media platforms and onto their personal computers/devices (Figure 16). In doing so, less than one quarter of respondents (20%) experienced issues (Figure 17). Of that small group, more than half of respondents (58%) experienced unexpected size changes in their downloaded digital photographs (Figure 18). Closely behind, were reports of unexpected color changes (42%) and missing metadata that contributes to identifying the content and context of digital photographs (38%).

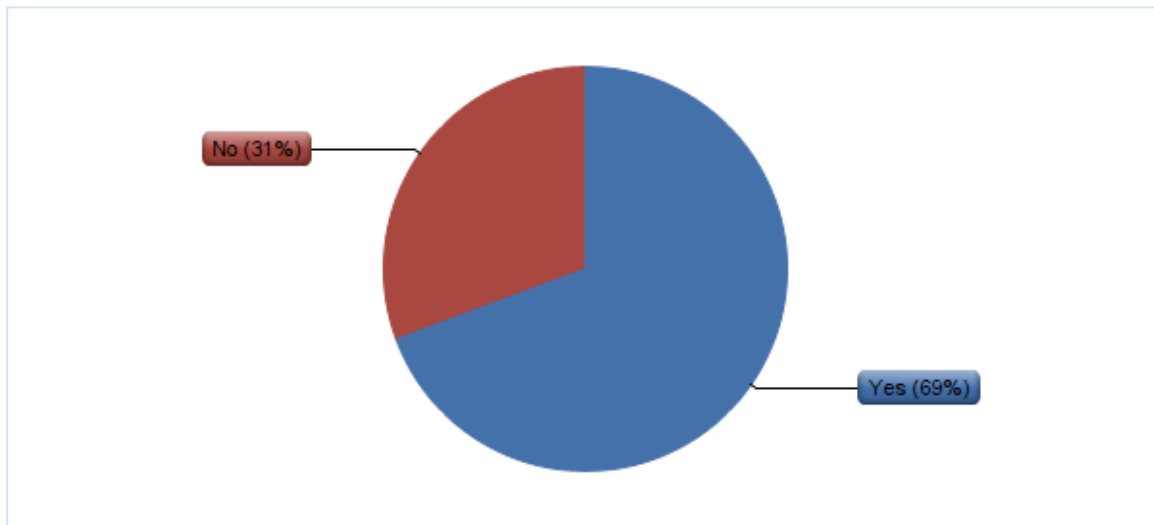


Figure 16. Have you ever downloaded your stored digital photographs from a photo-sharing or social networking site?

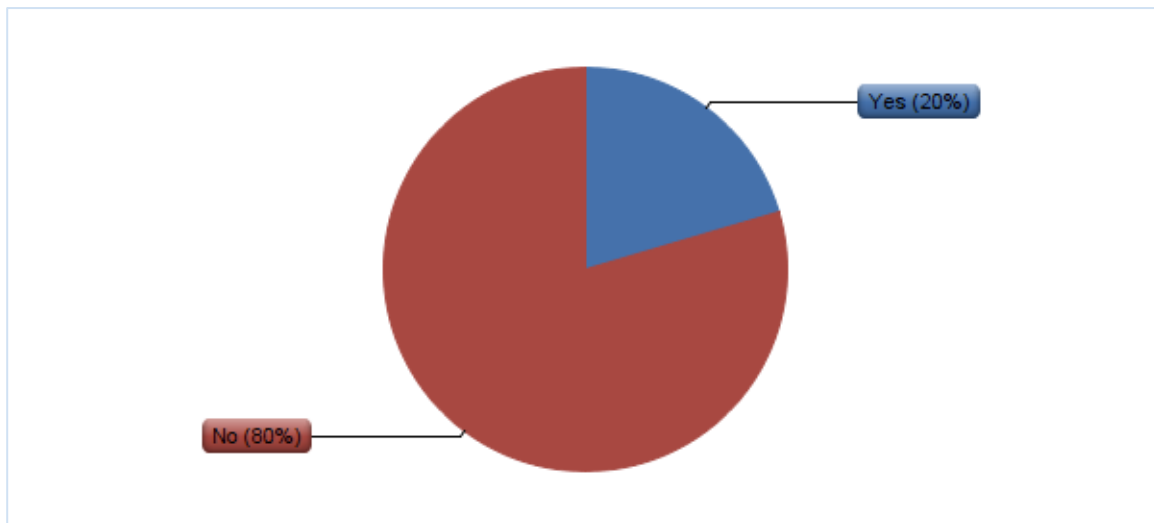


Figure 17. Did you experience any issues when you downloaded your digital photographs out of the photo-sharing or social networking site?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Unexpected size change	41	58%
2	Unexpected color change	30	42%
3	Missing files (e.g., not all the digital photographs you selected were downloaded)	20	28%
4	Missing identity metadata (e.g., photographer name, title, date, GPS location)	27	38%
5	Missing copyright information	23	32%
6	Missing comments, tags, likes and ratings	22	31%
7	Corrupt files (e.g., file will not open after download)	25	35%
8	Bandwidth and time required (e.g., downloading large numbers of images)	21	30%
9	Other (Please explain)	8	11%

Figure 18. Please select any similar issues from the list below. (Check all that apply)

Most survey respondents (91%) always keep a copy of their digital photographs when they upload files to social media platforms (Figure 19). Choosing (in order of frequency) to store these copies on their personal computers, external hard drives and smart phones/mobile phones (Figure 20). Of the small percentage of survey respondents that do not keep copies (6%), they designate the digital photograph in the social media platform as the only version available.

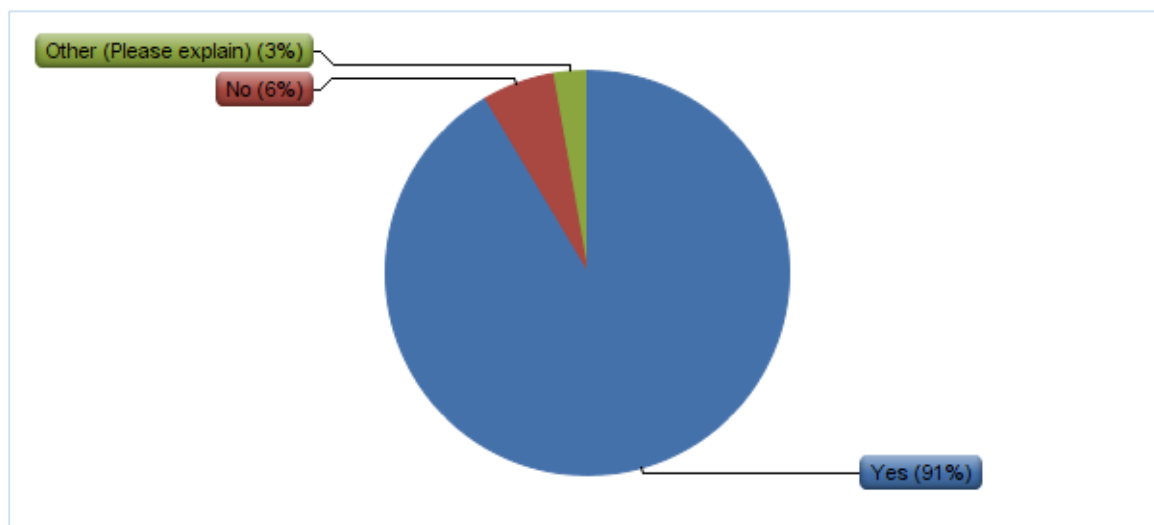


Figure 19. When you upload a digital photograph to photo-sharing and social networking sites, do you keep a copy of the digital photograph somewhere else?

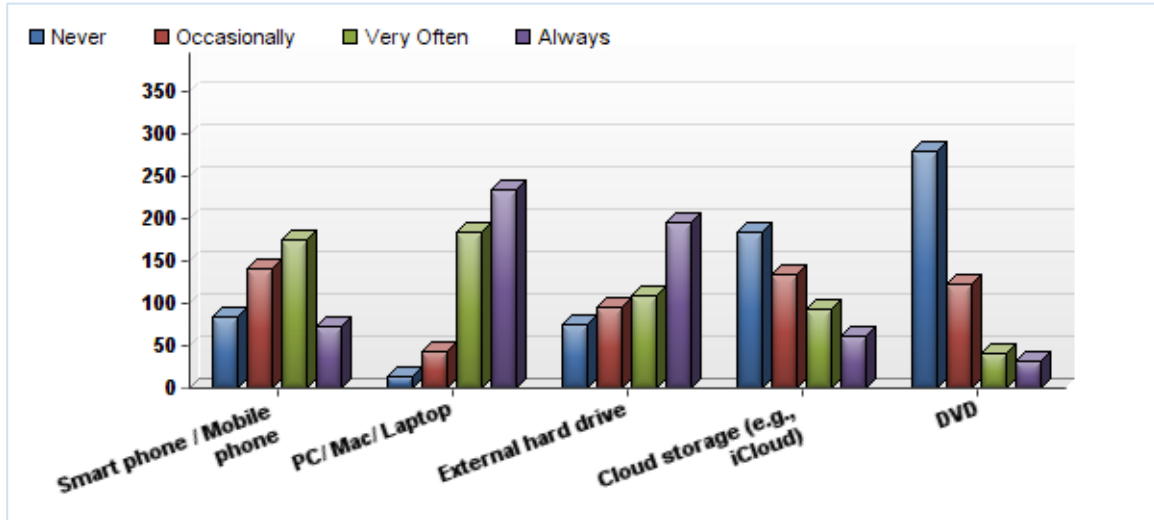


Figure 20. When you keep a copy of your digital photographs, how often do you use the following devices for storage? Please rate the devices according to frequency.

In general the majority of respondents (72%) has between 101 – 5,000 digital photographs stored on social media platforms (Figure 21). Of this group, a little over one-quarter of respondents (26%) have between 101 - 500 and a little under one-quarter of respondents (24%) have between 1,001 - 5,000 digital photographs stored on social media platforms. The percentage of respondents with over 5,001 digital photographs is small (15%) but still significant in respect to understanding the potential for storing large collections in social media platforms.

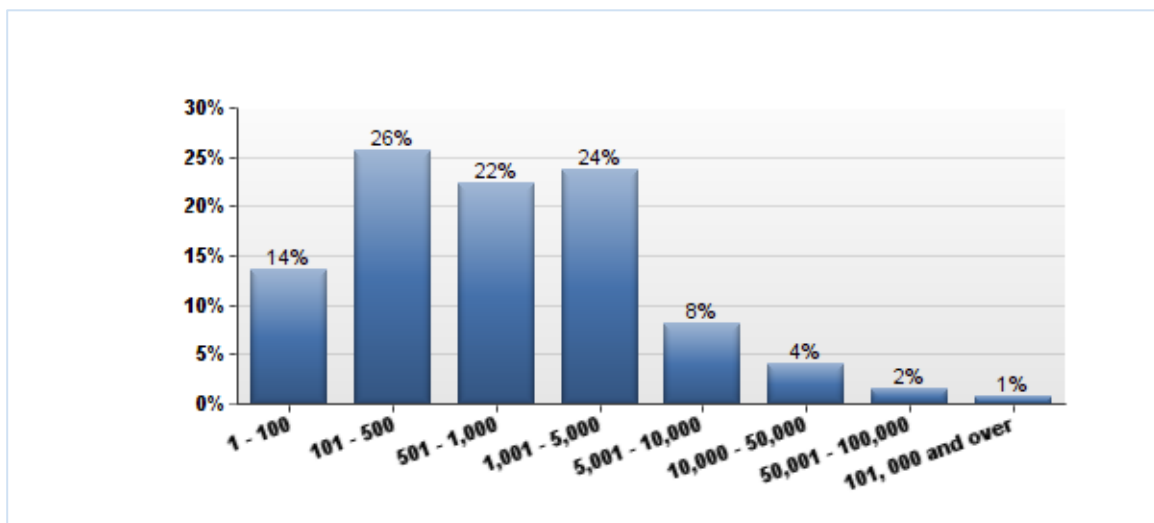


Figure 21. In total, how many digital photographs do you have stored in your photo-sharing and social networking accounts?

3.5 Legal Agreements

The Terms and Conditions Agreements between social media service providers and their members establish the rules for using the service and clarify the roles and responsibilities of providers and members. A small percentage of survey respondents (20%) confirm that they have read the legal agreement prior to signing-up for the social media service (Figure 22). Yet, the more popular approach taken by half of the survey respondents (59%) is to skim the legal agreement. The Terms and Conditions Agreements typically include a number of sections, as well as separate documents that address copyright, privacy etc. Of the group that read or skimmed the legal agreement, the majority of respondents (76%) remember reading the privacy policy (Figure 23). An almost equal number of respondents (73%) recall reading the Terms of Service.

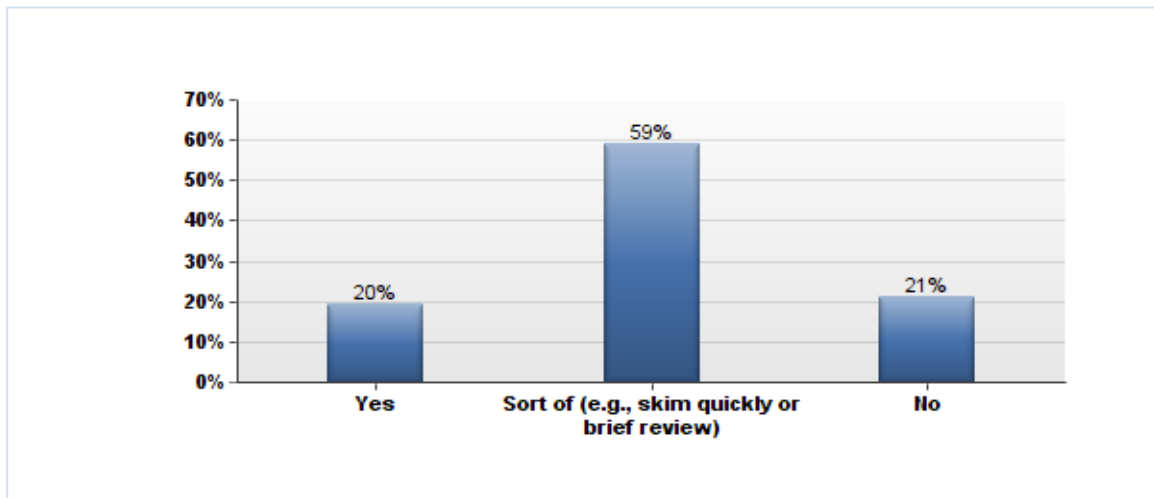


Figure 22. Before signing-up for the photo-sharing and social networking account, did you read the "Terms"?

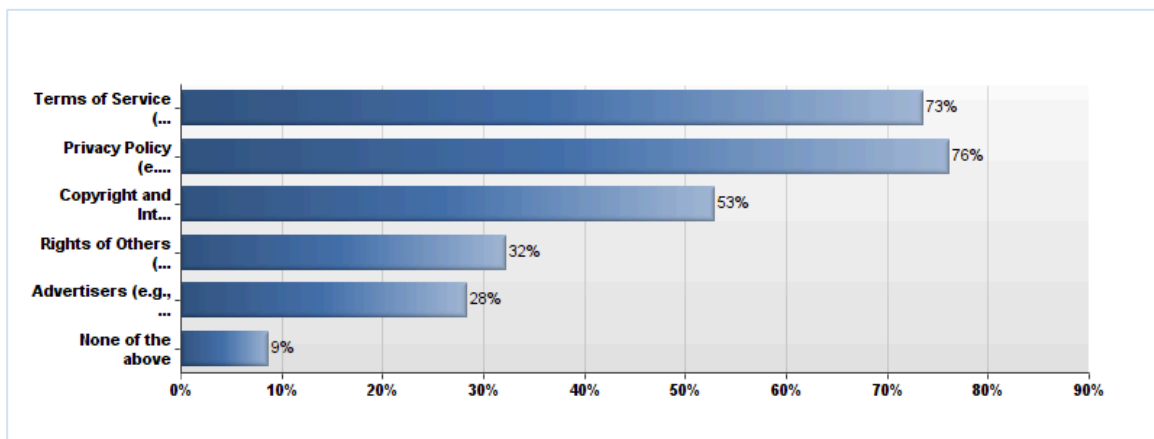


Figure 23. In the "Terms" do you remember reading any of the following sections? (Check all that apply)

Very few survey respondents (6%) have had their social media accounts deleted by the service provider (Figure 24). Of that small group, more than half of the respondents (66%) had their deleted account and digital photographs successfully restored by the social media provider (Figure 25). Of the remaining respondents that were not successful in having their accounts restored (34%), nearly half of them (42%) lost all their digital photographs and did not have stored copies on an external device (Figure 26).

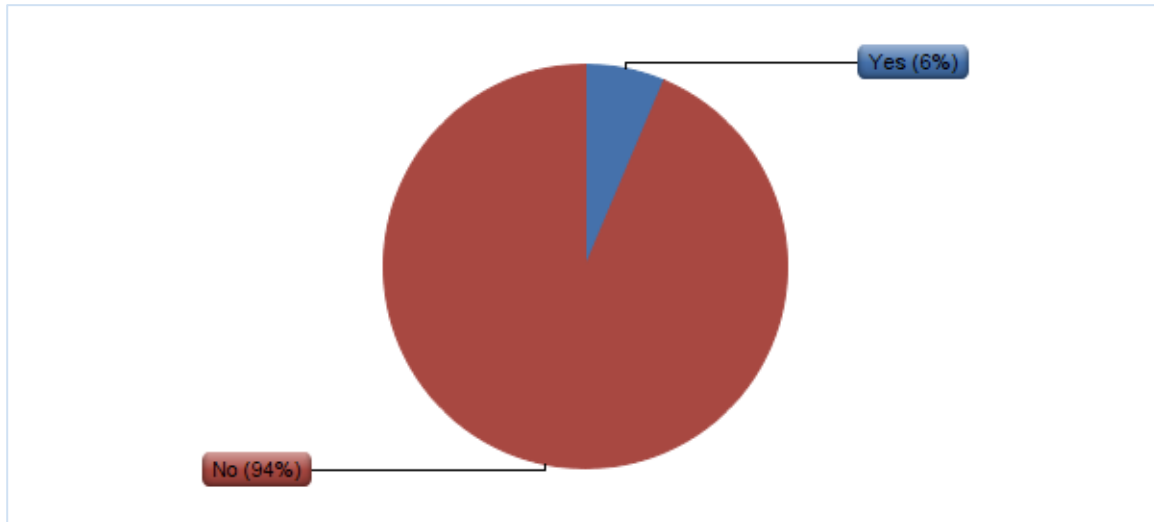


Figure 24. Have you ever had your account deleted by the service provider due to inactivity or by accident?

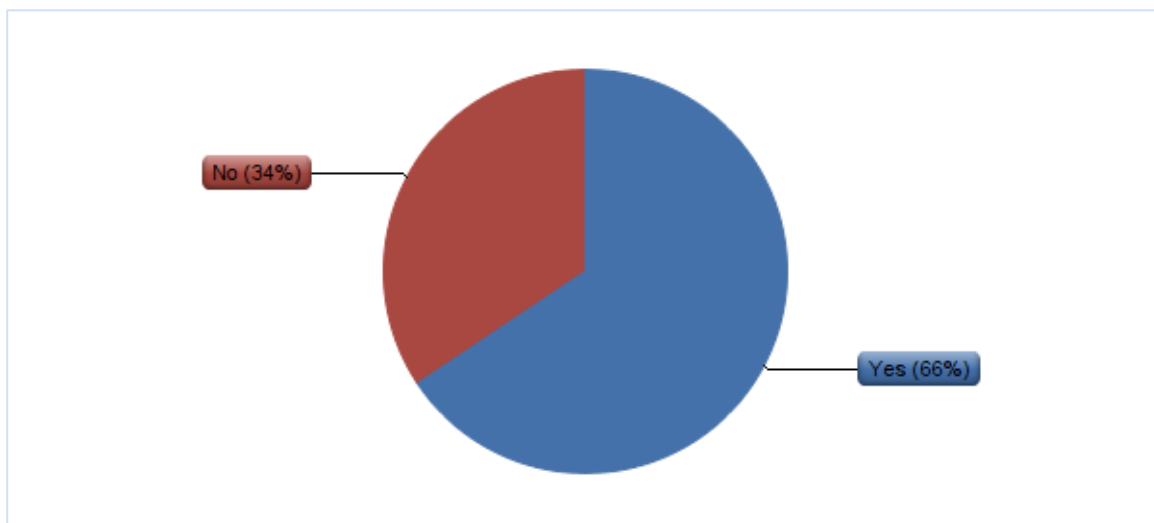


Figure 25. When your account was deleted, were you able to contact the service provider and restore your account and all your digital photographs?

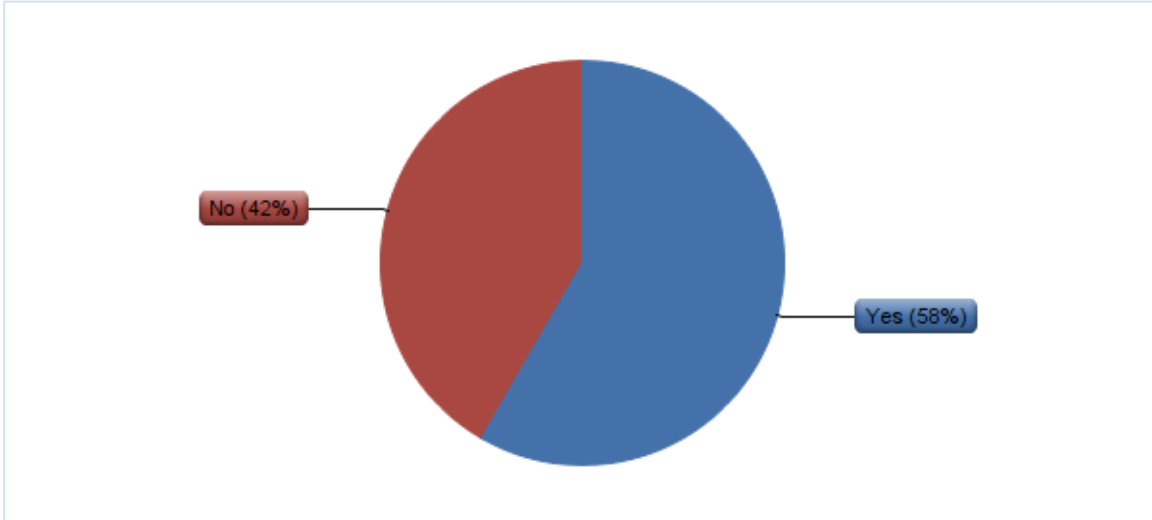


Figure 26. Did you have copies of your digital photographs stored in another account or on a different device?

The Terms and Conditions Agreement typically includes a clause about access and termination of accounts and their content in the event of the account holder's death. The majority of survey respondents (82%) has not recorded a list of social media accounts including passwords nor designated a beneficiary (Figure 27).

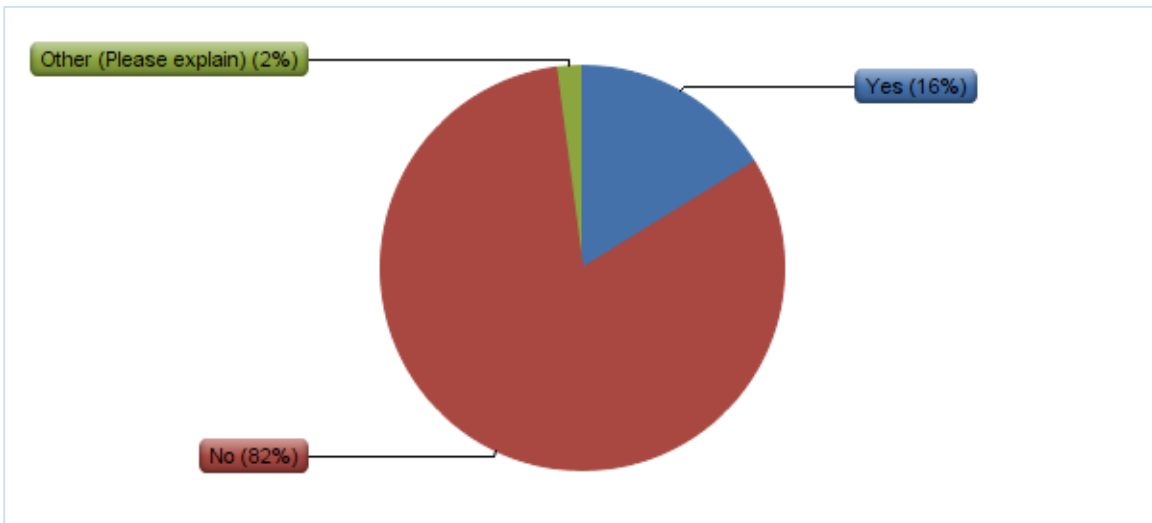


Figure 27. In the case of death, have you recorded a list of your photo-sharing and social networking accounts, including passwords, and designated someone as a beneficiary?

3.6 Member Expectations

Survey respondents' expectations of future access to their digital photographs stored with social media platforms are varied. The largest number of respondents (25%) expects to have access to their digital photographs twenty years from now (Figure 28). Slightly smaller numbers of respondents expect access between 1 – 3 years (22%) and 4 – 6 years (20%).

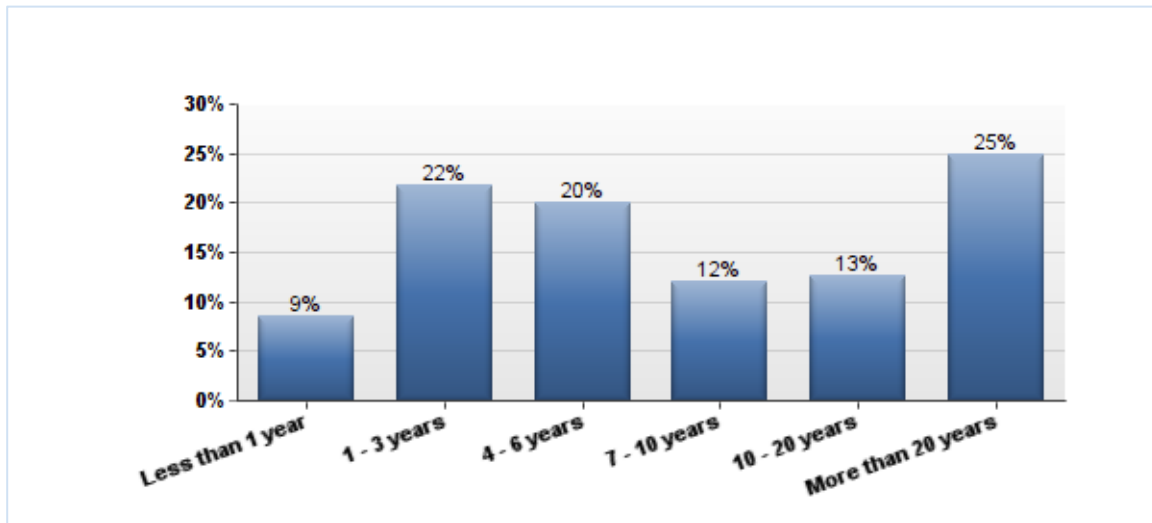


Figure 28. How long do you expect to have access to your digital photographs that are stored in photo-sharing and social networking sites?

4. Conclusion

In general, the survey data collected enabled the identification and comparison of individual photographic practices that involve social media platforms. It is on this basis that further research can be conducted to formulate a comprehensive understanding of the current state of contemporary photographic practices in the online environment.

Among current members of social media platforms, the dominant reason for using social media services is to share digital photographs with others. The most popular services are free to use, offer unlimited storage and provide interfaces that support sharing of personal digital photographs with other members. However, the survey data reveals that protecting the privacy of social media members is a key concern.

The survey data reveals that individuals use smart phones and digital cameras to capture their digital photographs and keep copies of their image files on personal computers and external hard drives after upload to social media platforms. The practice of adding metadata that contributes to the context and describes the

content of the digital photograph through the social media application is more prevalent than adding metadata to image files prior to upload.

Broadly speaking, members have had their social media accounts between 2 – 10 years and have accumulated between 101 – 5,000 digital photographs. The duration of memberships and the fact that very few members have had their accounts deleted by social media providers may influence users' expectations of ongoing access to their accounts, which according to the survey data may be in excess of twenty years. The survey data does not suggest that members of social media platforms have a comprehensive understanding of the terms and condition agreements between service providers and members. Nor have members taken actions to communicate their accounts and passwords to family members in the case of death or designate their social media content as personal assets assigned to a beneficiary.

5. Next Steps

The next phase of the research involves in-depth analysis of the survey data to respond to a number of research questions posed at the outset of the study, as well as the selection of interviewees from the group of survey respondents that indicated their willingness to be contacted for follow-up questions. Interviews will be conducted in late January 2015. Analysis of the interview data will commence in concert with review of social media providers' Terms and Conditions Agreements and related case law in North America. The anticipated completion date for the doctoral study is Fall 2015.

Thank you for participating in the Survey on The Trustworthiness of Digital Photographs Accessed and Stored in Social Media Platforms. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address listed on the cover page of this summary report.