

The construction of self in social medias, such as Facebook

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Abstract Social medias have changed and challenge the way we interact with each other. Social medias, such as Facebook, open up new possibilities for presentation of self and of managing the self you present to others. Is this process different for those that have grown up with social medias (The Net Generation) [Tapscott (Growing up digital: the rise of the net generation. McGraw-Hill, NY, 1998)] from how an older group of social media users would do it? What is their primary use of Facebook and how does this differ between generations? Such questions are discussed through engaging a group of Facebook users, with clear ideas of why and how they use Facebook, in joint reflections. The participants represent two generations of internet users; Those who was introduced to internet and social medias, such as Facebook, as adults (i.e. 40 years and older) and those who have grown up with the technology (i.e. under 25 years old, also called “The Net Generation”). The discussion indicate that there are differences in how these two groups relate to social medias, such as Facebook and for what they use Facebook. Further research is necessary to pursue those differences.

Keywords Social medias · Facebook · Net generation · Presentation of self

1 Introduction

Exploring the use of social medias, such as Facebook, can be done in many formats. Rather than trying to fit the paper to the conventional academic format, our aim is to reflect on the theme in a more open and explorative form. We have just started exploring this theme in our own research and this paper presents a first attempt to find out whether there are generational differences in how Facebook is used and for what purpose, and what those differences could be. Further research is necessary to develop insights from our explorative study into scientific research.

Reflecting the more oral, compact and direct communication on social medias, we have chosen to start the paper by delving directly into our organised conversation between a group of Facebook users, with clear ideas of why and how they use Facebook, in joint reflections. The participants represent two generations of internet users; those who were introduced to the internet and social medias, such as Facebook, as adults (i.e. 40 years and older) and those who have grown up with the technology (i.e. under 25 years old, also called “The Net Generation”). We will return to describe methods later in the text and at the end of the paper by indicating the need for further research.

1.1 “I live my life on Facebook”: but what kind of life?

“I’ve been on Internet since 1998. I’ve grown up there.” This is said by a 24 year old. “Much of my life is on Facebook”, said by another. Social medias have changed and challenge the way we interact with each other. Social medias, such as Facebook, open up new possibilities for presentation of the self and of managing the self that one presents to others.

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Facebook is widely used and so, maybe, is *the* social networking site (SNS) by most people at this point in time. It is used to communicate with everyday friends, keep in touch with family and friends who live further away, find old school friends or distant friends and relatives and to post news from your own life. As one young man said, “I have the impression that everyone else leads more interesting lives than I do.” Is one supposed to present an interesting and full life to ones friends on Facebook or is it acceptable not to do or achieve much? You can say that you are off to the gym or just home from the gym, but probably not that you’re not exercising, unless it is done in a self-deprecating and humorous way. You can tell about good grades, but would probably not choose to share the news of failures.

How do we “stage” the life we lead on Facebook? What does one choose to share and with whom? Is Facebook a place for raw emotions or is it a highly stylised presentation of life? What kind of information and emotions are acceptable to share and what is not to be shared on Facebook? And does this vary with age and generations?

This article is based on an organised group discussion between a group of Facebook users of different ages, with clear ideas of why and how they use Facebook. Through joint reflections, they shared their experiences and thoughts on the use of social medias, and particularly Facebook.

Meet M and J, two young men in their early twenties, and AM, a young woman of similar age. They are all students and engaged in a wide range of activities both related to their studies as well as extracurricular activities. They have grown up with SNS technology and can be referred to as “The Net Generation” (Tapscott 1998). The conversation also includes C and A, women in their forties, and F, a man of similar age. The three adults belong to a generation that was introduced to internet and social medias, such as Facebook, as adults. They are all working in fields where ICT is essential and are more than average proficient IT users. They are also engaged in information technology in their spare time and can thus be seen as advanced IT users at work and off. Inviting these two groups or generations of internet users to a joint discussion makes it possible to explore different ways of understanding friendship and the constructed self on Facebook. The group discussion, or loosely structured focus group, was recorded and partly transcribed, and this text¹ constitutes the basis of this article.

“I like to cook and post descriptions and recipes of things I’ve cooked”, one of the 40+ women said. Facebook is a forum for sharing this kind of everyday social information. It can be used to post pictures of your family,

particularly the children, as another did. She chose to be very restrictive about whom she accepted as friends in order to be able to share family pictures and information with close family members living apart. On the other hand, the three youngsters described a somewhat different way to use Facebook. They used it to communicate and coordinate everyday activities with friends they also met regularly. Facebook was used for making appointments, inviting to parties, telling about concerts or other events to which they wanted their friends to come. “Every planned activity is planned on Facebook”, said one. This kind of running coordination of everyday activities can be understood as predominantly instrumental, while the creation of a profile on Facebook describing what you and your family do and care about can be seen as more expressive, to borrow the distinction from Parsons (1951). According to Parsons, there are fundamental differences between these kinds of social interaction. The *instrumental—expressive distinction* can thus illustrate and explain two different modes of communication on Facebook. The way the youngsters talked about Facebook communication, they did not so much express themselves, as plainly kept in touch. Typically, when recruiting participants to the group discussion, one young man we first contacted then he used Facebook to invite other friends to be participants. This illustrates a very direct and instrumental use of Facebook. As one of the youngsters said, “If you are not on Facebook you don’t know what’s happening.” This more instrumental use of Facebook, using it mainly to organise practical everyday tasks and coordinate activities with friends rather than mainly uploading pictures and personal material might not be what we expected. Our youngsters might not be typical of how all young people use Facebook, but a point may be that these youngsters are not that young, they are not children or teenagers. Our youngsters are 20–25 years old, young adults. How this makes a difference and how useful the instrumental—expressive distinction is, is one of the many questions where further research is needed.

On the other hand, as one of the 40+ said, “When I listen to you young people I think I have something to learn about how I can use Facebook, but I’m probably not that interested”.

1.2 A friend by any other name...?

Social networking sites (SNS) seem to become more and more popular, not only among children and youngsters, but also among grown-ups. The fact that SNS combine chat, messaging, blogging, photo and videos and so on makes online activities more seamlessly than ever before. In a way we might say that members of SNS are both producers and consumers, and seeing it like that we can assume that members of the communities can influence and be heard at these sites.

¹ The discussion was in Norwegian, so all quotes are translations made by the authors and thus not original quotes.

Social media, such as Facebook, allow individuals to present themselves, establish or maintain connection with others and articulate their social networks. These others become “friends”. Some of these “friends” that one interact with are people one already know offline, but the possibilities in interacting on social sites also are an opportunity to meet new people.

These new people also become our “friends”. These accumulated “friends” can post comments on each other’s pages, view each other’s profiles, share links and other information and so on. Everyone with a Facebook profile is also able to join different virtual groups based on common interests, musical taste and old school friends and so on.

It seems like that the term “friend” has integrated into the SNS users’ vocabulary and culture and means something else in “real life”. “Friend” is not only used as a noun, but also as a verb. “Friending” means to put someone at your friendlist and other users can “friend” you back if they want to, and “defriending” is to remove someone from your friendlist.

SNS are only as good as the content their users share so designers of these sites always try to get the members to contribute with content. Newcomers do not always understand and value this contribution. Burke et al. (2009) found that newcomers who see their friends contribute are more willing to contribute themselves. The more they contribute the more they get feedback, and they reach a larger audience and become predictors of increased sharing.

Online participants are often motivated by the anticipation of reciprocity (Kollock 1999); they get an opportunity to build their reputation, their organisations reputation and so on. We might also say that it gives them a sense of affecting the pulse of the SNS community. Statements from the younger participants in our group discussion support some of this. Said one, “I want my ‘internet friends’ to read what I’m interested in, and that is what I publish.” Another said, “I’m a member of an organisation and committed to those who are members of this organisation and what we are doing. I use Facebook to promote the organisation and what we are doing.” The third said, “Internet friends are not necessarily close friends, a lot of them are just what we can call acquaintances.”

They want to promote themselves and their interests to a larger audience, and at the same time, they do not consider all their “internet friends” as close friends. In real life, the most natural way of losing friends is that they “fade out”, but in this world of virtual socialising, we have to “defriend” our “friends”. But do all SNS user understand this difference between “SNS friends” and “off line friends”?

Our younger participants described how they did this: “From time to time I go through my ‘list of friends’ on Facebook and remove those I don’t want to be friends with any more” and “I have no problems with saying no to

friend requests on Facebook”. They were very clear about why they did that. If these “friends” did not “give” them anything, in the sense of them not sharing anything about their life and doings (as expected from close friends or potentially new friends). Also never posting anything, they were interested in on the wall (as expected from “friends”, and as profile and group belonging should imply happening). For the youngsters, the correct thing to do was to “defriend” such “friends”.

The young participants also told us that if they got a “friend request” from someone they did not want to have on their list most of the time they just said no to the request. Sometimes they did it a little more discrete and chose not to answer the request at the time and then after a while denied the request.

On the other hand, the 40+ experienced this very differently. “We have more problems with denying a ‘friend request’, I think we are more committed to being polite, and not hurt anyone”. They also seemed to have less of a distinction between online friends and face-to-face friends than did the youngsters. One of the 40+ said, “And my first thought is: Oh, someone wants to be friend with me”. This reaction did not seem to consider whether this was a person she wanted as “real friend” or online “friend”. Less distinction between types of friends online and offline can explain the difficulties they experienced when “defriending” someone. As a 40+ said, “The young ones today are more open and honest and keen on setting their own limits in this virtual world. So sometimes we end up with friends we do not want to be friends with”.

1.3 If it is written, it exists

Over the last years, we have witnessed the success of SNS, where Web-based technology and services allow individuals to build “a more or less public profile” within the system and define a list of other users to interact and establish relationships with. We are also allowed to see the list of connections, our “friends” and other user (for example “friends of friends” or participants of different groups you have joined) make within the system (Boyd and Ellison 2007). One of the controversial aspects of these networks is the use of the private and personal information. This personal information is often used to give permission to external applications to gain access to them (Boyd 2008). Some argue that very few users are aware of this fact and that by opening these applications they also open a door for a non-defined public to find their private information, something which both legal and technical experts characterise as “risky” (Acquisti and Gross 2006).

In the privacy chapter in his book, Kirkpatrick (2010) says that the older you are, the more likely you will find the exposure of all this personal information intrusive and

excessive. In both Facebook and the news media, it seems like today's youth do not care about privacy and will not take steps to protect it. Since the privacy settings on Facebook have the standard that all is open for everyone, changing the standards will always make information one put there more restricted and one have to choose who you will grant access.

In our group discussion, we can see some differences when it comes to privacy, but maybe not as expected. While our young participants had early started organising their Facebook friends in groups and quickly sorted out which "friends" and privacy settings belonged to the different groups, the +40 group seemed initially to be more restrictive with whom they wanted to accept as friends. One of them said: "I started very private (in the meaning of letting few into my Facebook site)", and continued: "but then I discover that I lost contact with a lot of not so close friends". Gradually, she accepted more people as friends. But she also said: "The more I open up access the more selective I have become", and "I do not post things I don't want my colleagues to see." In this way, we might see a difference. While the young people use groups and stricter privacy settings and in that way utilise the capability of the system, the +40 group use only their common sense of what is proper to say in the public sphere and share only things that can also be read by colleagues.

Mark Zuckerberg said (2010): "People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people. That social norm is just something that has evolved over time." Our group discussion seemed to confirm this. Still, there are some exceptions about what is seen as private; as one of them put it: "Really private you can only be face to face".

1.4 "From mail use to mail abuse"

"Born and nurtured under the sign of Industrialization, this century first invented the machine and then modelled its lifestyle after it. Speed became our shackles. We fell prey to the same virus: 'the fast life' that fractures our customs and assails us even in our own homes, forcing us to ingest 'fast food'." (The Slow Food Manifesto <http://www.slowfood.com/international/2/our-philosophy>, Retrieved 2011-05-15).

Social medias make possible constant availability. Facebook, Twitter, blogs as well as Email and even mobile phones change the way we are expected to be available and in constant communication with others. Availability and the almost immediate response time can be seen as an aspect of modern life. The Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen wrote in 2001 about what he calls "slow time", as opposed to the fast reaction time made possible by communication technology. "Slow time" is

parallel to the concepts of "slow food" and "slow cities"; "slow time" is the time needed to finish thoughts without interruptions, time to concentrate on one task at a time (Hylland Eriksen 2001).

The Slow Food movement, and later The Slow City (Cittaslow) movement, are protest movements against the rate of change in society, advocating improving the quality of life in what we eat and how we live. They resist the quick-fix and fragmented nature of internationally available similar "fast food" and of cities that become more and more similar while losing their cultural roots and diversity. (<http://www.cittaslow.org/index.php?method=section&id=2012&title=Association>. Retrieved 2011-05-15).

How do social medias, such as Facebook, change the way we interact as humans? Castells (2000: 23) quotes Barglow (1994 in Castells 2000) when he claims that information technology affects everything, even the very way we perceive individual identity. In a way, this describes a change from the ideal of self-sufficient individuality to technologically enhanced connectedness.

Our group of social media users, both the youngsters and the 40+, used a wide variety of Social Networking Sites (SNS) and technological communication tools. Facebook, as was our main focus in the discussion, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Underskog,² Origo,³ several blogs as well as mail services such as Outlook and Gmail were referred to as being used. No one was very active on Twitter, but they were all familiar with it. LinkedIn was the preferred professional network, but only for the 40+. None of the youngsters were on LinkedIn and did not see it as particularly relevant, though they knew of it and considered it as being more relevant when they graduated and starting working full time. There was an interesting discussion, where the 40+ saw LinkedIn as *the* place to find potential candidates and market your competence whether you were already working or not, and they assumed everybody used it the same way. The youngsters used Facebook much the same way, as a place to find people and market your skills, competence and interests, but did not consider LinkedIn. As all the 40+ had at several points been recruiting, the information that none of the youngsters used it seemed to come as a surprise.

Even though they all used SNS extensively, they were also concerned about the pressure of being "too available". As one of the 40+ said, "We've gone from mail use to mail abuse". What kind of strategies had they developed to limit the availability or protect themselves from overexposure?

² Underskog (Underbrush) is a Norwegian SNS for independent culture activities.

³ A Norwegian SNS where members can create their own "Origo zones", i.e. blogs.

There were some interesting differences between the two generations represented in the group discussion. All three 40+ had high-tech new model mobile phones and used them widely to communicate, to check emails and even to update Facebook. None of the youngsters (in their early twenties) had advanced mobile phones, but used their computers (advanced models) for most of the same purposes (Skype even allowing it to function as a phone). As one of the youngsters said, “It’s a bit exhausting to have to be online, so I’ve chosen not to have a phone, or just an old model [without special functions]”. For the youngsters computers were constantly in use (also during the group discussion), while the 40+ checked their phones in a similar way. Whether this constitutes typical generational differences is impossible to conclude based on only six individuals, but it offers an insight into different strategies for handling the question of unlimited availability.

Accessibility during holidays also constituted a difference. We asked what the longest period of time they had gone without being online was. The 40+ counted time in hours and days, while the youngsters said that it could be weeks. They said that they did not take their computers on holidays as a rule. Without mobile phones filling the same purpose, they were effectively offline during holidays, at least when travelling away from home. There seemed to emerge two different rhythms to the use of SNS and communication technology. The 40+ used it when they had time off, mostly after work, but youngsters use it during the time they study (their working hours) as well as for arranging leisure activities, joining up with friends and so on, but not so much when relaxing, as on holidays. Again, we cannot generalise from so few individuals, but the difference in use is interesting.

1.5 Do you have backup of your life?

Not long ago there was a hoax that convinced some people that Facebook was shutting down; that Facebook’s creator Mark Zuckerberg wanted to close down his firm, and shut down Facebook. This spread almost panic amongst many of the site users. Has Facebook become the most important thing in people’s life? Will a shutting down of Facebook in a way be the end of the world as we know it? All of our informants publish photos on Facebook. Independent of whom they allow to see these photos a lot of the photos were only saved on Facebook. If these photos were lost, how could we remember and share events in our life with friends, children and so on? Possibly, it would not be the end of the world, but it seems clear that it would change it.

For many people, it seems normal to check the profile of your friends on Facebook to see how they are doing or what mood they are in today, rather than to phone them and ask. How would we keep in touch without Facebook? How

many of us still keep a physical address book? Do we have a backup of the information on Facebook or will a closure of Facebook make people on the fringes of our social life vanish without a trace?

Our ways of organising birthdays, nights out, political protests and much more have adapted to Facebook’s “Events” and “Groups” features. With those gone, it could mean a return to mobile phones and mailing groups. As mentioned earlier, one of the young people in our discussion said that “much of my life is on Facebook”. They tell us that being on Facebook not only helps organise events and friends’ birthdays, but one receives a huge amount of news and links via Facebook. Friends post interesting articles and such on the “Wall”. With Facebook gone, our exposure to eclectic sources of news will be curtailed. Before Facebook, most of us got our information from online news medias (or even printed sources). Facebook users connect with many different sources of news portals on a daily basis. The conclusion after our group discussion is that being on Facebook is a huge part of their everyday life. As one of them said (about being on Facebook): “Here can we joke about things, and here are we serious”. Another said: “Here I keep contact with those I went to school with”. Several of them mentioned the possibility of finding interesting articles via links from “friends” and to pass them on to other friends.

None in our group discussion had organised backups of their own profile and friends contact information, posted photos and so on, although they seemed to be aware of what would happen if Facebook shuts down. One of them had earlier had an account at GeoCity and experienced the problem with the closing down of a SNS site and what happened with files, personal information and so on, that he had not saved. “It was annoying”, he said and it took him a long time to reassemble the information that he lost, and some of it he never could get back. Today, he has even more information posted on Facebook and still without taking backup of all of it.

Another question is: is it possible to take backup of one’s “life”? We are not focusing on what is technically possible, but rather whether we experience the need to do so. The young man’s statement about the closing of his profile on GeoCity was only that it was annoying, in the sense that it took him a long time to rebuild as much of his profile information, address information, photos and so on, as possible. Based on our small sample of people, it is impossible to reach any clear conclusions, but maybe this life lived on the social forum of Facebook is not something we find necessary to backup? Do we really need to have those on Facebook with whom we also have face-to-face contact?

Facebook makes it easy to maintain a large number of “friendships”, though these relationships are not always deep and meaningful ones. It might be that some people

have turned their social lives into “a numbers game”, defining themselves by how many friends they have on Facebook, and without Facebook they would revert back to a “quality over quantity” approach while dealing with closer friends (friends they also have ordinary social contact with) and family. Without Facebook, people might be forced to keep up with only the relationships that mean the most to them. Some of the statements of our informants like: “I am using the group function, and a lot of the things that are really important to me I just share with close friends and family”, or “you are only really private ‘life’, face to face”, might indicate that it is not necessary to have a backup of one’s life on Facebook.

Even if our focus is mainly on Facebook, it is not like social networking would disappear altogether if Facebook shuts down. Facebook’s connectivity could likely be replaced by Twitter or other SNS. But most of the other SNS sites today lack some of the possibilities of Facebook, like chat capability, extensive profiles or a detailed friend network. For instance, Twitter allows you to see who you are following and being followed by, but does not break these people up into networks (i.e. colleagues, companies, etc.). Several of our informants have accounts in other SNSs like Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace and so on, but all of them used them for more specialised or restricted purposes.

In the media debate on social medias, we sometimes hear concerns about people that have developed such an attachment to Facebook that, if it were to vanish, they would have a hard time adapting to what once was called normal social etiquette. Although we hardly have a representative sample of SNS users their discussion seems to indicate that they separated between their social life on Facebook and their “real” everyday life. Since there are no SNS like Facebook that has actually closed down yet, all we can do at this time is pose the questions.

2 What did we do to reach these conclusions? Methods

2.1 The sample, the two generations

When recruiting participants to the group discussion that forms the basis for this article, we wanted the participants to represent two different generations of internet users; Those who were introduced to internet and social medias, such as Facebook, as adults (i.e. 40 years and older) and those who grew up with the technology (i.e. under 25 years old, also called “The Net Generation”).

Selection criteria are important, and our choice was based on the literature on digital divides created by information and communication technology (ICT). Particularly, Don Tapscott, in his two books on The Net Generation (Tapscott 1998, 2009), talks about the difference between

those who were introduced to the digital world as adults and those growing up in it. His claim is that coming of age in the digital world changes the way one interacts with it, as well as having wide-ranging effects on how one interacts with the physical and social world. Technology shapes the way one relate to others, and we expected our group of 40+ and 25– to have different experiences and different ways of communicating on social medias, such as Facebook.

The Net Generation, or “Millennials” (Howe and Strauss 2000), is supposed to be “digitally literate, connected, social, and experiential” (Bullen et al. 2009: 2). The orientation is supposed to affect learning and communication styles in most fields of work, though much of the above-mentioned literature discusses consequences for education and educational styles. Prensky (2001) goes beyond natural, cyclic generational change and talks about “Digital Natives” as opposed to “Digital Immigrants”. In his description, the Digital Immigrants will always retain a vestige of the (technological) culture they have left behind, culturally defined ways of doing things, even when they adapt to the new environment. His examples of such things range from habits of printing online material, rather than working with the material on the screen, to what sources one uses when searching for information (whether Internet is the first alternative or not).

In the beginning of this article, we described the difference we experienced when it came to recruiting participants. The first young man we approached used Facebook to invite others of his age to partake in the group discussion, while the first 40+ we contacted used personal communication or phone. This illustrates what Prensky would call the difference between a Digital Native and a Digital Immigrant (2001). This also confirms the importance of having both groups present for such a group discussion. Whether we would find other differences if also the very young (children) and the elderly were present, is beyond the scope of this article. The literature indicates that the important divide is between the before and after Internet/social medias generations, rather than also within these two groups.

2.2 The research process

Our concern is to explore how social medias, such as Facebook, change, and challenge, the way we interact with each other. To investigate such questions, we engaged a group of Facebook users in joint reflections. To ensure a rich and varied discussion, we recruited participants with clear ideas of why and how they use Facebook. The discussion might have been different with other, less experienced, Facebook users, but our concern was to find participants who were able and willing to share their reflections and experiences, and who had reflected on the subject before our staged discussion.

When selecting participants, we used the snowball method (Thagaard 2003). The snowball method is a method for recruiting informants for interviews or group interviews through the recruiting of one or few, who then recommend the next participants, who recommend the next and so on similar to how a snowball grows, rolling down a hill. The advantage of the snowball method of recruiting participants is that it allows researchers to come in contact with informants that might be difficult to identify and reach otherwise. We first recruited one young user (under 25 years of age) and one 40+ from our acquaintances and asked them to recruit two more each. In this way, we ensured that not all participants were familiar to us, but at the same time, everybody knew more than one other person in the group, allowing an easy and relaxed discussion. A group of strangers, particularly strangers from different generations, might in contrast not be so free in exchanging opinions and experiences. A possible disadvantage of the model is the bias introduced by the participants' previous relationships. On the other hand, our sample was not supposed to be representative of the general population, or even the population of frequent Facebook users. We wanted "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973: 3–30), descriptions that not only answered our predefined questions, but descriptions steeped in the participants' daily experiences and lived context.

The group discussion was organised one afternoon in March 2011 lasting almost 3 h and held at the research institute where both researchers worked at that time. It was recorded and partly transcribed, and this text constitutes the basis of the discussions in this article. To ensure that the participants recognised and felt comfortable with our presentation of their views, we sent a draft of this article to all participants and invited them to comment, criticise or contribute to the text. Unfortunately, we did not receive much feedback, but at least they had the opportunity of also engaging in the writing of the text. This seems to be a familiar limitation to the ideal of participatory research where simple time limitations can keep the participants from engaging in the analysis and the writing of the resulting text (Hauge 2011: 166).

2.3 Analytical model

Social medias have changed, and challenged, the way we interact with each other. Social medias, such as Facebook, open new possibilities for presentation of self and of managing the self that one presents to others. Inspired by Goffman's study of social life through focusing on the way which the individual presents him/herself to others "in concrete social establishment, be it domestic, industrial, or commercial" (1982: 9), we want to explore how this presentation of self is enacted in social medias, such as

Facebook. How does one decide what information to share and with whom? How private is this social and virtual room? What are the implications when for instance employers, potential employers, or government agencies can access this personal space one has created for oneself and friends?

Inviting these two groups or generations of internet users to a joint discussion makes it possible to explore different ways of understanding friendship and the constructed self on Facebook. From a social constructivist perspective, dialogue creates new realities beyond those that the participants bring into the discussion (Pålshaugen 2004; Shotter 1993). This dialogue between participants not formerly engaged in such discussions makes it possible to explore their initial understanding and thus develop a "new" or revised sense of self and sociability. Further research is necessary to understand this enactment of self in, or through, social medias to any higher degree.

3 Who are you, and who do you want to be?

Impression management (Goffman 1982) is about controlling the presentation of self, controlling how we want others to perceive us. Facebook offers ample opportunities to manipulate the image we present and we might have expected more examples of this. The story that came through were rather of people handling their daily activities and schedules, communicating with friends, sharing photos and everyday social information in a fairly open and "non-manipulative" way.

Still, being yourself on Facebook means different thing to different people. Although both our two generations of SNS users wanted to represent themselves as truthfully and honestly as possible on Facebook, they did it in a strikingly different manner. Both groups (as well as researchers) were surprised that "being honest and truthful" can take so many different forms and few of them matching the stereotypes of reckless youths and mature adults.

We do not claim that the group discussion that forms the basis of this article is representative of the larger population using Facebook. Still, the image that emerged was both many-faceted and surprising. In different ways, these people of different ages shared their experiences and thoughts about how technology shapes the way we present ourselves to others on social medias, such as Facebook, in contrast to how we are in the physical presence of others.

4 Further research

This text aims at identifying questions for further research. Through the text, we have posed a range of questions,

while only indicated possible answers. Further research needs to be based on a more stringent research process, a much bigger sample and more extensive data. We can but indicate questions worth further study and hope our limited study can inspire further research on generational differences and challenges in the use of social medias to express oneself.

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