

Mixed Emotions in Active Social Media Use – Fun and Convenient or Shameful and Embarrassing?

Gunilla Widén, Åbo Akademi University
Johanna Lindström, Åbo Akademi University
Malin Brännback, Åbo Akademi University
Isto Huvila, Åbo Akademi University
Anna-Greta Nyström, Åbo Akademi University

Abstract

This paper discusses self-perceived observations of social media use among undergraduate students. 132 media diaries are analyzed in order to identify media usage patterns, profiles and emotions expressed as a consequence of an extensive and frequent social media use. By asking the students to report in detail of their media use and to reflect on their behavior in a personal media diary, we go beyond the typical snapshot acquired from a cross-sectional survey design. The diaries were analyzed using NVivo, focusing on the students' own reflections on their media and social media consumption. We were able to identify four different media consumption profiles based on the level of activity in social media and the emotions expressed in the reflections. Most of the students are active social media users, and about 40 % of the students express strong emotions, both positive and negative, when reflecting on their own frequent social media use. The aim is to discuss how does this kind of extensive and frequent social media affect these young adults and what we can learn from analyzing their perceptions and self-reported social media use.

Keywords: Social media; social media use; media consumption; undergraduate students; emotions

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Contact: gwiden@abo.fi, jjuslin@abo.fi, malin.brannback@abo.fi, isto.huvila@abo.fi, anna-greta.nystrom@abo.fi

1 Introduction

Popular press frequently reports a growing concern for an ever-increasing consumption of Internet and social media among children and young adults. This raises many questions related to the effects of social media on younger generations and their behavior, media consumption patterns and social interaction skills. Previous research has addressed such questions quite extensively, but considering the height of concern, there is fairly little comprehensive in-depth evidence on how the younger generations experience and reflect upon their own media use.

Similar concerns were raised at the introduction of earlier innovations and new technologies, for example concerning television and its effects on children's behavior (Paik & Comstock 1994; Buijzen & Valkenburg 2003; Mares & Woodard 2010). These concerns have triggered a well-established line of research on the positive and negative effects of using different types of media. The positive effects are usually associated with supporting efficient behavior as well as increased time and cost effectiveness (e.g. Palfrey & Gasser 2008). The negative aspects are associated with irrational behavior, working around routines, addiction-like behavior and abusive or criminal conduct (e.g. Bawden & Robinson 2009).

In addition to the effects on our behavior, research has also been conducted on why we use different types of media, to what extent etc. For example, Correa, Hinsley and de Zuniga (2010) show that personality traits impact the use of, and the willingness to interact in social media. While introversion is positively associated with Internet use, recent studies show that extraversion is positively related to social media use (Correa, Hinsley & de Zuniga 2010). It is assumed that the level of anonymity is a key factor; anonymity of Internet use is perceived to be high whereas it is perceived to be very low in social media. Furthermore, emotional factors seem to affect the level of activity in social media use. Instable individuals (especially men) are more regular users than others (Correa, Hinsley & de Zuniga 2010). Also individual characteristics affect our adoption of new media. We develop different habits and patterns of use to keep up with the variety of media formats available. Furthermore, the perceived advantage is an important explanatory factor when it comes to willingness to adopt and use new mobile devices (Chan-Olmsted, Rim & Zerba 2013).

Another stream of research focuses on gender differences in media use. Here, research has shown that there are in fact gender differences in the use of Internet and social media (Sherman et al. 2004; Joiner et al. 2005; Barker 2009). Roughly, earlier findings suggest that men primarily look for features,

entertainment, and information, while women often interact with others, and build and maintain their social networks. Negative attitudes and anxieties are more frequent among women (Joiner et al. 2005).

Considering the diversity in research and findings on media and social media behavior thus far, this is clearly an area in rapid development and we see a need for more information on social media use in many different contexts. Especially, there seems to be a need for further exploring peoples' own attitudes towards and perceptions of their social media use, as well as the perceived effect this have on their behavior. This paper reports on an exploratory empirical study of social media use among undergraduate students. These students are born around the early 1990's and have recently started their university studies. They can be described as technologically savvy and true digital natives, who have spent their entire lives in the digital environment with easy access to basically any information they ever wanted or needed (Williams et al. 2012; Bolton et al. 2013).

The aim of this paper is to gain a deeper understanding of how young individuals experience and describe their own social media behavior in order to understand what characterizes self-perceived social media use in the group. First, we provide an overview of relevant earlier research on social media use. Then we review earlier literature on the positive and negative effects of social media use. Thirdly, we discuss methodology, and finally, the results of the study are presented, analyzed and discussed.

2 Social media use

Research on social media use is a wide area, ranging from studies on how individual factors affect social media use and investigations of emerging behavioral patterns and habits, to research on the influence of contextual and environmental factors as well as cultural differences (e.g. Correa, Hinsley & de Zuniga 2010; Sherman et al. 2004; Barker 2009; Bolton et al. 2013; Hasebrink & Domeyer 2012; Rowlands et al. 2008).

The media landscape has undergone rapid change after the advent of the Internet, a gateway to millions of information sources, characterized by connectedness and social information. The share of digital media in daily media consumption is growing and new ways of managing the information overflow and interacting with each other are emerging. A new form of networked individualism (Rainie & Wellman 2012) is developing with new efficiencies and affordances in our actions. Individuals invest a lot of time in social networking; information is seen as a collective resource that is constantly changing and evolving. These new patterns of media consumption and behavior can have both positive and negative consequences (Bawden & Robinson 2009; LaRose et al. 2014). Thus, we need to enhance our understanding of both individual and contextual factors affecting our media and social media consumption, as well as the effects of our media and social media consumption behavior. Even though social media use is penetrating all age groups (Chou et al. 2009) the question of impact is especially significant among younger generations who have spend their entire lives in a digital environment (Bolton et al. 2013).

Hasebrink and Domeyer (2012) have studied individual patterns of media use using qualitative and quantitative measures to identify groups of media users with similar media repertoires. The study showed that media users combine a specific range of different media, genres, and content, constructing a pattern of use that make sense to them. Social practices in this context are developed where individual values and ambitions interplay.

Collective norms are developed within social media. Active social behavior online and offline are generally not correlated (Pollet, Roberts & Dunbar 2011; Huvila et al. 2010). A study on information worlds of youths (9-13 years) shows that social settings are important in predicting why they decide to interact in different situations. Informality in social settings is important, access to other people can make or break an information search, and social costs may be barriers to information behavior in this context (Meyers, Fisher & Marcoux 2009). Also, Correa, Hinsley and de Zuniga (2010) found that social media use is negatively correlated to emotional stability whereas the correlation with extraversion (especially with young adults) and openness (especially with older adults) is strong.

Research on social media use among younger generations shows that the purposes for using social media is similar to other age groups and generations (e.g. Bolton et al. 2013). Young adults use different social media sites as sources of information (Kim, Yoo-Lee & Sin 2011; Westerman, Spence & Van Der Heide 2013), for leisure and entertainment (Bolton et al. 2013; Leung 2013), for socializing and experiencing a sense of belonging (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten 2006), and for staying in touch with and communicating with friends (Bolton et al. 2013).

Even though researchers seem to find it hard to agree on any general patterns of activities and types of consumption behavior in social media among younger generations, many agree that young adults in

fact use social media extensively and frequently (e.g. Bolton et al. 2013). But the question still remains; how does this extensive and frequent social media use really affect the young adults? And what can we learn from analyzing their perceptions and self-reporting of their social media use?

3 Consequences of social media use

Previous research on social media use among young adults has identified several positive as well as negative effects on for example their psychological wellbeing, physical health, social relations, and learning behavior. Many benefits as well as detrimental effects and emotions have been identified. In the following section we present an overview of documented effects and emotions, as well as a short discussion on the importance of understanding how young adults deal with these, at times, mixed and even conflicting emotions.

3.1 Positive and negative effects of social media use

Researchers have been able to identify several positive effects of social media use among young people. For example, social media helps to connect people with social resources and helps young people to maintain relationships and develop and boost social capital (LaRose et al. 2014; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007). Social media use might also have a positive effect on young peoples' psychological and emotional wellbeing and help them to strengthen and nurture supportive relationships with family and friends (Bolton et al. 2013). Social media can even have a positive effect on young peoples' physical health as social media sites are an efficient way of communicating and possibly creating an interest in, for example, exercise and health information (Hackworth & Kunz 2010). Furthermore, social media use supports for example identity exploration and formation, technological literacy, learning and the development of positive self-esteem (Agosto & Abbas 2013).

At the same time we can identify a number of negative effects connected to social media use that can hinder psychological and physical wellbeing as well as social and personal development. People experience communication demands as well as connection and information overload, leading to stress and difficulties in managing time effectively (Bawden & Robinson 2009; LaRose et al. 2014; Ji, Ha & Sypher 2014). Young adults are prone to a heavy reliance on technology for communication, entertainment and socializing and this may lead to long-term effects on their mental health (Bolton et al. 2013). Extended exposure has been argued to lead to cognitive overload and "technostress" (Palfrey & Gasser 2008).

Young adults who spend more and more time online can also abandon other types of social interactions, which can lead to difficulties in intimate relationships (Lewis & West 2009). Other possibly negative consequences of using social media can be an unhealthy relation to a "need for popularity", very little control over which information is shared through social media sites, and compulsive checking habits of social network profiles and status updates (Bolton et al. 2013). Social media use can also lead to privacy and security risks (Agosto & Abbas 2013), and subject users to phenomena like cyber-bullying, sexting and "Facebook depression" (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson 2011).

3.2 Emotions and social media use

Forgas (2006) notes that affect and emotions influence everything we do and all the decisions we make in our everyday lives. Social media use encompasses a diverse and complex set of (often unconscious) decision-making activities, influenced by a large number individual, collective, and environmental factors. There is a constantly ongoing balancing of judgments, and people are compelled to use a great deal of sense-making in the process and base their decisions on both rational and non-rational choices (Dean & Croft 2009).

Hardin's (2009) economic theory of knowing proposes a type of colloquial form of rationality as a basis for understanding how people make decisions in the context of using social media. Hardin claims that there is a certain innate rationality to every decision at the moment they are made. However, the same decision that is considered rational and rewarding at the moment it is made, might be regretted or might feel highly irrelevant immediately afterwards. For example, using this approach, Huvila (2012) found seemingly irrational forms of using digital tools, which often led to externally imposed anxieties.

According to rational choice theory, individuals are motivated by their wants or goals and choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction (Scott 2000). According to this approach, a rationally reasonable choice can result in positive experiences and emotions like for example social approval, usefulness and enjoyment. However, when individuals become part of collective action the

rational choice theory is challenged since social norms and structures challenge individual rationality and satisfaction (Scott 2000). If individual behavior and rationality collides with collective behavior and social norms, the consequence might be negative experiences and emotions. For example, actively using social media might give an individual great satisfaction and enable feelings of enjoyment and convenience due to all the positive effects mentioned earlier. At the same time, using social media to a great extent can be collectively considered as wasting time or distancing oneself from other forms of social interaction with friends and family, which might lead to bad conscience, and conflicting emotions. In this case the individual might experience negative emotions like shame, guilt and embarrassment.

We want to highlight that the terms shame and guilt are often used interchangeably although research in psychology shows they are distinct affective concepts (Tangney 1990; Kugler & Jones 1992; Tangney et al. 1996). The distinction between shame and guilt appear to lie in the role of the self, whereas shame is about the self and guilt is a negative evaluation of what is done (or not). Shame seems to be a more intense emotion than embarrassment. A study by Miller and Tangney (1994) showed that embarrassment was associated with humor, smiles, and jokes and the individual felt awkward. Shame is associated with disgust, anger over oneself, and apologies and an immoral feeling. While guilt generally involves regret and remorse it is seen as less painful as guilt does not directly affect an individual's concept of self. Nevertheless guilt also involves a normative dimension, i.e. it is the feeling, which enables an individual to recognize violation of social or moral norms, and thus enabling cooperation in social groups (Kugler & Jones 1992; Nelissen 2014).

Even though an extensive amount of research has been conducted on social media use and the underlying complex decision-making process, subsequent emotions and how we are dealing with these still remains a relatively unexplored research topic. Researchers have noted that emotions (positive and negative) in fact do play an important role in social media use, especially in the context of information and social sharing behavior (see e.g. Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2013; Choi & Toma 2014). Furthermore, Whiting and Williams (2013) note that positive experiences and emotions linked to entertainment, relaxation and convenience are good predictors of recurring media use. Chimel et al. (2011) focus on negative emotions and the link between these and activity in online discussion forums. Still, research remains scarce on positive, negative or conflicting emotions as a part of frequent social media use.

3.3 Digital natives and mixed emotions concerning social media use

As discussed earlier, social media use encompasses an array of behavioral processes, activities and psychological factors that frequent social media users most likely are not aware of. This is true especially for young people who are using social media as a natural part of their every day lives (Creighton et al. 2013). They are considered comfortable with several different forms of social media (Leung 2013) and active social media users (Bolton et al. 2013). However, in line with earlier observations (e.g. Palfrey & Gasser 2008), we assume that digital natives rarely reflect upon, for example, what they are doing or sharing on what social media site and what effects this might have on their own behavior or their environment.

Bolton et al. (2013) discuss several shortcomings of previous research within social media use among young people. The authors highlight the fact that more research needs to be done on social media use among digital natives, the positive and negative effects on their behavior and health, and also on the effect on society in general. We believe that one step towards a deeper understanding of the effects that an extensive social media use may have on young people, is to listen to how they describe and experience their personal (social) media behavior. Their own recollections and perceptions of their social media use can provide us with a better picture of how they perceive, for example, collective norms and conflicting emotions.

4 Method

It has been shown that it is difficult to recollect what we do in virtual space, which put special requirements on data collection in this setting (Nicholas et al. 2010). The aim of this paper is to gain a deeper understanding of how young individuals experience and describe their own social media behavior in order to understand what characterizes self-perceived social media use in the group. The very nature of this aim calls for a qualitative exploratory methodological approach (e.g. Creswell 1998; Mackenzie & Knipe 2006) as the aim is not to test or confirm prior theories, rather to use these as part of exploring and better understanding people's experiences, perceptions, descriptions and understandings of a certain

phenomena in a certain context (e.g. Leitch, Hill & Harrison 2010). In this paper the context is media consumption and social media use among undergraduate students.

4.1 Data collection

We conducted an exploratory media diary study among undergraduate students at Åbo Akademi University in the spring of 2013. In qualitative diary studies people are asked to provide regular reports on events and experiences in their everyday lives (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli 2003). Czarniawska (2013) describes this type of diaries as a narrative reporting of events, memories and experiences. Media diaries are often used for specifically capturing the media use of a group of people during a particular period of time (cf. Vanderwater & Lee 2009).

Media diaries as data collection method offer possibilities to collect information about media use from a large number of informants during a longer period of time than if conducting, for example, personal interviews or observations (Czarniawska 2013; Vanderwater & Lee 2009). This data collection method also gives the researcher a better understanding of the full extent of media use, routines as well as fluctuations throughout the whole period of time, which for example a snapshot survey design would not provide (Vanderwater & Lee 2009; Kaun 2010). Furthermore, media diaries can capture more comprehensive information about the use of and the purpose behind using several different types of media that for example a web or a mobile tracking system would not provide (Vanderwater & Lee 2009).

Still, the media diary method is quite limited concerning, for example, capturing simultaneous use of different media platforms; informants might not realize or even remember to register this kind of simultaneous use. The informants' engagement in keeping the diary heavily affects the outcome and the extent of the activities recorded (cf. Kaun 2010). A general concern with this method also seems to be whether or not this kind of diaries in fact really are accurate recordings of certain events or experiences. However, the method is suitable if the researchers do not aim at drawing quantitative conclusions from the collected data (cf. Czarniawska 2013).

In our media diary study, the students were asked to keep a diary over their personal media use for one predetermined week. Instructions were given to keep track by writing what media they use, when, where, for how long and for what purpose. Furthermore, the students were encouraged to reflect upon their personal media consumption and add photos in their diary that reflect their typical media consumption situations throughout the week. Media was defined broadly to include newspapers, radio, TV, computers, Internet, social media, tablets, and mobile phones. The decision of what to actually include into the diary was left to the students to provide indicative evidence of how they conceptualize media use in general and what they perceive as media. The students were also free to decide on how to design their own personal diary and how to record their media usage throughout the week. The media diaries were handed in using the virtual learning platform Moodle. This media diary study was conducted as part of a collaboration project with a media organization which the students worked with on a course in marketing. The students were aware of the fact that the diaries would be used for research purposes, and were given several opportunities to draw back their participation in this study. None of the students that handed in a media diary declined, although some students on the course chose not to complete this assignment and did not hand in any diary at all. In this paper, the media diaries are treated anonymously and separately from any other material or documentation that the students produced within the project or the course.

4.2 Informants and data analysis

The informants in this study are mainly first year students in business and economics, but also first year and older students from other departments and subjects within the university. In total, 175 students participated in the course and among these, 169 handed in a media diary. In this paper, only diaries including personal reflections on media consumption are considered (n=132). Out of the total 132 informants, 73 are women (55 %) and 59 are men (45 %). The majority of the students (almost 80 %) are aged between 19 and 22 (see Table 1).

Age	Total (n=132)	Female (n=73)	Male (n=59)
19	26	24	2

20	43	23	20
21	27	10	17
22	10	6	4
23	6	3	3
24	7	2	5
25	5	2	3
26	4	2	2
27	2	1	1
28	1	-	1
29	1	-	1

Table 1. Informants, age and gender distribution

The data was analyzed by coding the original media diaries in two rounds. First, we focused on mapping the media consumption patterns of the informants. The goal of the content analysis and coding was to make meaning out of the cases (cf. Neuendorf 2002; Roberts 1997). The outcomes, i.e. media routines, were compared, discussed, and agreed between all authors. In the second round of data analysis, the data on social media was organized according to time spent on social media, social media platforms, gender, routines and places where the informants access social media. We also focused on specific topics and themes that had emerged during the first round of open coding, namely emotions expressed in the personal reflections. The second round of coding aimed at specifying social media profiles and linking them to the reported emotions enclosed in the use of social media.

5 Results

First, we present some key findings of the initial analysis with the purpose of identifying general media consumption patterns and routines. Second, we present four social media profiles based on feelings expressed in the media diaries connected to the use of social media. Then we move on to further explore and describe the profiles where positive and negative emotions are expressed as part of reflecting on a frequent social media use.

5.1 General patterns of media consumption

In line with previous research, the study shows that the informants create routines in their media behavior and that the means of accessing information are fragmented, as the channels are many. The devices used most frequently for accessing media content by this group of students are laptops or computers and mobile phones. These are often used simultaneously.

Television and radio are not used to the same extent, but many informants reflected upon the fact that they listen more to the radio than they would have expected. Both radio and television are often consumed via Internet using laptops and computers (or mobile phones for listening to radio), usually in the background of other activities.

Listening to music in general, not only radio, is important to many of the informants; however, mainly as a background activity. Mobile phones or small devices for playing music (e.g., iPods) are used for this purpose in many different contexts and situations; while riding the bus, driving a car, working with school assignments, going to the gym etc. Some informants listen to music as a way of relaxing or taking a break from working with school assignments. Other activities like playing games (on computers or video game consoles), watching TV-series or movies on Netflix or watching videos on Youtube are also mentioned as means of relaxing in between study or work related tasks.

Mobile phones are used frequently and the majority of the informants own a smart phone. The mobile phone is used mostly for keeping in touch with friends and checking different social media sites, but also for checking the weather, checking news-sites and playing games while, for example, waiting for the bus or for a lecture to start. Mobile phones and especially social media apps are often used also during lectures for quick status updates or checking on friends' status updates.

Tablets are not used to the same extent as the mobile phones; only about one third of the informants reflect upon owning and using a tablet. The tablet is mainly used for checking social media sites and for playing games. A few students also use their tablet for reading books.

The only media that is mentioned especially to be read in paper format is the newspaper. Here it seems that the parents' media behavior plays an important role and the tradition to read the newspaper at breakfast is something the students refer to as a habit inherited from home.

Overall, the informants refer to their media consumption as highly routine based activity and further that they use specific media for specific purposes. The informants identify that they have different media consumption patterns during weekdays and weekends as well as during different times of the day. The informants also divide their media consumption into leisure use and use for study purposes. The leisure use is dominant and ongoing. Furthermore, simultaneous use of several media platforms is very common.

Social media seems to be a very important part of many of the informants' lives and many are aware of the fact that they check several different social media sites on several different occasions throughout the day and the night. The most used social media sites by this group of students are Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. These are mostly used for regularly checking what is happening as well as for updating and sharing one's own thoughts, emotions and activities.

5.2 Profiles of experienced social media use

The study identifies four different social media profiles (see Table 2) based on the students' own reflections and described experiences connected to using social media. The majority of the informants (76 %) are active social media users, but almost a fourth (24 %) of the total population articulates a less active degree of media and social media use. The less active social media users describe different reasons for their low degree of activity in social media; some acknowledge a conscious decision of not wanting to consume media at large, but more often practical reasons like being away from home or not owning appropriate technological devices are given as explanations for the (in some cases unusually) low degree of social media use (see 5.2.3 and 5.3).

As we are interested in emotions and the role that emotions play in social media use, we have identified the two most interesting groups for this study to be the ones where the informants reflect upon a high degree of social media use and express strong emotions and attitudes linked to this. In these groups, active media and social media use seems to be experienced as very convenient and joyful as well as problematic and connected to feelings of overuse. Because of these conflicting emotions described, we will describe these two groups in depth after a general overview of all the identified profiles.

Reactions	N=132	Female	Male
Active/positive	32	16	16
Active/neutral	46	25	21
Active/negative	22	16	6
Less active / indifferent	32	16	16

Table 2. Profiles of social media users

5.2.1 Active/positive

The informants in this group (24 % of the total population) are active social media users and express positive emotions linked to this activity. Social media is an important part of their lives and they are very aware of their high degree of media and social media consumption and regard it as both important and necessary. Some even claim it would be difficult to get by without being constantly connected or without social media. They underline the importance of following news and other current and relevant issues in many different media forms. They experience using social media frequently as convenient, fun and relaxing (see 5.3).

5.2.2 Active/neutral

This is the largest group of informants (35 %) and they are also active social media users and states that they are always connected. Similar to the previous group, they are also aware of their high degree of social media use and they acknowledge the fact they were expecting this amount of consumption that the media diary revealed. They check social media all the time and everywhere; on the bus, taking a walk, in the class, waiting in different situations. Social media seem to be consumed unconsciously (e.g. having the radio on in the background) and according to routines. They conclude that they use social media

frequently because it is easy, but no particular positive or negative feelings are expressed or reflected upon.

5.2.3 Active/negative

This group of informants (17 %) is active social media users but they express negative feelings linked to their perceived social media use. The informants are worried about their own media use in general, and especially their social media use. Many of the comments are connected to the fact that they experience Internet and social media a time thief and that they need to learn to cut down on social media use, and learn to plan their time more efficiently. Media consumption is seen as problematic and they identify a number of negative feelings (see 5.4).

5.2.4 Less active/indifferent

24 % of the total population reflects upon a less active social media use than that of the previous groups. The informants in this group can be divided into those who make conscious choices not to use social media and those who state practical reasons for not using social media. The conscious choice is reflected in that the informants have no Facebook account because they do not want to be exposed, or that they are not interested in marketing themselves. This is categorized by some informants as “old fashioned” media consumption. Also, they declare a disinterest towards frequently following news or in following what is happening in society.

However, most informants in this group give other types of practical reasons and special circumstances for their unusually low degree of social media use during the particular week when they kept their media diary. Travelling or being ill seems to be common reasons that affect their media and social media use, which they claim is higher during a “normal” week. Other reasons mentioned are having been busy with studies, work or exercise, a poor Internet connection or not owning a smartphone or tablet and therefore having limited access to social media. A few informants in this group also stated that the task of keeping a media diary have affected their normal social media behavior and degree of activity; they made a deliberate decision not to use social media during this week because they did not want to record this in their diary. Overall, no particular positive or negative feelings are expressed connected to their social media use.

5.3 An emotional upside of frequent social media use

Almost one fourth of the informants (24 %) reports a frequent social media use in positive terms. They deliberately choose to use social media actively and they experience social media as almost unbearable to live without. The students in this group seem to have an outgoing personality and they like to follow news, learn new things, debate, motivate and argue. Even though earlier research acknowledge that young people often are active social media users, we find it quite interesting that the frequent social media use expressed by this group is in fact often a conscious decision and experienced as necessary.

“You can see I’m active and daily using Facebook. Every day I check id someone has contacted me or if something exciting has happened to and around those people I’m in contact with in Facebook”

“I spend a lot of time on my computer, because of my interests and hobbies, but mostly to be updated about what happens in the world and to manage school- ad work related stuff.”

Among the different social network sites mentioned, Facebook is the most popular and most important one. Facebook (and social media sites in general) are considered to be very useful and convenient. Some informants were surprised over their extensive social media use, but they see this as a positive thing as social media is perceived as mean of making their everyday life easier and more convenient. For example, much of the group activities and discussions related to their studies take place on Facebook.

“Facebook is necessary because it works like a calendar, reminding me of events and group work and discussions take place there.”

“I’m often logged into Facebook but it is not only for pleasure, I do a lot of work via Facebook, like group work. Facebook is also a good way to take a break from the studies for a while.”

“I’m constantly logged into Facebook via my mobile so that I don’t miss any important information about studies, group work etc.”

Social media sites are also used for many different purposes, to stay in touch with friends, to follow news, to find information etc. The overall impression is that this group of students perceives social media as enjoyable and easy. Furthermore, social media and games enable them to relax and to reduce stress.

“There are many reasons why you use media, intentional and unintentional. You seek for information about current events and practical things. One big reason for me is to pass time and feeling less stressed.”

“Games are a good way to relax after a stressful day and it is a lot of fun.”

“It is easy and fun to keep in contact with friends using Whatsapp.”

For this group, social media is a way to keep in contact and to structure work and collaboration in both study and work contexts. The fact that this way of keeping in contact is for free is stressed as well as the importance of getting different views and interpretation of the same news or phenomenon. A sense of belonging to a group or a community is also mentioned as an important reason for actively using social media.

The positive emotions expressed in the media diaries are connected to necessity, convenience, enjoyment and relaxation. Social media and being constantly connected is perceived to make their lives easier. Also, it creates a sense of belonging and “closeness”. Social media sites as well as games are used to pass time or to take a break, to relax and to have fun. Feelings of enjoyment, relaxation and convenience are expressed and highlighted by this seemingly outgoing and social group of students.

5.4 An emotional downside of social media use

On the other hand, in 17 % of the studied media diaries, the informants reflect upon a number of negative and surprised feelings when it comes to their media consumption, and especially their social media use. The fact that almost a fifth of the informants experience their social media use as problematic is notable. They acknowledge a clear indication of using social media too much.

“I’m using social media too often”

“I use social media tragically too much”.

The informants are very aware of their media consumption, connectedness, and social media use and the most mentioned problem is the time aspect. Social media is seen as a time thief, it reflects their inability to plan their time and their activities and they express a need to cut down on social media use.

“I notice that I spend too much time on Internet when I should do other things. This happens when you don’t plan your time and put up clear aims. Inefficient!”

The informants also experience their social media use as one-sided and unnecessary. This is reflected through comments that show recognition of getting very little important or interesting information compared to the time they spend on social media. Furthermore, the informants also often associate their social media use to negative feelings. Shame, guilt, and embarrassment are represented in the comments. They are surprised and scared to see how much they are connected through social media, which generates comments on the feeling of shame and embarrassment. In addition, they feel guilty that they have less time to do “sensible” things.

“I was surprised to see how much I sit on front of a computer”

“I was frightened to see how often I check Facebook, it is something I do when I’m bored.”

“This week will reveal an embarrassing insight into how much time I spend on my computer.”

They even describe themselves as addicted to social media and consider frequent social media use as bad for their mentality. They identify so-called checking habits, which overrules rational thinking. More

specific downsides are mentioned like being influenced by advertisements, which was considered as negative.

“I start to realize how addicted I am of all my devices. The time consumed on Facebook is unbelievable.”

“It is scary how much time I spend on social media.”

“I’m a kind of a media nerd and I’m always hooked on new trends. .. Sometimes I realize it doesn’t sound good that I have accounts on all these social media sites.”

The informants state the reason to this social media “addiction” is due to the use of smartphones or tablets.

“I feel I should sometimes disconnect from all my devices.”

However, at the same time the informants acknowledge that there are positive aspects related to social media use, e.g., that it is good to be social online, but that it acts as a substitute to being social offline. Also, it is good to be curious, even if not to a large extent, because it might lead to having too much information, which could be challenging to manage. The results also show that men are less negative in emotional terms, and their comments more often concern the time aspect rather than their emotional reactions.

6 Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this paper was to explore how an extensive and frequent social media use really affect young adults, and reflect upon what we can learn from analyzing their perceptions and self-reporting of their social media use. For the purpose of achieving this aim, we conducted a qualitative media diary study among undergraduate students. From the collected media diaries, we can clearly see that there are a lot of different internal as well as external factors that affect these young students’ social media behavior and the perceptions of their own social media use.

Even though there has recently been an increasing request for research on “the dark side” of social media (cf. Bawden & Robinson 2009), we found it interesting that there was such a wide range of emotions and experiences expressed when reflecting on one’s individual social media use. Some students experienced their frequent social media use as very convenient, relaxing and fun, whereas others experienced a similar level of activity in social as problematic, time consuming, shameful and embarrassing. In addition, many students reported on an active social media use but expressed no particular emotions or did not really reflect upon this to any greater extent and 24 % of the informants reported on a lesser degree of activity in social media use than normal due to a number of different reasons. While the active/neutral as well as the less/active indifferent profiles also would be interesting to analyze further, for this paper we focused on the students that expressed strong emotions and/or clearly reflected upon the “upside” or the “downside” of frequently using social media. We find that these emotional expressions give us a better picture of the effect of actively using social media might have on these students than the more neutral or indifferent reflections would.

Earlier studies have underlined some positive effects of social media use, for example, helping us to maintain relationships and connect with different social sources (LaRose et al. 2014; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007). The active/positive informants in this study indicated the same positive effects and perceived their social media use as a necessary tool for managing both their everyday life and studies. Furthermore, finding social acceptance, support and a feeling of belonging to a certain community through social media, most likely result in satisfactory emotions like enjoyment, relaxation and convenience. This kind of emotional state and personally perceived rewards encourages a continuous active use of social media and creates media habits where social media is an important and necessary part of the everyday life.

However, actively using social media is also expressed with a great deal of concern by about 17 % of the informants in this media diary study. For example Bawden and Robinson (2009) have identified negative effects of using social media like addiction-like behavior and even abusive or criminal conduct. Some of the students reflected upon kind of an addiction-like behavior. Most experienced this as something negative due to the fact that using social media actively is time-consuming and takes away time and focus from other activities or tasks. What is interesting is that the informants clearly have an idea of what might be an acceptable amount of time for using social media, but they seem to be unable to

articulate what this acceptable time limit would be and if this is created or affected by collective norms. When they perceive that they are exceeding this acceptable time limit (even though it is not clearly stated), feelings of anxiety, shame, guilt and embarrassment are expressed. These tendencies can be explained in the light of Hardin's (2009) theory as a tendency to compare one's own everyday life decisions and their rationality to an imagined 'absolute' rational behavior described by the rational choice theory. The anxiety is triggered by a clash of a behavior that is reasonable in an everyday life context, but appears as excessive when it is compared to an essentially utopian norm. The negative emotions expressed in the media diaries can be described as guilt and embarrassment, to a certain degree also shame. The embarrassment arises from the social norms connected to computer and social media use; it is generally considered bad to consume too much media. The guilt is more connected to the time aspect; too much time spent on social media instead of other, more important tasks escalate into feelings of bad conscience and guilt. In line with earlier research (cf. Joiner et al. 2005), the women in this study reflected more on anxieties and negative emotional reactions as a consequence of active social media use than the men.

The mixed feelings expressed in the media diaries when reflection upon a frequent social media use, could partly be explained by clashes in the underlying complex (often unconscious) decision-making process where a constant balance between the individual's own rationale and social norms and judgments. Previous research identified factors like the level of anonymity and the readiness to adopt new media (cf. Correa, Hinsley & de Zuniga 2010; Chan-Olmsted, Rim & Zerba 2013) as important in this kind of decision-making processes. However, in line with for example Liao et al. (2009) we see that habits and habitual behavior seem to have a greater influence. People tend to use social media out of mere habit rather than because of rational (or irrational) decisions according to any desirable outcome. The study supports this observation; the four profiles show that majority of the informants are active media consumers with distinct routines and habits. The diaries also reveal that the informants are unaware of these habits as they are surprised by their own media habits when asked to report and reflect on these.

The students also reflected upon the balance of managing a constant information and media overload. Ji, Ha and Sypher (2014) point out the key in media and overall digital literacy as easing the feeling of information and connection overload. In line with this, the informants comment on the need to cut down on social media use and more generally to disconnect themselves from all their devices.

In the future, it would be useful to further examine the linkages of the social media profiles, emotions and the perceptions of social media use in order to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of the patterns represented by the profiles. Also, we suggest that information and connection overload, and the emotions triggered by being constantly online, are important topics to study further to improve our understanding of the determinants of social media behavior among young individuals.

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