

# **Being together online: a qualitative study of teenagers' information sharing on Facebook**

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## **Abstract**

Social networking sites have become immensely popular, especially among Norwegian teenagers. An integral part of these sites is information sharing. Most previous research, however, has investigated teenagers' information sharing in light of risks and concerns. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, was to get teenagers' thoughts and experiences of how and why they share information on Facebook. The study was conducted through qualitative interviews with 7 Norwegian teenagers, as well as observations and solicited diaries. My study revealed that why and how teenagers' shared information on the site was influenced by the nature of their intended audience; their offline contacts. Motivation for sharing information included giving and receiving reaffirmation, being recognizable to and to been seen by their friends. At the same time information sharing was part of their social interaction on the site; a key motivation for signing up. While Facebook gave teenagers new opportunities to be together, it also introduced new challenges. After all, my study showed that what teenagers shared on the site was often visible to close friends and distant others, as well as to parents and peers. This, I found had implications for how teenagers shared information on the site.

## Preface

By now, it seems as though I am one of the few people left of my generation that have not joined Facebook. I just do not understand what all the fuss is about. I frequently get the comment “everyone is on Facebook” Well, why should I do something just because everyone else does? Thus, although I knew I wanted to write something about children and media, I also knew that I did not want to write about Facebook. I made this very clear to my fellow students. They suggested that I could write something about television, about movies or other more traditional forms of media instead. “Nah” I said, “I have been there, done that”. What I had not done was writing something about new media. There it was again, the comment “Why don’t you write about Facebook”. I said “No way”. Yet here I am studying teenagers' usage of the social networking site Facebook. I am not sure how this happened, but it did. I suppose it was a way to satisfy my curiosity, to understand what it is about this phenomenon that captivates so many. But is not this the very essence of sciences such as anthropology, to study cultures different from that of your own? To understand why people act as they do? Should this not also be the focus of a childhood studies thesis? To understand why children do what they do? To get a better understanding of their culture? So join me now, in my journey into unknown territory.

## List of acronyms

FB	Facebook
SNS	Social networking sites

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

More Norwegian teenagers have a working social networking profile than teenagers in any other European country surveyed by EU Kids Online (Livingstone, Ólafsson & Staksrud 2011). In fact, one Norwegian study indicate that social networking sites (SNS) has become a part of teenagers everyday life. After all, 60% of the children surveyed by Skog (2010) said that they used SNS every day. Moreover, Danah Boyd's (2008) found that teenagers' SNS usage can be linked to their offline peer culture. In fact, some teenagers consider SNS so important that they have linked it to social existence (Sierra 2006). An important part of SNS is sharing of information and experiences, expressing themselves and collecting information (Livingstone 2010; Vandoninck, d'Haenens, De Cock & Donoso 2012). Despite the role and apparent importance of information sharing on SNS in young people's lives, adult-centric perspectives about teenagers' information sharing have dominated academic research. Although these perspectives are important, research that does not involve children's voices may produce biased results. Involving children's voices, however, may result in a more accurate picture of the situation. Arguing that teenagers' voices and peer culture are important too, this thesis will set out to fill this gap in research. Consequently, teenagers' information sharing practices on SNS will be investigated as a part of their peer culture. In order to get teenagers' own thoughts and experiences about information sharing on SNS, I conducted a qualitative study of seven Norwegian eight-graders. The first part of the chapter will introduce the background of the study, the research problem, the aims and perspectives underlying this thesis. The chapter will then outline the research questions. Finally, the chapter will give an outline of the present thesis.

### **1.1 Background, research problem aims and perspectives**

Throughout this thesis the concept “teenagers” will refer to individuals between thirteen- and eighteen years of age. SNS can be defined as “...Internet based meeting places, where the users, via personalized profiles can link to each other and list each others as friends and thus communicate and socialize across physical and temporal boundaries” (own translation) (Larsen 2009, p.1). Being on social networking sites is a popular pastime among Norwegian

teenagers (Medietilsynet 2012). In fact, social networking sites are unusually popular among

Norwegian teenagers (Livingstone, Ólafsson, & Staksrud 2011). A study, for example, 59% of Norwegian 12 -14 year old, and 80% of 15 – 16 old say they use SNS sites frequently (Medietilsynet 2012). Some teenagers even use SNS several times a day (Skog 2010). This indicates that social networking sites have become a part of many teenagers' daily life.

Moreover, a questionnaire revealed that the most important activity on SNS for youths was to socialize with people they knew (Vandoninck, d'Haenens & De Cock et al. 2012). Similarly, a study about teenagers' sociality in networked publics revealed that teenagers frequently used SNS to socialize with their offline peers (Boyd 2008). Thus, it was argued that SNS can be seen as an extension of offline peer culture (ibid.). Teenagers themselves view these sites as spaces where they can hang out with their peers, private spaces that should be free from adult participation and snooping (Boyd 2007a; Boyd 2008; Ito et al. 2008). These sites are used to stay in touch with their friends, to stay updated on peers and to participate in peer culture (Lenhart & Madden 2007; Boyd 2008; Larsen 2009; Spekter 2009; Johannessen 2012). This shows that peer culture is an important part of SNS. Furthermore, the interface of SNS such as facebook, one can argue, encourages information sharing. After all, SNS are created around the presentation of profiles (Acquisti & Gross 2006; Boyd 2007a). The role of information sharing on SNS is also emphasized by teenagers who say they use SNS to share and collect information (Vandoninck, d'Haenens & De Cock et al. 2012). This could indicate that information sharing on SNS is a part of teenagers' participation in peer culture. Previous research, however, have dedicated little attention to this fact. In order to shed light on the role of information sharing in teenagers peer culture on SNS, therefore, this thesis set out to investigate teenager's thoughts and experiences of information sharing on SNS.

The present study draws on perspectives from the social studies of children and childhood. Children, therefore, are considered as active meaning makers. This, however, does not mean that children are seen as unaffected by social structures. Rather, children will be considered as social actors whose lives are heavily influenced by the social structures that surround them. Thus this thesis aims to investigate children's perspective and children's culture. Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to gain insight and understanding of teenagers'

thoughts and experiences of sharing information on social networking sites. I approached the study with a sample of 7 Norwegian 8 graders from the Stavanger area. Because all of the participants in my study used Facebook, this site became the main focus of this study. Moreover, the study was conducted using ethnographically inspired methods. Ethnography has been considered a highly appropriate methodology when studying children and childhood (Prout & James 1990). The argument for this is that “It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research” (ibid., pp. 8- 9). Consequently, ethnography is suitable for getting the informants own views and perspectives. Getting teenagers own perspectives, however, have not always been the aim of previous research.

Traditionally, two polarized discourses have shaped the debates surrounding children's media usage. On the one hand it has been viewed in terms of hopes, celebrations and fascination (Tingstad 2003; Buckingham 2004; Drotner 2009). On the other hand it has also been interpreted in light of concerns and fears (Tingstad 2003; Buckingham 2004; Drotner 2009). It is important to note, however, that children within this thesis will be seen as both competent and vulnerable. Consequently, children's media usage will be approached from a nuanced perspective where it will be seen as both beneficial and harmful. Many adults, however, have been concerned about teenagers sharing practises on SNS.

Some have argued that the Internet blurs the line between public and the private. Barnes (2006), for example, argues that because people uses their home computer to post content online it might feel like a private exchange. The problem, however, is that little information posted online is private (ibid.). Consequently, it is often argued that the online world blurs the boundaries between public and private (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes 2007; Rosenblum 2007; Byce 2009). Internet sites such as SNS, therefore, have been said to create an illusion of privacy (Barnes 2006). As we have seen information sharing is a part of SNS. Some adults, therefore, are concerned by the search-ability, visibility and permanence of the information youngsters disclose on SNS (Gross & Acquisti 2005; Boyd 2007a; Rosenblum 2007). It is argued that the information on SNS could lead to online sexual exploitation, cyber bullying, third party data mining, phishing, damage to reputation, unwanted contact, stalking, identity

theft and hacking (Bryce 2009; Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes 2009). Such discourses of concerns and fear, one can argue, have influenced studies on teenagers' information sharing on SNS.

Several researchers have investigated teenagers information sharing on SNS. Most of these studies, however, have focused on teenagers information sharing in terms of privacy and personal information (Lenhart & Madden 2007; Pierce 2007; Hinduja & Patchin 2008; Patchin & Hinduja 2010; Taraszow et al. 2010). Moreover, two of these studies investigated adults concerns without involving children's own thoughts and opinions. Consequently, much research has investigated teenagers from an adult-centric perspective that interpret their information sharing on SNS in terms of risks and harmful consequences. These are of course important issues, issues that should be investigated. However, it also indicates that there is a gap in the research of teenagers sharing of information; a gap where sharing information is only interpreted in light of adults fears and concerns. This reinforces David Buckingham's (2004) argument that the debates surrounding children and new media, seldom involves children's own voices. Not involving children's voices in research is problematic for several reasons. First of all, only children can know what they experience, think and feel. Thus research that does not involve children's voices, are likely to build on adult presumptions. These presumptions, one can argue, are influenced by various discourses surrounding children and media. Discourses where children are positioned as vulnerable and in need of protection. This of course, becomes problematic when these presumptions are presented as facts, misleading facts that may influence future policies. Thus children are denied their right to voice their opinion in all matters that concerns them.

## **1.2 Research and interview questions**

In order to gain this insight and understanding of teenager's thoughts and experiences sharing of information at social networking sites, I set out to answer the research question: "Why and how do teenagers' share information at social networking sites". Several guiding interview questions were developed. These questions are divided into three sections. The first section, *introduction*, focused on

- a) What kinds of SNS the informants use.
- b) The role of social networking sites (SNS) in their life, how much time the informant spends on SNS
- c) What the informant does on SNS networking sites and what pleasures the informant derives from it.

The main section investigates how and why teenagers share information on SNS.

- a) How the informant interacts with others on SNS and the informant's perception of the role of information sharing on SNS.
- b) What kind of information the informant shares on SNS, and why he/she shares this information.
- c) How the informant defines personal information on SNS and why/ why not, do the informant share personal information on SNS.
- d) The informant's opinion and experience of the effects of information disclosure on SNS.

The final section, concentrated on privacy:

- a) How the informant define privacy and how the informant define privacy on SNS
- b) Does the informant feel that SNS compromises his/her privacy, why/why not?
- c) Does the informant protect his/her privacy on SNS, why/why not?
- d) How does the informant protect his/her privacy on SNS?

### **1.3 Thesis Outline**

The first chapter, chapter 1, introduces the topic. This, as we have seen, is done through various stages. First, the chapter contextualises Norwegian teenagers access to- and usage of SNS. Thereafter, the chapter introduces the research problem, along with important concepts, research perspective, aims, objectives, research questions and a brief thesis outline. Chapter two will contextualise the study. The chapter, therefore, will start by giving a brief introduction of Norway, the study site. Thereafter, the chapter will look at how Norwegian teenagers lives are influenced by structures. The last part of the chapter will look at

teenager's access to and usage of SNS, definitions of SNS, historical overview of SNS as well as interface and features of SNS. Chapter three starts by outlining the theoretical perspective underlying this thesis. Thereafter the chapter will move into a review of previous literature. Chapter four looks more closely at the methods and how the research question was approached methodologically. It will also cover areas such as the ethical considerations. The next chapter, chapter five, will present and discuss the research findings. Drawing on previous chapters, the final chapter, chapter six, will sum up by presenting a conclusion and future recommendations.

## **Chapter 2: Background**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to present background information relevant for this study. The chapter, therefore, will start by giving a brief introduction of the country this study was conducted in; Norway. Thereafter, the chapter will give the reader a brief description of the study area as well as some contextual information. Next chapter will move into a description of teenagers access to- and usage of SNS. With this in mind, the final part of the chapter will attempt to define SNS as well as describing its interface.

### **2.2 Geography and demographics**

The kingdom of Norway is ruled by a unitary parliament and has a constitutional monarchy. It is situated in Northern Europe and in the western parts of Scandinavia. While the country have a long coastline, the eastern side of Norway is connected to land and share borders with Sweden, Russia and Finland (Store norske leksikon 2005-2007a). Norway, has a series of mountains, fjords, valleys and high plateaus and the mainland covers an area of 323 787 km<sup>2</sup> (Central Intelligence Agency 2012?; Statistisk sentralbyrå 2012a). Even so, Norway has a relatively small population where approximately 22% are bellow 18 years of age (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2012b). The life expectancy for these children is relatively high. It is estimated that the life expectancy for children born in 2010 is 83 years for females and 79 years for males (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2012a) This is a result of various factors influenced by the economy such as, high living standard, health, nutrition and the housing conditions (Munthe 2011).

### **2.3 Economy**

Norway has been described as one of the richest countries in the world (Store norske leksikon 2005-2007a). Historically, Norway used to be substantially poorer than it is today (Frøland 2011). This, however, is no longer the case. Today's good economy is a result of various

factors such as access to energy, trade and Norway's location in relation to markets (Store norske leksikon 2005-2007a). One of the largest factors, however, was the discovery of massive oil and gas revenues (ibid.). During the early 1970s this started what can be described as an economic boom (Frøland 2011).

Norway has some economic inequality. Men for example, generally earn more than women (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2012a). Moreover, the gap between rich and poor is increasing (Simonsen, Rudi & Mortensen n.d.). In fact, it is estimated that 5–10 % of the Norwegian population lives in poverty (ibid.). This poverty is usually not life threatening, but relative (ibid.). Despite these inequalities, welfare politics have ensured a relative equal society (Store norske leksikon 2005-2007a). Most people, for instance, have their own computers and Internet access.

## **2.4 Brief description of Rogaland and Stavanger**

In 2009 the county Rogaland had 420 574 inhabitants (Thorsnæs 2013). Rogaland, is situated in the south west Norway. With its long coastline, mountains, fjords, forests, farmland, cities and populated areas, it covers an area of 9 378 km<sup>2</sup> (Bratthammer 2012; Thorsnæs 2013). While some of the county borders to the north sea, it also shares borders with the counties Hordaland, Aust-Agder, Vest-Agder and Telemark (Thorsnæs 2013). All of the participants in this study lived in Rogaland. While six of the participants lived in the Stavanger area, one participant lived in another, smaller city in the county. Due to the anonymity of the participants, however, only Stavanger will be described in detail.

Stavanger is a municipality (kommune) and a city. It is situated southwest in Norway in Rogaland, close to the North Sea. Stavanger is Norway's fourth largest city, covers an area of 71 (km<sup>2</sup>) and has approximately 127 506 inhabitants (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2012a). Since Norway started its oil production in 1971, Stavanger have been labelled the "Oil Capital" of the country (Gjerde 2007?). In fact it have been argued that the oil changed Stavanger from a small and sleepy city to a city with an internationalized city (Gjerde 2007?). Another important result of the oil findings was its economic significance. During the early 1970s

Stavanger's taxpayers had a relatively low net income (Gjerde 2007?). During the 1980s and 1990s, however, Stavanger's taxpayers had a higher net income than the taxpayers in the other largest cities (Gjerde 2007?). Due to the high net income, therefore, most teenagers in Stavanger is likely to have access to the Internet from home. Even so, teenagers lives are influenced by structures.

## **2.5 Being a teenager in Norway**

Modern childhood can be described in terms of what unites children, and only children, namely the time spent at school and by their legal status as minors (Qvortrup 2002). This argument, I propose, can be extended to include today's teenagers in Norway. First of all, teenagers in Norway are expected to attend school for a significant part of their lives.

Although children in Norway start school around the age of six, they are legally obliged to attend both primary school and lower secondary education (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2000). This means that teenagers are legally obliged to attend ten years of basic education. In year eight, therefore, these children have become teenagers. Thus, teenagers between thirteen and sixteen years are legally obliged to attend school. When teenagers have finished primary school and lower secondary education at the age of fifteen or sixteen years, they are expected to continue their education. After finishing their compulsory schooling, therefore, most teenagers start upper secondary education and training. This level of education usually takes three years (ibid). Although teenagers are not legally obliged to continue their education beyond lower secondary education, they are strongly encouraged to do so. The county council (fylkeskomune), for example, is legally obliged to follow up the teenagers and youngsters between 16 – 21 years who are neither in education nor working (ibid). Consequently, most Norwegian teenagers spend all their teenage years in school.

Secondly, individuals in Norway who are below the age of eighteen years of age are legal minors. According § 1 of the Guardianship Act (Vergemålsloven) an individual below the age of eighteen is considered as legal minors without legal capacity (Vegemålsloven 1927; Store norske leksikon 2005-2007c). Thus, according § 2, those below the age of eighteen cannot decide over their own means nor enter commitments that requires legal capacity (Vegemålsloven 1927b). Parents and guardians, therefore, have much authority over their

teenagers until they reach the age of eighteen. There are of course exceptions to this rule, such as individuals who are considered as incapable of managing his/her own affairs, and thus have been legally incapacitated (Umyndiggjørelsesloven 1898, § 1). Even so, most Norwegian teenagers are influenced by structures. Despite this, most teenagers have spare time that they can use to access the Internet.

## **2.6 Teenager's access and usage**

Many of today's teenagers are frequent users of digital technology. In fact in many teenagers in the minority world have grown up with it, and it have become part of their every day life (Youn 2005). Most Norwegian teenagers have access to digital technology such as the Internet (Medietilsynet 2010). Over 90% of these teenagers have access to the Internet from home (Vaage 2011; Tns galup 2012). Norwegian teenagers have access from their own- or others computes or through other electronic home equipment (Medietilsynet 2010).

Teenagers, however, does not only have access to Internet from home; they also have access at school, at friends houses, at the library, on mobile phones and open networks (Medietilsynet 2010). Clearly then, the Internet is easily accessible for Norwegian teenagers.

The access to Internet is reflected in teenager's usage of the medium. In 2010 approximately 70% of Norwegian 9-15 year olds used Internet on a daily bases (Vaage 2011). A year later 83% of Norwegian 9-15 year olds used Internet on a daily basis (Vaage 2012). This indicates that teenager's usage of Internet is increasing rapidly. Similarly a survey of teenagers from Stavanger shows that there has been a 34% increase in teenagers who have used the Internet more than twice in the last week (Frøyland & Sletten 2011). Not only is the frequency of Internet visits increasing, but studies also indicate that the time spent online is increasing. In 2010 it was found that 9-15 years old spent an average of 66 minutes on the Internet every day (Vaage 2011). A year later the same age group used Internet for 75 minutes every day (Vaage 2012). Other studies, however, have found that teenagers Internet usage is higher. One study has found that Norwegian children and teenagers spend approximately 2 hours online everyday (Medietilsynet 2010). A qualitative study even indicated that teenager's usage could become as high as 8-12 hours online everyday (Johannessen 2012). Although the amount

time teenagers spend online varies from study to study, it is clear that the Internet is becoming a more and more important part of teenager's everyday life.

One popular online activity among teenager is using social networking sites (Medietilsynet 2012). In 2007 18% of 9-15 year olds and 30% of 16 – 24 year olds were on social networking sites (Vaage 2008). Four years later, in 2011 52% 9-15 year olds and 83% of were on social networking sites (Vaage 2012). This indicates that social networking sites are becoming more and more popular. Moreover studies have shown that, in 2011, 92% of Norwegian teenagers between 13 – 16 used social networking sites (Livingstone Ólafsson & Staksrud 2011). Studies have indicated that 81% of 12-14 year olds use social networking sites every week (Medietilsynet 2012). While not all teenagers use SNS everyday, Almost 60% of the teenagers until 16 years old used the social networking site Facebook everyday (Skog 2010). Medietilsynet (2012), however, found that 47% of children between twelve and fourteen used SNS daily. This shows that SNS is a popular activity among teenagers who have access- to and use the Internet.

## **2.7 Defining social networking sites**

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as "...web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." (ibid., p. 211). The authors continue their article, by distinguishing between social networking sites and social network sites. Networking sites, to them, implies that the users main purpose is to extend their network. Although networking is possible within social network sites, it is not their main purpose. Rather it focuses on communication with existing connections. These connections are publicly displayed, and thus may also encourage communication with previous social ties such as old classmates (ibid.). Boyd and Ellison's definition, however, have been criticized. First of all, the definition has been criticized for being too wide and inclusive (Larsen 2009; Beer 2008). After all, it includes websites that are not commonly considered as social networking sites such as the video sharing site youtube (Larsen 2009). Beer (2008) argues

that the overlap of website functions makes categorizing different online cultures complex. Pointing to Boyd and Ellison's "networking" and "network", therefore, Beer argues that the differences between them should be grounds for distinctions not expansions (ibid.). After all, due to the "...rapid cultural shifts and the dynamic and disjointed nature of much contemporary online culture there is a pressing need to classify in order to work toward a more descriptive analysis" (ibid., p. 518). Another criticism is that Boyd and Ellison's definition attempts to categorize websites as SNS based on the different functions of the particular website (Larsen 2009). The problem with this definition is that the users may find other purposes for a particular website than it was initially intended for (ibid.). As a result Larsen has added to Boyd and Ellison's definition, suggesting that definitions of social networking sites should account for the actions performed by the users (ibid.). Consequently, this thesis will employ Larsen's definition of social networking sites that was outlined in chapter 1.

## **2.8 SNS History**

The actual beginning of the social networking era, one could argue depends on your definition of SNS. Boyd and Ellison (2007), for example, described the 1997 Internet community SixDegrees.com as the first social networking site. After all, the site was the first to allow its users to combine the creation of profiles with displays friends list and surfing of friends lists (ibid.). Since then, many social networking sites have been introduced such as blink.no 2002, MySpace and LinkedIn in 2003 (Boyd 2007a; Flage 2011?; LinkedIn n.d). In 2004 another SNS was introduced; The Facebook (Phillips 2007).

The Facebook was developed by Mark Zuckerberg and introduced to his fellow students at Harvard University (Phillips 2007). Later, The Facebook extended to a number of other US universities (ibid.), and by the end of 2004 the Facebook reached 1 million users. In August 2005 The Facebook became Facebook.com (FB) (ibid.). That same autumn the FB became available to American high schools and later foreign universities (ibid.). At the end of the year, FB had reached 6 million users. In autumn 2006 any one who had access to the Internet, could join FB (Facebook 2006). Thus the number of FB users continued to increase and as of

October 2012, FB claimed that they had one billion active users every month (Facebook 2012). The popularity of FB was also evident in my sample of informants. After all, it was the only SNS that all of my informants used. Due to its popularity, therefore, SNS became the focus of my study.

## **2.9 Interface and features**

Different SNS have different interfaces and features. As Alessandro Acquisti and Ralph Gross so adequately puts it «...specific goals and patterns of usage vary significantly across different services» (2006, p.72). Most SNS, however, are built around the presentation of profiles (ibid.; Boyd 2007a). These profiles, therefore, often include information about the profile owner. Another commonality on SNS, is the display of friends through e.g. friends lists (Acquisti & Gross 2006). These commonalities are evident in the popular SNS Facebook.

Like most SNS, Facebook are created around profiles. At the top of the profile, the profile owner is allowed to display a banner sized cover image or illustration of his/her own choosing. Just below this cover image, the profile owners name is displayed. The name is displayed next to a profile photo. Replacing the old profile and the wall, today's profiles are organized around a time line (Duffy 2012). The timeline runs through the centre of the profile and display the owner's user history (ibid.). It does so by organizing the information posted by and sometimes about the profile owner reverse-chronologically (ibid.). A FB profile, therefore, usually contains much information about the profile owner.

Facebook's interface encourages its users to display information across their profiles. One section for example allows work positions and education. Another section, the about you section allows the profile owner to write about him/her self. The profile also allows the user to post what is described as basic information. This basic information includes gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, languages, birthday, religion and political views. It is also possible to display contact information on FB. This contact information can include information such as mobile phone number, e-mail, other phones, IM screen name, address, town, city, zip, neighbourhood, website and network. Profiles also include a list where ones

friends are displayed. This is not the only list on FB. Another list is “likes”. On the likes list, teenagers can add things they like such as favourite books, music, television, movies, games, interests, groups and companies. This, however, is not the only function of likes. Likes also allows its users to give feedback and connect (Facebook n.d.a). By pressing the like button on someone else’s photograph, for example, the profile owner can tell others that they liked it (Facebook n.d.a). Some other profile features include photos and maps. Maps allow the user to add the places he/she has been, as well as places he/she have lived (Facebook n.d.b). This can be done by e.g. checking in from a phone or adding particular life event to the map (Facebook n.d.b). Although FB interface seem to encourage such information sharing, much information sharing on FB is optional, and can be set to both public and private. Similarly, interaction with friends can occur both publicly and privately. The profile owner, for example, can often choose whether what they publish should be available to the public, friends, only me and custom. One way of interacting is though using pokes. After pushing the poke button, the person who was poked receives a notification (Facebook n.d.c). This feature, FB, suggest can be used e.g. to say hi to FB friends (Facebook n.d.c). Some other ways to interact includes posting content such as pictures, update status, commenting on their friends profiles, liking friends content to name but a few. Unless the profile owner set the content they publish to private, it may appear on their friends news feeds. News feeds is a function that gives you an update on what has happened on FB recently such as friends updates (Facebook n.d.d). Even so, the profile owners can choose wether or not they want to receive news feeds about their friends activities (Facebook n.d.d). There are, however, also less public ways to communicate with ones friends. Its users can, for example, send e-mail messages through FB. This e-mail account can be used to send and receive e-mail from other e-mail systems such as gmail and hotmail (Facebook n.d.e). Another more private way to interact with friends is FB's chat function. This function allows it users to communicate “privately” with their FB friends (Wiseman 2008). This, of cause, is only few of the features on FB. The features outlined above, however, indicate that communication and information sharing plays an important role on SNS.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical perspectives**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The following chapter will outline the theoretical perspective underlying this thesis and give a review of relevant literature. Theoretical perspectives plays an important role in research. First of all, theoretical framework represent the researcher views and beliefs, which in turns guides the research process (Brennen 2012). In doing so it "...becomes an advocacy perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed..."(Creswell 2008, p. 62) Secondly, theory helps the research make sense of the data (Brennen 2012). This chapter, therefore, will start by outlining the theoretical perspectives that helped me investigate the thesis aim and research questions, particularly the social studies of children and childhood. This will led into a historical overview of how children's media usage have been studied. Finally, the chapter will contextualise the present study, by moving on in to a brief review of relevant literature.

### **3.2 Studying children and childhood**

Before the 1970s perspectives from sociology and psychology dominated research on children and childhood (James 2009). Some theories within these disciplines viewed children as largely passive and with little agency. Many theories also compared children to adults. These adults were seen as the normative, and those who have not reached adulthood, therefore, were seen as incomplete and immature (James and James 2004). Thus childhood was seen as a journey towards completion; towards adulthood. These theories proposed that this maturation process was a natural and a universal phenomena; it happen to everyone, everywhere (Prout and James 1990). Such ideas, however, have not go unchallenged. Early ideas about children and childhood, for example, have been criticized for viewing children as unfinished becomings and childhood as a universal and natural phenomena (Ibid). As a result of criticisms such as these, that took place during the 1970s and 1980s, some scholars proclaimed a paradigm shift (James, Jenks & Prout 1998). Although the ideas that a paradigm shift took place can be debated (Ryan 2008), the ideas found within this "new" approach have been a major theoretical perspective underlying this thesis. Frequently referred to as *the*

*social studies of children and childhood*, this paradigm presented a different view of children and childhood.

### **3.3 The social studies of children: key features**

Since the alleged paradigm shift, many scholars have embraced the social studies of children and childhood. According to Prout and James (1990), the paradigm has six key features. Firstly children and childhood are socially constructed. Secondly, there are not one universal childhood, but many childhoods. Thirdly, children, their relationships and their culture should be studied from children's own perceptions free from adult presumptions. Fourthly, children are active beings with agency. Fifthly, Children should be given a more direct voice in research. Lastly, they argue that "...to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society (Prout & James 1990, p.9). As previously outlined this perspective has been a major theoretical perspective underlying the thesis. Consequently, each of Prout and James six points will be discussed.

### **3.4 Social constructionism**

A fundamental perspective that underlies this thesis is social constructionism. Social constructionism is "A theoretical perspective that explores the ways in which 'reality' is negotiated in everyday life through people's interactions and through sets of discourses" (James and James 2012, p.116). To a social constructionist, therefore, there is not one 'reality'. Rather the ideas of what 'reality' is build upon taken-for-granted ideas. These ideas or discourses then, become produced and reproduced throughout society. This reproduction occurs throughout "... social structures, political and economic institutions, beliefs, cultural mores, laws policies and the everyday actions of both adults and children..." (James and James 2004, p.13). Different discourses, therefore, saturate society to such an extent that they become taken-for-granted 'realities'. Social constructionists, therefore, suggest that these ideas are not natural, but socially constructed. One example of social constructionism is the ideas about children and childhood.

Childhood, within this thesis, will be seen as a social construction. This idea is a direct critique of previous child research. Child researchers often proposed that children were naturally and universally different from adults. The social studies of children and childhood, however, suggest that the difference between adults and children is, to a large extent, a social construction (Archard 2004, p. 26); it is historically, socially and culturally constructed. Examples of this can be found across history. Although criticized, a study by Philippe Ariès (1962) suggested that children in medical society was treaded like adults. Thus he argued that childhood, in this period, did not exist (ibid.). His studies, however, revealed that children became constructed as different from adults during the 15th and 16th century (ibid.). This indicates that what it means to be a child varies according to the historical period in witch it takes place. Another frequent argument is that childhood is culturally produced. James and James (2012), for example, points to the fact that children and childhood is understood differently through out the world (Ibid.). Children, in some countries, are seen as competent and capable and thus encouraged to work. In other countries, however, children are seen as vulnerable and should be protected from work because it is seen as harmful for them (Ibid.). A third argument is that although children live in the same historical period, and in the same culture, children's lives are not necessarily the same (James and James 2004). After all, childhood interplays with other factors such as class, gender and race (Prout and James 1990). In line with the social studies of children and childhood, therefore, this thesis will propose that the ideas about what it means to be a child is not natural or universal, but a social construct. These different ideas about children and childhood, it has been argued, are based on discourses.

### **3.5 Discourses about children and childhood**

A discourse can be explained as a "...set of interconnected ideas held together by a particular ideology or view of the world" (Rogers 2002, p.21). There are, however, usually more than one interconnected idea, or discourse circulating in the society at any given time (Montgomery 2002). One example of this are the discourses about children and childhood. Discourses about children entails ideas about what children are and how they should be treated (Rogers 2002). As indicated earlier in this chapter, some believe that children are

vulnerable and needs to be protected from work. In contrast other believe that children are capable and thus should be allowed to work. This shows that there are different ideas, or discourses about children and their competences circulating in society. As we have seen, social constructionists view such ideas as social constructs rather than absolute truths. Social constructs that are constantly produced and reproduced throughout "... social structures, political and economic institutions, beliefs, cultural mores, laws policies and the everyday actions of both adults and children..." (James and James 2004, p.13). The different understandings about the perceived competence and capabilities of children, have influenced debates about children's agency.

### **3.6 Agency and structure**

As we have seen, some researchers within psychology and sociology viewed children as incomplete human beings; as becomings. This means that children were compared to the adult ways of being and thus seen as unfinished beings on their journey towards the complete state of adulthood. As a result children are often understood "...as dependent and passive recipient of adults' actions" (Lee 2001, p. 8). This idea, however, is often challenged by scholars within the social studies of children and childhood. Children, they argue, are not passive and incomplete. Rather, children are "...shaping as well as shaped by their social circumstances" (James, Jenks & Prout 1998, p. 6). Children within this paradigm, therefore, are considered as beings; social actors with agency (Prout & James 1990). Agency can be defined as "...an individual's own capacities, competencies, and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds, fulfilling many economic, social and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual/collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives" (Robson, Bell and Klocker 2007). In other words, children have the ability to shape their own lives; they think and they do (Robson, Bell and Klocker 2007; Prout and James 1990; James, Jenks and Prout 1998). To what extent children have the possibility to exercise their agency, however, is debated. After all, children's agency is likely to be influenced by social structures.

One social structure that have particular influence on children's lives are generations (Mayall

2002). After all, today's society is generationally structured (Alanen 2001). This means that peoples position in society is based on witch generation they belong to. Generation can be defined as “ ...all of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively...” (McKean 2009). One such generation is children. Through their everyday interaction, children become constructed as children and adults become constructed as adults (Alanen 2001). While one of the characteristics of the status as children is age, Qvortrup suggest that childhood, as a structural form, is defined by what children are doing (2002). He goes on to explain that children becomes constructed as such through what unites children, namely the amount of their time spent in school and their legal status as minors (Qvortrup 2002). The reason for why children are considered as legal minors, one could ague is their alleged incompetence. Adults, however, define what it mens to be competent (ibid). Thus adults, have assigned children the status as incompetent (ibid.). As we have seen, however, adults are seen as competent. Thus it is a common conception that adults have a natural “...right to exert power over children” (Qvortrup 2002, p.53). This in turn, influence children's activities, opportunities and experiences (Alanen 2001). One example of this can be found in the minority world, where children is “...dependent on parents for money, for access to friends and to spaces and time outside the home” (Mayall 2002, p.48). This of cause, is not the only ways adults influence children's activities, opportunities and experiences. After all, adults have tremendous power to decide where children should be, when and what they should do. Adults, for example, have decided that children should spend much of their time in school. Consequently, social structures such as generation is likely to influence children's agency. To what extent theses structures control children's agency is greatly debated. Nevertheless, children and young people, do not necessarily do what adults tell them to do unquestionably. Rather, they attempt to influence their lives through bargaining, negotiation or subtle resistance of adult control (Mayall 2002; Robson, Bell and Klocker 2007). This indicates that are influenced by social structures, but at the same time they are not just passive recipients of adult actions, but beings with agency. The argument within this thesis, therefore, is that children are social agents who at the same time are influenced by structures such as generation.

### **3.7 A voice in research**

This thesis set out to involve children's voices in research. The arguments for this is that children are competent beings and that they help adults gain insight into children's worlds. Not listening to children, therefore, is to deny their status as beings with agency. When listening to children's voices, however, the researcher acknowledges the fact that children are competent beings with agency and their own opinions. With this in mind, children should be considered as experts of their own perception (Grover 2004). First of all, children's opinions and viewpoints may differ from that of adults (Lee 2001). Secondly, only the informants can know how they think and feel. Research that does not involve children own voices, therefore, is likely to result in incomplete data. Consequently, scholars within the social studies of children and childhood stresses the importance of involving children's voices in research. Another argument within this paradigm is that children's relationships and culture should be studied from children's own perspectives.

### **3.8 Children's culture**

The word culture is often vague, ubiquitous and have many meanings. In fact, culture have been described as one of the most complex words in the english language (Williams 1988). Although an extensive debate of the meaning of the word culture is beyond the scope of this thesis, Marianne Gullestad (1989), describes three common meanings of culture. These three meanings where societal sectors, lifefoms and patterns of behaviour. Childrens culture within this thesis, however, refer to children's patterns of behaviour. Although, this thesis employ the concept of child culture, it is important to note that culture is not generic and static. Rather culture, like childhood, is diverse and dynamic (Fiskeri- og kystdepartementet 2008)

Although few studies were conducted on children's culture during the 18- and 19 hundreds, much of the work focused on culture by adults for children (*Enerstvedt* 1978). Since the 1950's, however, an increasing number of studies have focused on the culture created by children themselves (*Enerstvedt* 1978). One example of this is the folklore research tradition. Examples of researchers within this tradition are Iona Opie and Peter Opie (1959) and Åse

Enerstvedt (1971). Arguing that children's culture should be studied from children's own viewpoints, Opie and Opie looked at children's games and lore in the United Kingdom (2001). Similarly, Enerstvedt (1971) looked at children's games and lore in the Norwegian capital Oslo. Despite the fact that these studies set out to study children's culture, the folklore research tradition is not without flaws. One problem with the studies such as that of Opie and Opie (2001), was the idea that child culture took place in isolation from adult culture.

The idea that children's culture exist in isolation from adult culture has generated much debate. As we have seen, researchers such as Opie and Opie (2001), describe children's culture as little influenced by the adult sophisticated world. In doing so, Opie and Opie describes the tribal child. This means that children are seen as different from adults (Punch 2003). The belief within the tribal childhood paradigm is that children's social worlds are real places that should be studied for their significance for children and not as "... poor imitations or inadequate precursors of adult state of being (Jenks 2004, 91). Another point is that children have autonomy and their own rules and rituals (Jenks 2004). Critics have argued that such views are idolizing and romanticising child culture, and that children's culture does not take place in isolation from adult society (Gullestad 1990; Jenks 2004). Furthermore, William Corsaro, a scholar within the social studies of children and childhood, suggests that it is possible to argue that children produce their own peer cultures, without viewing it as separate from adult culture (Corsaro 2009). With this in mind, he argues that children are part of both adult and child culture, and that these cultures are crossed intricately together (Corsaro 2005). In fact, Corsaro has argued that adult culture "...both extends or elaborate peer culture and simultaneously contributes to the reproduction and extension of the adult world" (Corsaro 2009, p.301). In doing so, he challenges the idea that childhood takes place in isolation from adult society. Nevertheless, the idea that children's culture should be studied from children's own perceptions, have become an important argument within the social studies of children and childhood. As already outlined, this study set out to study children's culture from children's perspective. Like Corsaro, however, the argument within this thesis is that childhood does not take place in isolation from adult culture.

### **3.9 Reconstructing childhood**

Pointing to Giddens, Prout and James (1990) argues that childhood is a good example of the double hermeneutic of social sciences. In simple terms, double hermeneutic is when "...the social sciences encounter a world that is pre-interpreted by its participants. And, when research feeds *its* interpretations of *their* interpretations back into society, it reshapes the object of study" (Jensen 2011, p.54). Researchers that challenged previously held ideas about children and childhood, one can argue, have influenced the way children have been thought of, talked about, written about and treated. Alison James, for example, suggests there has been a "...shift from seeing children as simply the raw and uninitiated recruits of the social world to seeing them as making a contribution to it..." (2001, p. 246). Ideas about what it means to be a child, however, have also influenced studies of children's media usage.

### **3.10 Children's media usage: a historical overview**

Discourses about children and childhood have shaped research on children's media usage. Traditionally, there have been two polarized discourses of children and the media (Buckingham 2004). On one side of the coin, children's media usage have raised concerns and fears, and thus have been investigated in terms of potential harmful effects (Ibid.). On the other side of the coin, children's media has been seen as positive and the audience have been studied as active meaning makers (Ibid.). In order to position this thesis, therefore, the following section set out to outline the debates surrounding children's media usage.

#### **3.10.1 Discourses of concern and fears**

Historically, the introduction of new form of media has raised fear and concern amongst parents and educators (Buckingham 2004). Examples of this were cinema, radio, comics, television, video games and the Internet (Critchler 2008). When comics were introduced, Norwegian politicians, for example, were concerned about the moral content of comics and comics effect on children and young people (Eike 2006). Later adults were concerned about the violent nature of video games and feared that they were addictive (Shotton 1989). Likewise, the murder of the toddler James Bulgar stimulated much debates during the 1990s. The two boys who killed James were they themselves children. Naturally, many questioned

how two children could murder a toddler. One theory was that the two boys had mimicked the horror movie *Child's Play 3*, where a doll killed humans (Nowicka 1993; Morrison 2003). Consequently, adults were concerned about the easy access to violent videocassettes and its effect on youngsters (Taylor & Willis 1999). Thus, although the worries have been many, a key concern have been what the media does to children. Such discourses have often positioned children as vulnerable and in need of protection. These discourses have- and still circulates in society.

The discourses about children and childhood have influenced how children's media usage have been studied. An early example of this was the Payne Fund Studies. The Payne Fund Studies was a result of the growing concern about children's media usage (Jowett, Jarvie & Fuller 1996). The studies took place during the late 1920's and the early 1930s, and set out to investigate the effect of motion pictures on children (McDonald 2004). Thus the very reason for undertaking this study built on discourses about children and childhood. The study did find evidence that the media had some effect on how children and adults lived their life (Ibid). Interestingly, however, the studies also found that the medias effect varied from child to child and that there was not a "...simple cause-and-effect relationship" (McDonald 2004, p.186) between media consumption and behavior (ibid.). Despite these findings, the ideas that children were largely vulnerable and in need of protection continued to dominate media research in what became known as the media effect tradition.

The media effect tradition has been described as the longest running research tradition within audience studies (O'Neil 2011). Studies within this tradition often suggested that there was a causal link between the media content the audience consumed and their behavior (Hartley 2002). Thus the audience was assumed to be "...generally passive and gullible..." (Creeber 2009, p.13). This, of course, was also the case of the child audience. Thus children were positioned as passive and in need of protection. An extreme variant of this tradition was the hypodermic needle/ magic bullet theory. According to this theory, the media had direct effect on the audience. It suggested that the media message was injected into the passive and uniform audience and that the media had a direct influence on e.g. the audiences behaviour (Fourie 2001). The media effect traditions, however, have had various nuances. Other

examples include the multi step flow theory, selective processes, cultivation theory and social learning theory (Straubhaar, LaRose & Davenport 2010). An example of the latter, is a frequently quoted study by Bandura and Walters (1963). Despite its criticism, it is a very good example of how some academics were influenced by discourses of concern and fear surrounding newer media forms. Bandura and Walters (1963) study set out to investigate whether or not children would copy violent behaviour seen in motion pictures. They did so by exposing three groups of children to violent content in movies and in real life and a fourth group to non violent content. The children were then placed alone in a room together with the *Bobo doll*. Studying these children, Bandura and Walters (1963) found that the groups who had seen violent content were more likely to act aggressively towards the *Bobo doll*. Consequently, it was argued that this experiment showed evidence of media effect (Branston & Stafford 2010; Davies 2010). Since then, however, ideas of the media as having moderate or even limited effects have been introduced, (Baran & Davis 2011). Discussions about children's internet usage, for example, is often discussed in terms of fears and concerns. According to Drotner (2009), discourses of concern can be further categorized into two sub categories. One focus of the discourse of concern is perceived dangers and transgression. Perceived dangers and transgression often refer to issues such as the body, sex and violence (ibid.). A second subcategory is identity performance and display (ibid.). An example of this is the kind of information teenagers share on SNS. Their profiles often includes identity information such as real names, photographs, birthdays, religion, hometown, personal interests, politics, income, religion and sexual preferences (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini 2007; Livingstone 2008). As already outlined, this information sharing concerns many adults. These issues are of course important. In focusing exclusively of the potential harms and negative consequences of teenagers media usage, however, they fail to investigate what children do to the media and the media's role in children's lives. To this day, therefore, much media research and public debate position children as predominantly vulnerable and in need of protection. On the other hand, children's media usage have been discussed in terms of celebration and hope.

### **3.10.2 Discourses of celebration and hope**

The launch of new media forms have resulted in optimistic discourses about children and media (Buckingham 2004). This discourse have been labelled discourses of celebration (Drotner 2009) and discourses of hopes (Buckingham 2004). Beuick (1927), for example, argued that radio programs could have a positive influence on politics, religion and education. Later, computers where believed to inspire learning in new ways (Buckingham 2004). Discourses of celebration and hopes, however, still exist. An example of this is the debates surrounding children's Internet usage. For some, the Internet is believed to provide teenagers with many opportunities (Livingstone & Bober 2006). One example of these opportunities is the idea that the Internet allows children a space where they can be heard, where they can be free from adults and form friendships (Drotner 2009). Other opportunities include Interactivity opportunities, commercial and career opportunities, civic opportunities and learning (Livingstone, Bober & Ellen Helsper 2005). Some academics, however, go beyond outlining the benefits of the Internet. Celebrating the Internet, Don Tapscott (2009) suggest that those who have grown up with the Internet are so knowledgeable and media literate that they can teach the older generations. According to Buckingham (2005), such discourses about celebration and hope celebrates "...the competent child, the child as sophisticated, media literate, autonomous." (p. 11). Consequently, also discourses about the competent child have circulated in society. Naturally, describing children's media usage only in terms of celebration and hope is just as problematic as only describing it in terms of fears and concerns. After all, it may present romanticized versions of children's media usage where children are seen as naturally media competent and immune towards risks (ibid.)

### **3.10.3 Audience research**

A response to the effects tradition was audience research. In the 1940s for example, the uses and gratification approach was introduced (Chandler 1993). This approach was revived in the 1970s and 1980s, and suggested that the audience used the media in order to gratify particular needs (Ibid.). Thus, while the media effect tradition looked at what the media did to the people, audience theories focused on what the audience did to the media. James Halloran, for example, argued that one should focus on what people did to the media, as opposed what the media did to people (Halloran 1970)

Other important contributions towards audience studies were made during the 1970s and 1980s. One example of this was Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model, that looked at how the audience made sense of media text. Another influential contribution was the *The Nationwide* studies. Conducted by David Morley and Charlotte Brunson in the 1978 and 1980, *The Nationwide* studies looked at how different groups in society interpreted the same media text (Morley & Brunson 1999). Both academics suggested that different audience interpreted media in different ways. In doing so, they rejected the idea that all audience react the same way to media texts. Since then, evidence has shown that children and teenagers, like adults are not necessarily vulnerable and incapable, but active meaning-makers. An example of this is Joseph Jay Tobin's (2000) study, *Good Guys Don't Wear Hats: Children's Talk About the Media*. He found that children's interpretation of media content depends on where they live. Similarly, Buckingham (1987) found that youngsters have agency in their interpretation of media texts. This indicates that children, like adults, do not necessarily interpret texts the way the media producers intended it to be read.

### **3.10.4 Modern Audiences**

Traditionally, the concept of audience were referring to relative passive experiences of watching or listening to media content (McQuail 2010). Today, however, being an audience is much more complex. After all, today's media is very different from when audience studies first began. One of these differences is that the digital media allows for a much more interactive experience (McQuail 2010). After all, older forms of media were more of a one way mass-communication where the audience had limited interaction with the media beyond listening or watching (Livingstone 1999; McQuail 2010). Today's media, however, often allows for much interactivity and searching (Livingstone 1999; McQuail 2010). In doing so, it allows for a more active audience. First of all, digital media such as the Internet gives the audience the opportunity to become producers (Buckingham 2004). Teenagers for example can produce content and display it on sites such as youtube and flickr. Consequently, there is no longer a clear distinction between producer and consumer (McQuail 2010). These are not the only changes today's media audience have faced. Livingstone (1999), for example, points to the fact that, families used to own one television set or/and one radio set. Today, however,

it is not unusual that each households have multiple media items that are personally owned rather than family owned (Livingstone 1999). This in turn, is likely to increase the freedom of each family member to watch, listen or interact with media content of his/her own choosing (Livingstone 1999; McQuail 2010). Another point is that today's media users have more choice when it comes to form and content (Livingstone 1999). An example of this is television. While many teenagers during the early nineties only had access to one television channel, most of today's teenager have easy access to the Internet. The Internet provides the audience with almost limitless opportunities to watch television. Finally, today's media is highly mobile and convergent (Livingstone 1999; McQuail 2010). Today's mobile-phones, for example, can be used almost everywhere any time to surf the Internet, listen to music, video-chat and play games to name but a few. Thus the audience have actively choose between various media forms. This indicate that today teenagers have more opportunities than previous generations. At the same time, however, these opportunity may also increase the risks associated with children's media usage. Adults, for example, have less opportunities to control what teenagers see and do in the present media environment. Consequently, this thesis will view children as both vulnerable and active media users.

### **3.10.5 Audience research and the social studies of children and childhood**

One influential approach towards the audience is the cultural studies approach. This approach shares many similarities with the sociology of children and childhood. As we have seen, audience theories proposes that the audience are active meaning-makers. This, of course can be linked to ideas of the active child. Children's experiences of the media, however, can be influenced by social power such as class and gender (Buckingham 2008). Again, this can be linked to the idea that there are many childhoods. Furthermore David Buckingham argues that the cultural studies approach towards the audience "...disputes normative models of child development, focusing attention instead on the changing social, historical and cultural construction of childhood" (Buckingham 2008, p. 221). Like the social studies of children and childhood, therefore, cultural studies set out to view children's lives from children's perspectives (Buckingham 2008). Consequently, this thesis will adopt a cultural studies approach towards audience. Audience theories, however, will can be criticized.

### **3.10.6 Criticism of audience theories**

There have been much criticism against audience theories. Audience studies, for example, have been criticized for paying too much attention to the power of the audience, and thus neglecting the power of the media. An example of this is Abercrombie & Longhurst who argue that "the issue of power will slide off the agenda altogether or, more likely, will be allocated a less central place in the theoretical debate and ensuing empirical work" (1998, p.30). As we have seen, however, both debates about the power of the audience and the power of the media continues to shape media research. Another important criticism against audience theories is that they fail to investigate the producers political, economic and ideological influence on the text (Morley 1993). Although this is often the case with audience research, the effect research tradition often neglects the power of the audience. Consequently, both theories have flaws. In my opinion both effect research and audience research are important. After all, it is not impossible that the media may have some influence on it's audience. At the same time, however, the audience is not necessarily passive and gullible. Like agency and structure, therefore, the power of the media and the power of the audience is interrelated. The dangers, therefore occurs when the researcher ignores the other and construct the audience or the media as the all mighty and powerful. Consequently, this thesis will view the child audience as active beings that are not necessarily immune towards the power of the media. Both audience and effect theories, however, have influenced research on children's usage of social networking sites.

### **3.11 SNS**

The following section set out to give a brief review of relevant literature on teenagers information sharing practises on SNS. The review will start by outlining some of the previous studies on teenagers and SNS. Thereafter, the review will move on into a discussion of some of the literature with particular relevance to teenagers information sharing on SNS. The thesis will then point to the gaps in the literature. It is important to note, however, that this is not a complete review of all literature available. Rather, the review will focus on some of the studies on teenagers between 13 and 18 yeas of age. Although this thesis will look at studies

from across the minority world, the main focus will be studies conducted in Norway. Moreover, only studies written in English or Norwegian will be included.

Like the introduction of radio and television, the introduction of social networking sites have sparked debates about teenagers and their media usage. Adults concerned about teenagers usage of SNS, for example have coloured previous research on the topic. Some studies, for example, investigated teenagers SNS usage in terms of the possibility of increased risk of harm (Staksrud, Ólafsson & Livingstone 2013), cyber bullying (Brandtzæg, Staksrud, Hagen & World 2009; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson 2010; Skog 2010), meeting new people (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson 2010), unwanted exposure on SNS (Skog 2010; Almhjell 2012), teens and adults privacy and consumer protection (Brandtzæg & Lüders 2009), sexual solicitation and harassment (Ybarra & Mitchell 2008) to name but a few. Teenagers usage of SNS, however, have not only been investigated in terms of risks and negative consequences.

Countless studies have looked at teenagers usage of SNS. Some of the topics explored include teenagers friendship maintenance and identity exploration (Clark 2012), promoting and maintaining intimacy (Reich, Subrahmanyam & Espinoza 2012), uses and gratifications (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley 2010), self- esteem and well-being (Valkenburg, Jochen & Schouten 2006), learners identity formation and informal learning (Greenhow & Robelia 2009), grieving process and remembrance (Williams & Merten 2009; Rosenberg 2012), self-perception and self-image (Solvang 2011; Husom 2012). Other have investigated both adults and teenagers SNS usage in terms of participation inequality (Brandtzæg & Heim 2011), social capital (Pfeil, Arjan & Zaphiris 2009; Brandtzæg, Him & Kaare 2010), motivations for using SNS (Brandtzæg & Heim 2009) and Mediated interaction (Lüders 2009). Surprisingly, this indicates that there is much research on teenagers SNS usage beyond risks and concerns. This, however, is not the case with teenagers information sharing on SNS.

Adults concerns have shaped much previous research on teenagers information sharing on SNS. One such concern is the nature of the information teenagers share on SNS. Several studies, for example, have investigated how teenagers share what the researchers have

labelled as personal information. An example of this is Lenhart and Madden's 2007 USA study that looked at teenagers information sharing from a risk perspective. They set out to investigate how teenagers understood privacy by looking at what kind of information teenagers shared, what they did not share, in what contexts they shared the information as well as asking teenagers to assess their vulnerabilities. After having a series of focus group discussion with teenagers, the researchers conducted telephone surveys with other teenagers. They found that teenagers did not freely distribute personal information to everyone, and that teenagers believe that not all information should be shared. Despite this, Lenhart and Madden concluded that teenagers may face several risks associated with information sharing on SNS, such as "Stranger danger". Similarly, the American researchers Hinduja and Patchin (2008) set out to investigate whether or not teenagers frequently made personal information publicly available on SNS. They did so by conducting a content analysis of world wide publicly available SNS profiles in english. Through their analysis they found that only a minority of the profile owners disclosed what they had labelled as personal and private information and that as many as 40% of teenagers had set their profile to friends only, thus limiting access to their private information from strangers. They concluded that teenagers probably shared less information on SNS than is commonly and believed that most teenagers seemed responsible. They too, stressed the dangers of information sharing on SNS. Unlike Hinduja and Patchin (2008) and Lenhart and Madden (2007), Pierce (2007) did not only focus on personal information. The study also focused on sexual content displayed on teenager's MySpace profiles. The study was conducted using a content analysis of random MySpace profiles from the United States. The profiles were coded for personal information, sexual visual content, language (profanity) and private settings. Their study found that teenagers shared both personal information and sexual content on their MySpace profiles, but that the type of information shared on SNS varied according to the profile owners age and gender. Pierce (2007) thus argued that teenagers seemed to be unaware of the risks associated with sharing personal- and sexual content on their myspace profiles. Consequently, he suggested that teenagers needs to be educated on the potential implications of information sharing on SNS. Another study, Taraszow et al. (2010), also concluded that teenagers seemed unaware of the risks associated with information disclosure of personal information and contact details. After all, their study of Cyprus teens indicated that most youngsters displayed information

such as full name, facial pictures, hometown and e-mail address on their facebook profile. Their conclusion was reached by conducting content analysis of facebook profiles for what the researchers labeled as “risky” personal information. Unlike the other studies, however, the majority of profiles studied were set to friends only. The same year another study was published. The study conducted by the two american researchers Patchin and Hinduja (2010), who was interested to see whether or not educating teenagers about online safety had impacted their behavior. In 2010, therefore, Patchin and Hinduja conducted a following up study of their 2006 study. They wanted to investigate whether the information teenagers posted on MySpace had become more or less private. Thus Patchin and Hinduja revisited the MySpace profiles from their previous study that had not been set to private or deleted. Like their 2006 study, the 2010 study focused on personal or identifying information. The study found that an increasing number of teenagers set their profile to private, thus guarding their information on SNS. Although the sharing of some information such as first name and full name had increased, their findings suggested that “...there appears to be a general trend toward safer and smarter online social networking.” (Patchin and Hinduja 2010, p.208). Thus they concluded that risks can be minimized through guidance and supervision. With this in mind there seems to be a disagreement within academic circles. Some authors argues that teenagers are relatively responsible in their information sharing on SNS. Other scholars, however, suggested that teenagers shared personal- and contact information without regards for the consequences. Despite these contradictory findings, the above studies have several commonalities. First of all, the main focus of these studies were concerns about the kind of personal information teenagers shared on SNS. Thus none of the studies looked at teenagers information sharing from children's own perspectives. Rather they approached teenagers information sharing from a risk perspective. A perspective that focused on adults perceptions of personal information. All studies except one, investigate their adult presumptions without involving children's own opinion. In doing so, it could be argued, they deny children's agency. Moreover, in not involving the teenagers own opinions the research may cause inaccurate results. After all only children can know what they think and feel. The researches, therefore, cannot possibly know whether the “personal information” they find are accurate. Nor do they know whether or not teenagers consider this information to be personal. Another problem is that most of these studies only focused on profiles that were publicly available.

This is problematic because teenagers who set their profiles to friends only may have completely different perceptions of privacy than those who set their profile to open to all. Moreover, these studies only investigate what teenagers share and not why. From an adult perspective, this becomes problematic because the studies does not address a root of the “problem”; why teenagers choose to share information in the first place. From a more child centered approach, the studies fails to consider the role of information sharing on SNS. After all, previous research have suggested that SNS is part of teenagers peer culture and that information sharing plays an important a part on SNS (Livingstone 2010; Vandoninck, d’Haenens, De Cock & Donoso 2012; Boyd 2008). This is not to say that the studies about teenagers information sharing in terms of risks and concerns are not important. Rather, these studies indicate that the research on teenagers information sharing is highly biased by the researchers. In doing so they fail to consider the role of information sharing on SNS. Some studies, however, have adopted a more nuanced approach towards information sharing on SNS.

Although information sharing was not the main focus of the study, Livingstone's (2008) U.K. Study explored the interconnection between risks and opportunities online. She did so by investigating teenagers SNS practices through a series of open-ended interviews. Livingstone found that younger teenagers enjoyed to “...play and display, continuously recreating a highly-decorated, stylistically-elaborate identity” (p.393). Older teenagers, however, preferred a plainer profile that showed their relationship with their peers. Despite the opportunity of SNS, Livingstone argued that teenagers own sharing practices on SNS, their media literacy and the interface of SNS may jeopardize teens privacy. She also found that teenagers were not unconcerned about their privacy. Rather, her findings suggested that most teenagers were selective as to whom they shared their most personal experiences with and where. Teenagers notion of privacy, however, was not always linked to the nature of the information shared on SNS. Rather teenagers were concerned by who knew what about them. Teenagers ability to control this, however, was often limited by the affordances of SNS. Similarly, Petter B. Brandtzæg, Marika Lüders and Jan H. Skjetne's (2010) Norwegian study focused on SNS users sharing of content and sociability versus their users privacy experiences and usage behavior. Conducted through interviews and usability test, their study

looked at comparison between younger and older Facebook users. This review, however, will only look at the result from the youngest group (16 – 33 years of age). Their study revealed that the sharing of information was influenced by the number of friends on SNS. They found that a high number of friends were likely to influence the feeling of social surveillance and social control. In order to solve this problem, therefore, the informants used conformity to protect their privacy. Their study reveal that the group was both more “Confident in their FB usage and more knowledgeable about content-sharing practices.” than the older groups. Moreover, their study revealed that FB users only disclosed limited information about themselves and not information that they considered to be too private or personal. Despite their balanced approach towards teenagers information sharing, these studies payed little attention to why teenagers shared information on SNS. This, however, have been explored by studies that have focused on identity, self presentation and impression management.

Danah Boyd's (2008) study set out to explored american teenagers usage of SNS from teenagers own perspectives. The study investigated teenagers self-presentation, peer sociality and negotiating adult society through interviews and observations. Some of her findings can be related to teenagers information sharing processes. Boyd found that most teenagers used SNS to socialize with their offline network (ibid.). In order to do so, however, teenagers had to write themselves into being. Although their digital identities mostly reflected their offline identity, writing oneself into being required self presentation and impression management. Thus teenagers used features such as photos, text fields, songs and layouts for impression managements and self-presentation on SNS. In fact, even comments left by friends helped shape the teenagers digital identities. Although a sub topic in the study, Rebekah Willett (2009) also found that teenagers use the SNS Bebo to display their identity. The main method of data collection for Willett's U.K. study was interviews. She found that teenagers frequently argued that their profile creation was often “random” and unintentional, and not carefully constructed “identity management”. At the same time, however, she found that teenagers did sometimes carefully construct their profiles. Their profile construction, however, was underpinned by social norms. Egocentricity, for example, such as sharing too much of their body and or too much of their personal lives was seen as socially unacceptable. What one was allowed to share, however, depended on the background of the information as well as it's

context. Another interesting finding was that the sexual references displayed on profiles, often had deeper narrative and was merely a joke between friends. Despite public discourses, she found that teenagers, were careful about the kind of comments they made on the SNS. This was due to the public nature of SNS. Thus SNS, she argued, served as a “front stage” performance. Identity, was also an important marker in Malene Charlotte Larsen's (2005) study. The study was an ethnological investigation of Danish teenagers usage of the SNS Arto. Her main focus was how teenagers used the site for friendship and identity construction. She found that teenagers used the site for friendship and identity construction. Because truthful information was an important part of Arto, teenagers own identity construction on the SNS left little room for roleplaying. Teenagers identity construction on Arto, however, was deeply embedded in peer sociality. When posting pictures of themselves, for example, teenagers got positive reaffirmation and attention from their peers. Teenagers, however, also got reaffirmation through the positive and affectionate texts about themselves written by their peers. These texts, should be visible for all to see, and thus serves as a review of the teenagers. Consequently, these texts by peers, contributes to teenagers identity construction on SNS. Going back to Boyd's argument (2008), writing oneself into being did also include impression management. Visual impression management was the main focus of Andra Siibak (2009) investigating Estonian teenagers SNS pictures. The study was conducted using question surveys and found that there were gender differences in why teenagers chose a particular profile image. While boys appeared to be relatively lax when it came to choosing a profile picture, girls paid more attention to what kind of pictures they choose. Girls, therefore, were considered to be more preoccupied with creating their visual self value. Teens impression management, however, depended on who their reference group were and the self-beliefs and expectations of the reference group. Thus Siibak argues that “The virtual selves exhibited on the photos of SNS are therefore constantly constructed and re-constructed based on the values associated with the “ideal self” or “the ought self”. Consequently, sub sections of research have looked at teenagers information in terms of identity formation and impression management. In doing so, these studies have given us some insights about teenagers information sharing practices on SNS and its role in peer culture. Some norwegian studies, have also shed light on teenagers sharing on SNS.

Sub sections of Norwegian studies have looked at what kind of information teenagers have on SNS and why. Skog (2008) investigated participants on The Gathering's usage of computer games and SNS. The age of the participants varied from 13- 48 years of age, with the majority of participants being 17. Although the users spent most of their time looking at other peoples profiles and content, they did share some information on SNS. Her study revealed that only a few teenagers between 13 – 16 made appointments, sent messages, invited others to events or wrote on other peoples wall. This, however, was slightly more popular among 17- 18 year olds. Similarly, 4% of the younger teenagers said that they answered tests often or very often, and 8% of the older teens did so. This was also the case with picture sharing on SNS. While 6% of the younger teenagers said that they posted pictures often or very often, 7% of the older teenagers did so. Like Skog (2008), Skog (2010) found that many teenagers liked to stay updated on their peers. Another favorite activity was to stay in touch with others. Never the less, the study conducted by using a questionnaire, revealed that some teenagers liked to share on facebook. 19% of teenagers said that they liked to front themselves or show who they were on facebook. At the same time 23% of 16 year old liked to upload photos and 16% of 17 – 18 years enjoyed the same activity. Why teenagers choose to share information was included in a sub section on a Norwegian master thesis. Through Johannessen (2012) study, teens suggest that other teens may share information online because they wanted attention, positive comments, were social in face to face situations or were bored. Most of the participant of the study, however, argued that the owners of facebook accounts should have closed profile before they started sharing. Most teenagers seemed to agree that it was okay to share online provided that the content they shared would not offend or arouse negative reactions from others. Some knowledge about why and how norwegian teenagers share information on SNS, therefore, exist. Teenagers information sharing, however, was not the main focus of these studies. To my knowledge, therefore, no study have focused exclusively on teenagers information sharing on SNS from children's own perspectives. More research, therefore, is needed to understand the role of information sharing on SNS in Norwegian teenagers peer culture.

Like the introduction of most new media adults concerns have shaped research on teenagers information sharing practises on SNS. As we have seen the research that have focused

exclusively on teenagers information sharing on SNS have adopted an adult ethnocentric perspective towards teenager SNS usage. Much research on the topic, therefore, have investigated information sharing in light of risks and concerns without regard for children's voices and peer culture. Thus many of these studies are likely to give an inaccurate picture of the situation, which in turn may influence future policies. Moreover these studies have not investigate why teenagers choose to share information on SNS. While some studies have shed light on teenagers information sharing practises on SNS, as well as its role in peer culture, this was not the main purpose of theses studies. In addition few of these studies looked at norwegian teenagers. This indicates that understanding why Norwegian teenagers share information on SNS and its role in their peer culture is a much neglected research topic.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Research methodology has been explained as "...a way to systematically solve the research problems" (Kumar 2011, p.5). The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explain how the research question "Why and how do teenagers share information at social networking sites" was answered. In order to ensure the credibility of the research, some of the steps taken to answer the research question, will be discussed in terms of reliability and validity. The first section of this chapter gives a brief explanation of the concepts of reliability and validity. Thereafter, the chapter will explain the researchers pre position and how this may have coloured the research process through for example choice of research methodology. In light of this discussion, the next section will explain why and how the qualitative study was undertaken. Before discussing the different methods employed in this thesis, choice of informants, access and ethical considerations will be discussed. Thereafter the chapter will move on to explain how the data was transcribed, translated and analysed. Finally, the chapter will discuss some of the limitations with this study.

### **4.2 Validity**

Although debated, Silverman (2011), highlights validity as one of two essential concepts used to ensure the research credibility. Research without validity, it has been argued, is worthless (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). Another tradition describes validity as "The strength and soundness of statement; in the social sciences validity can mean whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p 327). Thus the validity of a study is dependent on the data to be collected and interpreted in a way that conclude "... accurately reflect and represent the real world (or laboratory) that was studied" (Yin 2010, p. 78). How this validation is done, is of course different in qualitative and quantitative studies. This thesis, however, will only focus on validity in qualitative research. How one chooses to validate qualitative research findings, however, varies and is highly debated. The scope of this debate is too large for this thesis. Nevertheless, it has been argued that validity is an important part of research from start to finish (Kvale & Brinkmann

2009). Throughout this chapter, therefore, some of the steps taken in order to validate the research will be discussed. Ensuring validity, however, is not the only step taken to ensure the credibility of the research.

### **4.3 Reliability**

Another central concept used to ensure research credibility, is reliability (Silverman 2011). Reliability is a term used to describe whether or not another researcher who conducted the research with the same method of data collection would get a similar result (Ennew et al. 2009). It is a "...a synonyms for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007, p. 146). Like validity, however, the meaning of reliability depends on whether one is conducting qualitative or quantitative research. Reliability in qualitative research it has been suggested, can be ensured through transparency (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). This transparency should saturate the research report. The researcher, therefore, should include detailed descriptions of how the research is conducted and how the data is analysed (ibid.). It should also include the researchers theoretical standpoints that may have influenced the research findings (ibid.). In order to ensure reliability, therefore, I will give detailed descriptions of how the research is conducted and how the data is analysed. Firstly, however, I will outline some of the researcher's standpoints that may have influenced the study and its result.

### **4.4 Pre-positions**

Ones view on children and childhood is likely to colour the research from start to finish (Punch 2002). As we have seen, this study have set out to listen to children's voices in research. There are many ways to do this. Some researchers, for example, stresses research methods meant to be especially child friendly. In doing so, it could be argued, one adopts a particular view on children. It suggests that children are different from adults. Due to my view of children as competent actors, however, I have followed Anne Solberg's (1996) advice. She have suggested that having some ignorance of age, may help the researcher set pre assumptions about children aside (ibid). Although children are not used to being considered as equals, I believe that treating them as such will encourage them, and help them share what they actually think and not what they think I want to hear. In fact, youngsters themselves have

argued that they want to be treated as "...individuals, not an age group" (Morgan 2005, p.183). Rather than choosing particular child friendly methods, therefore, I have chosen methods that are believed to give both adults and youngsters a voice in research. Despite my view on children and my attempts to include children in search, however, my research can never be completely free from adult pre-positions.

The researcher's position as adult is likely to influence the research process. First of all, power differentials between adults and children occur throughout society (Christensen 2004). This, one could argue, is also the case in research. After all, the adult researchers are usually in control of the research process, and thus the adult researcher is in a position of power (Punch 2002). The child informants in turn, may also respond to this power relationship and give answers that they think will please the researcher (Punch 2002). Thus "Negotiating unequal power relations is a central aspect of ethical research"(Abebe 2009, p.458). Consequently, I took several steps in order to diminish these power differentials. One of these steps was to position children as the experts (Solberg 1996). At each first meeting with the informants I told them that I wanted their opinions because they were the experts, and that there were no right and wrong answers. I also informed them that I was not on facebook. This, I would argue, positioned them as the experts, thus minimizing power differentials. Power differentials, however, is not the only influence an adult researcher is likely to have when researching children.

The adult researcher is also likely to have an adult perspective (Punch 2002). Although all adults have been children, they do not necessarily know what it is like to be a child today (Fine & Sandstrom 1988; Punch 2002). Examples of this can be found in Gary Alan Fine and Kent L. Sandstrom (1988), who illustrate how the meaning of children's language can change from one generation to another. Another implication is that, being an adult, the researcher is likely to have different perceptions of- and knowledge of the world than children do (Punch 2002). Thus, the researcher may find it difficult to leave his adult presumption behind when researching children (Solberg 1996). Examples of this can be found in the earliest stages of my research. When I first started researching for my project, it was underpinned by my adult presumptions about children and their usage of social networking sites. I presumed that teenagers shared information they themselves,

considered as private. As I continued reading, however, I realized that these ideas built on my own adult presumptions. This, therefore, made me realize how easy it is for the researchers adult perspectives to influence the research process.

#### **4.5 Qualitative research**

Unlike quantitative methods, however, qualitative methods use micro sociology. This means that qualitative research focus on the perspectives of individual children rather than children as a group. Qualitative researchers, as Alan Bryman (1984) argues, often set out to see the world through the eyes of the informants. Thus, qualitative researchers usually strive for rich "...and relevantly detailed descriptions and particularized interpretations of people and the social, linguistic, material, and other practices and events that shape and are shaped by them" (Sandelowski 2004, p. 893). Qualitative researchers, therefore, use methods that will help them get detailed information about the participant's world as possible. Examples of these methods include observation and interviews (Sandelowski 2004). Consequently, qualitative studies help the researcher to get in-depth knowledge from a few individuals (Patton 1990). None of these methods are necessarily better or worse than the other. Rather qualitative and quantitative research methods have different purposes. Which research methods to choose, therefore, depends on the research questions.

As already outlined, this thesis set out to investigate "Why and how do teenagers share information at social networking sites". This, of course, can be investigated using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Using quantitative methods would be useful to answer the research question. After all, the question could be asked to a large sample of teenagers, making generalizations possible. The aim of this thesis, however, is to gain insight and understanding of teenager's thoughts and experiences of sharing of information on social networking sites. As we have seen qualitative research is used for generalizations, while qualitative data is used to get in depth knowledge about how the respondents sees the world. While children can fill out a questionnaire, and thus being included in research, qualitative studies are often believed to be more in line with the social studies of children and childhood. After all, qualitative research methods are more likely to allow children to provide their own inputs, thus giving them a higher voice in research. Consequently, I consider qualitative methods as the

most appropriate tool for gaining insights and understandings of teenager's thoughts and experiences. Before I was able to get these insights, however, some ethical considerations needed to be considered.

## **4.6 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are important for any research project. First of all it can protect the research participants from harm. Secondly, it ensures respect for the participants (Alderson & Morrow 2011). Ethical considerations, however, are not only used to protect and respect the research participants. It is also used in order to protect the researcher, the research institution and the good name of the research (Alderson & Morrow 2011). Before starting my research, therefore, the study was reported to the ethics committee *Norwegian Social Science Data Services*, and approved. Ethical considerations, however, played an important part in this thesis, from start to finish. The following sections, therefore, will set out to explain some of the ethical considerations made during the research process.

### **4.6.1 Informed consent**

Informed consent means that participants should be both informed and understanding of the research aims, methods, processes, topics, what the data will be used for and that it is possible to withdraw from the research at any time (Ennew et al. 2009).

The first, perhaps most important step to ensure informed consent, was the letter of introduction. The letter of introduction started by introducing the project to the teenager and their parents/guardians. It briefly explained the aims, methods, processes and topics. The letter also explained that participation was voluntary, and that the participants could withdraw from the research at any time without giving further explanations. Another important part of the letter of informed consent was confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality. The letter also stated that the teenagers or the parents could contact me if they had any questions about the research. After reading the letter, the teenager and the parents would sign that they were informed and understanding of the research. Although the teenagers had received the letter, I could not be certain that they had read it and understood it. I therefore made a point of explaining everything that was said in the letter during our first meeting. Thereafter, I asked the participants if they had any questions.

### **4.6.2 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality in research means that private data and identity information that can be traced back to the individual, either directly or indirectly will be kept secret and anonymised (Alderson and Morrow 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Langtvedt 2009). Not only is confidentiality ethical, but the Norwegian university- and university college law (universitets- og høyskoleloven) § 4-6. (2005) states that student researchers have a duty of confidentiality. As Ennew et al. (2009) argues, the researcher should evaluate how the participants confidentiality may be put at risks. Evaluating potential risks to confidentiality was done throughout the project. The following section, however, will describe some of the measures taken in order to ensure confidentiality. The first identity information I received were the signed letters of consent. Because these contained personal data, I kept this information separate from other data in a lockable drawer. Other data such as the recorded interviews and their transcripts also contained identity information. Consequently, they were kept on password protected and encrypted memory sticks. In order to protect confidentiality, I asked the participants not to write their names in their research diaries. Rather, the informants were asked to write their age and sex. This, however, did not guarantee that the research diaries contained no traceable information. Consequently, the research diaries were kept under lock and key. Another important step in order to ensure confidentiality was taken at the later stages of the project. In the final report, all information was anonymized. This was done by changing identity information such as names, locations and hobbies. I did however, also inform the informants about the limits of confidentiality, that "...in rare cases, confidentiality may be broken, if it is thought that someone is serious danger" (Alderson and Morrow 2011, p. 31). After these considerations were considered, I was ready to get informants.

### **4.7 Sample**

This thesis set out to investigate eight grader's usage of social networking sites. The main reason for choosing eight graders was due to the nature of the Norwegian schools system. In year eight, Norwegian teenagers start lower secondary school. Many schools only teach grades 1 – 7, thus teenagers are often required to change schools when they reach year eight. When changing schools teenagers are likely to become separate from some of their previous class mates. At the same time, however, they are likely to get new classmates. As a result teenagers may wish to make new

friends as well as keeping in touch with the old ones. It would therefore be interesting to see whether they use social networking sites to do so. I initially intended to use eight teenagers as informants. As a result of lack of participants, however, I settled for seven. While the majority of the informants were from three schools in Stavanger, one participant from another city in the region also participated. As indicated above the access to, and recruitment of informants, was one of the most challenging aspects of this research.

#### **4.8 Access to- and recruitment of informants**

It was once argued that “Access is one of the hardest stages of research with children” (Scott 2000, p.105). This was also the case with my research project. In order to get “Access” to the teenagers I had to go through several gatekeepers. This was a much more lengthy and difficult process than I had first anticipated. In order to get access, I had to start by contacting principals from different schools. The willingness to participate varied from school to school. This could be because the schools were too busy or that the topic was not school related. A few schools, however, were happy to help. Getting permission from schools, however, did not mean that getting informants was straightforward. At all schools, I started by contacting the principals. The principals then passed on the information about my research project further down the school hierarchy.

At one of the schools, the teenagers were eager to participate. Teenagers in other schools, however, were less eager to participate. At most schools I received no participants at all. It is impossible to determine exactly why some schools had several willing participants, when others had none. I do, however, have some explanations. At the school where I was able to get the most informants, the first interview was conducted during school hours. In one of the schools where I presented my research to the students, the students specifically asked me whether or not the interviews would be conducted during school hours. I told the student that it was not, the student was no longer interested in my project. Similarly, one informant that I had received a signed consent form, withdrew when the informant realized that the interviews would not be conducted during school hours. One explanation for this could be that they were too busy to participate. Another issue that affected the recruiting of informants

was the fact that some students were uncomfortable with home interviews.

Contacting schools were not the only method I used to contact potential informants. I also tried to get access to informants through my extended network, but this proved difficult. I did, however, manage to get one informant through my connections.

Another way I tried to get informants was by contacting a youth club. The problem with this approach, however, was that the city only had a few youth clubs, and that these youth clubs were only open occasionally. Because these youth clubs were only opened occasionally, the best way to contact them seemed to be through e-mail contact. I did not, however, receive any response to my e-mails. I therefore feared that all contact with these institutions depended on phone calls during their opening times. Because I feared that this method would be too lengthy it was abandoned. Today, I regret this decision, because I feel I abandoned it too early.

I chose not to approach teenagers by e.g. hanging up posters and contacting them on the street. I did so because I thought that, by doing so I would lose credibility as a researcher. In today's risk society, both adults and children might become suspicious of adults trying to contact children directly, rather than through institutions. This in turn, could even affect the children's trust in me and thus influenced my research negatively. By contacting schools, however, the research was likely to increase credibility and thus in turn increase the informants' trust. After much hard work I managed to secure seven informants.

#### **4.9 Entering the research site**

I always made sure that I introduced myself as a researcher, both to the informants and to the schools. At one school, however, I was presented with a small challenge. The teacher told the students that the informants should think about my study twice, before opting out, because it was for a good cause. This it seemed caused some confusion among the student who believed that I was working for a charity organization. I therefore had to explain my role as a researcher again, and elaborate on what it meant to be a master student. While in the field, I employed several methods designed to answer my research question

## 4.10 Methods

“The term *methods* refers to the ways in which qualitative researchers collect data to build their argument” (Schensul 2008, p. 522). The following section, will set out to explain which methods were chosen, why and my experience of using these methods.

### 4.10.1 Interviews

Interviews have been described as one of the most popular research methods in qualitative research (Warren 2004). A research interview is “...a conversation that has structure and purpose” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p.3). Such conversations between the researcher and the informant were employed in this thesis. After all, the research interview is considered as a highly appropriate tool for getting a better understanding of the research participants own world, views and experiences (Kvale 1996).

Although there are several ways to conduct a research interview, this thesis used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are defined based on the flexibility and fluidness of their structure (Mason 2004). Rather than having a rigid structure, the interview guide contains an outline of the topics that is going to be covered (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Thus, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to be flexible in how he asks the questions and in which order he asks them (Mason 2004). Another important point with this form of interviewing is that it allows you to investigate the topics you are interested in, as well as giving the research participants the opportunity to introduce their own ideas and thoughts (Willis 2006).

Consequently, semi-structured interviews can increase children’s voice in research.

Criticism against interviews includes the fact that a successful interview is dependent on the researchers skill to ask the right questions (Ennew et al. 2009). The researcher for example, must make sure that the questions are not leading (ibid.). After all, research questions, which are leading, are likely to reduce the validity of the research. In order to ensure quality of the interviews, I created an interview guide. This interview guide contained a series of topics and suggested sub-questions, which would help me answer the overall research question. When creating the interview guide, I took great efforts to make sure that the interview questions were not leading. Another method used to ensure interview quality, was by piloting the interview guide. During the piloting of the interview guide, I realized that some questions were difficult to understand, or prompted short answers. Thus I decided to make some

alterations to the guide. After editing, I piloted and edited the interview guide. Although I had piloted the research tool, I found, during my interviews, that some of the questions still needed to be altered. Although most the questions had been successful during the pilot study, the informants found some of the questions difficult to answer. These questions, therefore, had to be adjusted. During the interviews, I also realised that some of my questions built on my own presumptions. I did for example, assume that teenagers shared personal information on SNS. I therefore removed some of the questions or edited them to make them more open, before asking them again. Consequently, the interview guide was continually evaluated and re-evaluated.

The first interviews were conducted at school. This was done because the school is likely to be considered as a safe environment both for parents, participants and the researcher. One issue with schools as a research site is that this location may influence the participant's answers (Willis 2006). After all, children are used to a school system where there are right and wrong answers. I therefore made sure that I informed the teenagers that there where no right or wrong answers. The interviews rooms assigned to me varied. Sometimes I would be assigned a group room, and other times I would be assigned an empty classroom. This reduced the likelihood of people listening in on the conversation. The informants seemed comfortable with this arrangement, and it helped ensure anonymity in the research.

I began each interview with small talk, such as asking them about their favourite subjects at school. This was done in order to make the informants feel comfortable. Thereafter I explained to them the content of in the informed consent letter they had received earlier. This letter contained information about the research project such as informed consent and confidentiality. Thereafter I asked the informants whether or not they had any questions. Before the interview began, I started the digital recorder.

Using a digital recorder "...frees the interviewee to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p. 179). Using a digital recorder, therefore, helped me focus on the interview and the informants; what they had to say, how they said it and their facial expressions. I therefore took very few notes during the interview, but made sure that I wrote my notes as soon after the interviews as possible. Secondly, using a digital voice recorder helped me transcribe

the interview as accurately as possible, which in turn helped to improve validity. Although the sound quality was not always perfect, I tried to ensure quality recordings by placing them on flat surfaces without any obstructions between the informants and the computer.

The interviews gave me useful insights to the pre-formulated topics. Due to the nature of the interviews, however, it also gave rise to new themes. I did not meet any particular challenges during the interviews. Listening to the recordings, however, I became aware of my interview technique. Although I had made sure that the questions in the interview guide was not leading, some of my spontaneous following up questions were. I took notes of this. Then I would paraphrase the question and ask them again during the next interview. I also noticed that one of the informants gave very short answers. I tried to solve this by making sure that I used more following up questions in the interviews with this informant. This lengthened the answers somewhat. However, I came to realize that the short answers may not have anything to do with my interview technique. Rather, it might simply be a reflection of how the person speaks in real life.

I had two interviews with each of the informants. The first interview was the longest, with an average length of 20 – 30 minutes. Although this was my first interview with the informants, they were talkative and gave me much insight to the their usage of SNS. After transcribing my interviews as well as my observations, I realised that I needed one more interview with the informants. The final interview was shorter and lasted from 10- 20 minutes. The goal of this interview was to talk about questions that the informants had not yet answered. It also allowed me to ask following up questions and new question generated from the research process. These interviews where very useful for clarifications and filling the gaps. Looking back, I feel that I was to focused on getting answers to my research questions during my last interview. So focused, in fact that I almost touched upon the borders of structured interview. After all, I focused too much on my pre made questions to allow much space for new topics. This, however, was not the only method used to answer the research question.

#### **4.10.2 Solicited diaries**

Another method employed in this thesis was solicited diaries. Linda Bell defines

solicited diaries as "...an account produced specifically at the researcher's request, by an informant or informants" (1998, p. 72). There are several reasons why I choose to employ solicited diaries as a method of data collection. Compared to other methods such as questionnaires, for example, diaries are considered more reliable (Coxon 2004). First of all, "...they minimize problems of bias in retro perspective recall..." (Coxon 2004, p. 261). Although diaries requires some recall, they should be written right after the participant have been on SNS. The amount of time between the actual event and the recording of it, therefore, is less. This, one could argue, is likely to make the event easier to remember, and thus making the tool more reliable. Secondly, Anthony P. M. Coxon points to the fact that because diaries are self-administered, they reduce interview effect. Naturally, this too can help make the information gathered from this tool more reliable than methods such as interviews. A final point made by Coxon, is the fact that diaries can ensure anonymity (Coxon 2004). Naturally anonymity was an important with all the methods. The research diaries, however, may even ensure anonymity from the researcher. Consequently, the research diaries may help the informants share information they would be uncomfortable sharing in a face-to-face interview. In order to increase anonymity, therefore, I asked the informants to write age and gender only. Another benefit with research diaries is that they "... can be used to record data that might not be forthcoming in face-to-face interviews or other data collection encounters" (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p.127). Another reason could be that some teenagers might be more comfortable with writing in a diary as opposed to talking to a researcher. There are, however, also drawbacks with solicited diaries.

One problem with solicited diaries is that the participant might become sloppy with their diaries. Other problems that can occur includes: the participants might find diaries too time consuming, the diaries might take time from other activities, they require literacy, the participants might not see the quality of the information they provide in their diaries and they may use self-censorship (McGregor 2006). I did, however, take several steps in order to diminish these drawbacks. One step was to ask the participants to write in the diary once a week only. I also made sure that they knew that it was voluntary to write a research diary. To limit self-censorship, I increased the anonymity of the research method by asking the informants to write their age and sex rather than their names.

Before entering the field, I piloted the research tool. The pilot was successful, and no alterations needed to be done. Then, during the first meeting with the informants, I asked the informants to keep a diary of what they did on social networking site. I asked the students if they would like to write a diary of what they did on SNS. I then explained that they should write in their logbooks at least once a week in three weeks. After visiting social networking sites, the student should write what he/she did, why and what he/she thought while being on the social networking sites. I told the informants that they should write in detail, but that they should not write too in-depth details, such as what they wrote and to whom. I informed the teenagers that writing a logbook was voluntary. Although I gave all the informants a logbook, I told them that they themselves could choose whether or not to write in them.

The research diaries provided me with much useful information of what the informants did on social networking sites. It was also useful for analysing what the informants said they did, and what they wrote that they did. Thus the diaries helped me validate what the informants said in the interviews and during the observations. I did, however, encounter some problems with this tool.

One problem with these logbooks, was that did not contain any details about why they choose to share things on SNS. During interviews, however, I often experienced that the informants did not know why they chose to share what they shared on SNS. This, of course, could also be the case in the research diaries. Another, reason, however, could be that the informants did not remember exactly what they where supposed to do. After all, this tool might be employed long after our meeting. When I was going to collect the research diaries, one informant told me why he/she had not written in the research diary. The informant explained that nothing special had happened, so he/she had nothing to write about. This reaffirms (McGregor 2006) argument that the informants may not see the quality of the information provided in diaries. In hindsight, this was a problem that I should have foreseen. I did, however, make sure that I gave the remaining informants written instruction of what they where supposed to do in their logbook. A final method used to answer the research question was observation.

### **4.10.3 Observation**

When the researcher observes the informants, the researcher sets out to "...watch what they do, to record this in some way, and then to describe, analyze and intent what we have observed" (Robson 2002, p. 309). The method is highly regarded among some researches. Ennew et al., for example, have argued that observation "...is the basis of all good research" (2009,p. 5.9). This could be due to the many advantages with observation; advantages that made observation a useful method for this research. One of the advantages with observation, it has been argued, is that it can be used to understand the difference of what the informants do, and what they say they do (Robson 2002). Consequently, I employed observation as a method to validate the data collected using interviews. Another important advantage is observational methods closeness to real life (Robson 2002). After all, observation lets the researcher watch life as it happens, in real time and in it's natural settings. In order to gain understanding of how teenagers shared information on SNS, therefore, I considered observation as an essential tool. Although this method is close to real life, it is not necessarily identical to real life. After all, the researcher may influence what the informants say or do (Angrosino 2004). Moreover, the teenagers may use self-censorship. There are, however, ways to minimize observer effect. In shorter studies, the researcher can minimize his/her effect and increase trust and comfort by being introduced by someone who already know the informants (Angrosino 2004). By using the school as gatekeepers, therefore, the informants were introduced by their teachers who already knew them. Another way to minimize the effect is by the researcher appearance (Angrosino 2004). While I did not to want to appear intimidating by dressing too formal, I wanted to appear professional. I therefore tried to find a balance between the two. Traditionally, however, the observer had other tools to minimize his/her effect. After all, the researcher might spend several years in the field (Robson 2002). This of course, would help the researcher blend in and minimize his effect, as well as increased the likelihood of gaining the informants trust (Angrosino 2004). Due to time constrains, however, longitudinal studies where not possible for this thesis.

Before my first interview I had piloted the interview guide. Some of this interviewing took place in front of the computer. My first opportunity for an observation interview, however, came on a very short notice. Consequently, I was unable to fully pilot the research tool. My first interview, however, became a pilot. When I had finished the

interview, I took notes of what worked and what did not work, before making alterations.

Initially, I had decided to observe what the informants did when they were on social networking sites in real time. However, most informants seemed sceptical to this. Perhaps they saw it as a threat to their privacy. If I had been able to spend more time with the informants, however, they might become more comfortable with me observing them. Nevertheless, I realized that I needed to make alterations to this method. Although I kept the option of letting me observe them in real time open, I also informed the informants that I did not necessarily have to watch them while they interacted with their friends. I told them that I was also interested in what the teenagers had on their profile, on the section that was visible to their friends. Like Livingstone (2008), therefore, I interviewed the informants while they visited their SNS profile. All the teenagers agreed to this form of observation. Although, I would have preferred real time observation, this form of observation also provided me with much important insight. I was, for example, able to view the informants' Facebook timeline, that gave a lot of information about what the informants had done while they were on Facebook. Some teenagers, however, interacted with their friends on SNS during the interview by e.g. chatting and commenting on photographs.

Like the standard interviews, I started the session with some small talk. Although the order varied, I often started to ask the informants some general questions. Next I asked the informants if they would like to log on to Facebook. Thereafter I asked them to show me what they did on Facebook. After they had finished showing me what they did, I asked them to tell me about the different features on Facebook, which they used and which they didn't. Naturally, the interview followed the semi-structured interview guide. This helped answering the pre-established questions. It also helped me creating new topics. At the end of each interview, I asked them if there was anything more they wanted to show me. The length of the interviews varied, but most interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes.

Unlike the interviews, the observations were conducted in the informants' own homes. There were two main reasons why I chose to conduct this interview in the participants' own home. First of all, teenagers' usage of SNS may be very different in

at home than in a school setting. In order to observe teenager's usage in an as natural setting as possible, therefore, I chose teenagers own home. Secondly, some schools may have filters blocking access to SNS. The informants or their families decided where in the home the interviews where to be conducted. In doing so, the informants could choose a room where they themselves felt comfortable. The locations included living rooms, bedrooms and kitchens. In order to minimize influences from others and ensure confidentiality, their family members were not in the interview room.

Some informants, however, were comfortable with me observing their real time usage of SNS. This provided me with useful insights to what teenagers did on SNS and helped me validate the data from other research tools. It is impossible to find the exact reason why these teenagers seemed more comfortable with being observed than the others. These informants, however, were the last teenagers to be interviewed. Perhaps I myself had become more competent as an interviewer, which might have reassured the informants. Another reason could be that these teenagers simply had a more trustful and open nature.

Although the observations provided we with much useful information, I did encounter some problems. One problem, I encountered, was a difference in terminology. When I asked the informants to show me a particular feature, they did not understand what I meant. We soon discovered, however, that we used different terminology for some of the features on SNS. In order to minimize such problems in the future, I tried to adapt to their terminology.

#### **4.11 Leaving the field**

According Gray et al. (2007) the researcher will know that it is time to leave the field when the research have reached saturation and when nothing surprises the researcher. The end of my fieldwork, however, was not necessarily marked by saturation. I believe that there where of many more questions that could be asked, and more insights that could be gathered. There was, however, a time limit to my research project. Consequently, I felt that it was time to leave the field as soon as I had got answers to my research questions, as well as the new questions that developed during the research process.

When I scheduled the last interview, I made sure that informants knew that this would be the last interview. After my last interview with the informants, I told them that although this would be my last interview, I told the informants that I would be in touch later in the research process. I also made sure that they knew they could contact me if they had any questions about the research.

## **4.12 Post fieldwork**

### **4.12.1 Transcription**

Blake D. Poland (2004) urges "...the production of accurate and high-quality verbatim transcripts is integral to establishing the credibility and trustworthiness (rigor) of qualitative research" (Poland 2004, pp. 137). Naturally, data that is not transcribed accurately, and contains inaccuracies such as misquotations, can cause misinterpretations, which in turn can influence the meaning of the texts making it invalid (Poland 2004). The researcher therefore should strive for an as accurate transcript of what is actually said as possible. There is, however, not one set way of doing so (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Thus, they suggest that the researcher should ask himself which way is more useful for the study purpose (ibid.). In order to get the transcripts as close as possible to what the informants actually told me, I used verbatim oral style. I started transcribing early in the process. This, I found, provided me with valuable insight to my own research techniques, helped me identify my own shortcomings, and identify patterns. Because I was in the middle of fieldwork, as well as working on chapter deadline, however, these sessions were short. Looking back, I wish that I had spent more time transcribing early in the process. After all, it helped me see what I could have done differently, identify patterns and creating new research questions.

I knew that transcribing would be a time consuming process. Even so, I was surprised by the amount of time it took to transcribe my data. Because all interviews were voice recorded, I was careful to transcribe them word perfectly. This was done in order to ensure the validity of the research. This of course, influenced the amount of time it took to transcribe. However, I soon however developed techniques to quicken my progress without compromising quality. An example of this was when I stopped

writing “emphasis” on the letters that were spoken with emphasis. Instead I would write these words with capital letters.

One problem I faced during the transcription phase, was that some words and sentences were less audible than others. These words, therefore, were difficult to make sense of. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggested that validity can be improved by listening to the recordings again. Listening to the recorded sections repeatedly, made some of the words and sentences easier to understand. The words and sentences, which I could not understand were indicated by the word “*etl*”. In order to signalize that the words were difficult to understand, but I believed I had understood them, I wrote the assumed meaning in italics. Another step I took to increase the validity of the transcript, was to add pauses and changes in tone of voice. Despite these efforts, however, I believe that the researcher can never give an exact reproduction of an interview. After all, the transcription can never capture all subtle differences occurring during an interview.

#### **4.12.2 Translation**

Because both the informants and the researcher were Norwegian, the research was conducted in Norwegian. Because my master program was conducted in English, however, the research data had to be translated into English. Translation in this thesis refers to “...the transfer of meaning from a source language ...to a target language ...” (Esposito 2001, p. 570). Due to economic reasons, the researcher conducted the translations. Before I started to translate, however, I had transcribed the audio recordings in Norwegian. Having a Norwegian transcript enabled me to continually refer back to the teenager’s exact statements. This was done in order to secure an as accurate translation as possible. The importance of accurate translations is often highlighted by researchers. After all, inaccurate data results in loss of validity and ethicality (Esposito 2001; Shklarov 2007; Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg 2010). In fact different interpretations might cause different research results (Shklarov 2007). The translator, therefore, must be objective, neutral and ensure that he/she interprets the meaning of what the informants said accurately and then convey this accurately to the reader (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg 2010). Accurate translating, however, is not straightforward. First of all, words and concepts may have different meanings and different cultural connotations in different languages (Shklarov 2007; Van Nes, Abma,

Jonsson & Deeg 2010). These differences do not necessarily have to be large, but also subtle differences must be considered (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg 2010). Secondly, the researcher might encounter words that does not exist in- or do not have similar word in English (Twinn 1997). When translating words that had different meanings or did not exist in Norwegian, therefore, I tried to explain the word and provide the reader with the Norwegian word in parenthesis. Despite my attempts to provide the reader with accurate data, however, I believe that some discrepancies are unavoidable. After all, "The reader produces an understanding of a text during the act of reading by reference to their own understanding of concepts and debates filtered through their own experiences." (Temple & Young 2004, p. 165). Similarly, I believe that the researchers own understanding and experiences will color the translation to a certain degree. Thus the researcher can never be 100% objective or neutral. Even so, the researcher should at least strive for the accuracy, neutrality and objectivity that produce data that is as valid and reliable as possible.

#### **4.12.3 Data analysis**

To analyse data is " ...a process of resolving data into its constituent components, to reveal its characteristic elements and structure" (Dey 1993, p.31). Data analysis is used to make sense of the data in a way that is both intelligible and analytical (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). As soon as I entered the research field, I continually analysed my data by e.g. listening to interviews, and transcribing them as well as taking notes of ideas. The following section, however, will focus on the data analysis that took place after transcribing and translating. The first thing I did after transcribing the data was to read through it as many times as possible. Sometimes I would read through the data with short intervals. Other times, I would take a brake of several days between each session. This was done in order to get a general overview of the data. Then I would start to analyse the data. Although there are many ways to analyse data, this thesis employed grounded theory. Grounded theory "...is firmly rooted in an assumption common to qualitative researchers: do not begin with a prior hypothesis but induce your hypotheses from close data analysis" (Silverman 2011, p. 67). The next step in my data analysis, therefore, was initial coding. Initial coding refers to the process of analysing each sentence and identifying various codes. This method of analysing data, (Kathy Charmaz 2004) argues, helps the researcher be open minded rather than pushing ideas into moulds and reduces taken for granted assumptions. This

method, therefore, helped me to focus on the physical records of teenagers' thoughts and experiences of information sharing, rather than my pre-assumptions. Due to the time limits of this study, however, I could not analyse each sentence. Rather, I set out to develop codes from each reply the informants gave me. Although the different codes created from the initial coding helped me make sense of the data and develop categories, the large number of codes also made it difficult to really understand what was going on. In order to solve this I moved on to the next stage of my coding. Here I set out to determine what codes were most prominent by e.g. writing summaries of each of the interviews, observations and diary entries, constantly rereading my codes and using computer software to determine the frequency of various words and codes. After doing so, I started to explore the relationship between the various codes, developing my codes and highlighting deviant codes. I then merged similar codes into overarching themes. It is important to note, however, that also the deviant cases were included in the analysis. As such, this stage of the process had many similarities with axial coding. Next, I moved on to a form of selective coding. During this phase I selected the core category, and investigated its relationship with the other dominant themes that had emerged from my data analysis. This was done by investigating my findings from the axial coding and initial coding. Consequently, I constantly moved back and forth between initial coding, axial coding and selective coding. After the selective coding I continued working on my research report, while constantly going back to my data. This research project, however, had several limitations.

#### **4.13 Limitations**

Although qualitative methods are believed to give children a voice in research, it also has limitations. One example of this is generalisability. Unlike quantitative studies, this study only had a small number of participants. These participants were from one area of the country and they all came from the same socio economic background. This thesis, therefore, cannot make the same generalizations as a quantitative study.

The time limits of the project presented me with some limitations. This of course influenced my research. An example of this was the observation interview. Most of the informants found the idea of me observing their activity on facebook unsettling. This could be an indicator that the time I spent in the field was not sufficient enough.

If I had more time in the field, however, I might have been able to build a closer relationship with the informants, so that they would be comfortable with me observing them.

## Chapter 5: Analysis and discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

In one of my interviews I asked one of my informants if she had a lot of friends that were not on Facebook.

Hedvig Amalie: “Ehh.. (A tone of voice that may imply “are you weird?”) No.” (A tone of voice that sounds like “of course they do”)

Eli Marie: (laughs) “..Why not?”

Hedvig Amalie: “Emm..I don't know..they..everybody's got it really.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Hedvig Amalie: “I don't know why everybody's got it..It's almost become like..a new lifestyle.”

Eli Marie: “Yes.”

Hedvig Amalie: “In..for the..for the teenagers that are growing up now.”

As this statement implies, FB has become immensely popular among Norwegian teenagers. When asked why they signed up to the site, many informants explained that it was due to its increasing popularity, especially amongst their peers. They also joined the site because it was seen as a space where they could communicate with-, become updated on-, share information with or simply hang out with their offline connections. These offline connections consist of everyone from their closest friends and family members to peers, adults from their offline community and people they go to school with. Together, these people constitute teenagers'

intended audience; they are the ones that will see what teenagers share on the site. They become the collective that teenagers “...adjust their behaviour and self-presentation to fit the intended norms of...” (Boyd 2010, p.44). One might assume, therefore, that the interaction that takes place on SNS is very similar to that which occurs offline. In fact, social media is believed to mirror numerous aspects of everyday life (Baym & Boyd 2012). At the same time, however, it has been argued that networked media “...are reconfiguring many aspects of everyday life, complicating social dynamics...” (Baym & Boyd 2012, p.328). The argument for this is that networked media such as SNS are shaped by properties such as persistence, searchability, replicability, and scalability (Boyd 2008). As a result teenagers may have to deal with invisible audiences, collapsed contexts and the blurring of public and private (Boyd 2008). In unmediated spaces, for example, different groups of people such as adults and friends are usually addressed separately (Boyd 2008). Due to the collapsed contexts of SNS, however, teenagers’ audience often consist of different groups of people who are gathered in the same space; all of whom teenagers address simultaneously. The following chapter, therefore, will set out to explore how teenagers’ information sharing is shaped by their audiences.

## **5.2 Chapter outline**

In the following chapter I will present and analyse my findings on why and how teenagers share information on Facebook. Aiming to capture teenagers' thoughts and experiences, my chapter builds on the data collected during my fieldwork, including segments from the transcripts. In order to understand what is going on in the data, however, I will interpret my findings in relation to concepts of audience, as well comparing my findings to that of previous studies. Before outlining teenagers' intended audience, the chapter will start by introducing the concept of audience on SNS. Paying particular emphasis to the collapsed context of SNS, the chapter will then discuss how the nature of teenagers' audience influences why and how they share information. This will be done by looking at the reoccurring themes such as shared norms, seeing and being seen, giving and receiving reaffirmation, pleasing others and hanging out. This will go hand in hand with in a discussion of how the collapsed contexts of SNS influence teenagers' information sharing. Next, the chapter will move into a discussion of the importance of information sharing on SNS. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by summarizing my findings.

## **5.3 Imagined audience**

As we saw in chapter 3, today's audience can often be described as active. According to Tufekci, however, "...in technologically mediated sociality, the audience has been obscured. We can no longer see who is looking, nor, sometimes, can we even make an educated guess. If one is in a street corner, a classroom, the beach, or a bar, the audience is limited by walls, doors, and distance. Although it is possible that there may be unexpected members within the audience, the presence of others is much more transparent than it is on the Web" (2008, p.20). While knowing one's audience in offline contexts is often relatively straightforward, the properties such as persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability are believed to complicate the sharing of information on SNS (Boyd 2008). Persistence refers to the automatic recording and archiving of online content and replicability refers to the possibility of duplication of content (Boyd 2008). Next, scalability is used to describe the potential of broad visibility of the things posted online (Boyd 2008). Finally, searchability is used to describe the possibility of accessing content posted on SNS through searching (Boyd 2008). Nancy Baym (2010) points to the difference between how information is stored in the human

mind and digital media. She explains how face-to-face conversations happen there and then, and unless this communication is recorded by e.g. digital devices “...they are gone as soon as they are said” (Baym 2010, p.10). What takes place on digital media, however, is much easier to store (Baym 2010). Sometimes, this storing of information is done automatically by e.g. the server. In other instances, individuals themselves can store information by e.g. taking screenshots or simply by copying and pasting. As such “Storage, and relatedly, replicability, are highly consequential” (Baym 2010, p.10). Because this information can be stored and replicated relatively effortlessly, it can be easily forwarded to vast audiences (Baym 2010). This is also the case with sites such as FB All information shared on the site, for example, will be automatically stored by FB. At the same time, others can copy the content you have shared with them simply by copying and pasting and then forwarding it to unintended audiences. Baym (2010) also suggests that those who share content online do not necessarily consider all of their potential audiences. Whether this occurs on FB, is to a large extent influenced by the privacy settings. The content shared by teenagers who set their profile to public, for example, can be viewed by all Internet users. Those who set their profile to friends only, however, have greater control over their audience. Moreover, Boyd (2008) argues that the properties of SNS usually make the audience invisible. After all, the audience can be comprised of lurkers, or in other words people who do not make their presence known (Boyd 2008). In some cases, however, the audience is invisible simply because the site is not constructed in a way that makes the audience visible (Boyd 2008). FB, for example, is not constructed in a way that makes people's audiences known. Another implication is the asynchronicity between audience and the one who shares online content (Boyd 2008). After all, the audience is not necessarily present when the content is shared (Boyd 2008). This is also the case with sites such as FB. Here, teenagers do not have to be present while their friends post something in order to hear about it. After all, News Feed allow teenagers to see what have happened on their FB network since they last logged in. Consequently, teenagers' audiences on SNS can be considered invisible.

In offline contexts “People typically interact with small and explicit audiences relying more on who they can see or hear in the actual audience, rather than their imagination” (Litt 2012, p.332). People then adopt their behaviour to this audience (Goffman 1959; Schlenker 1980).

Although the audience in offline contexts is not always known, the collapsed contexts of social media increases the possibility of an unknown audience (Marwick & Boyd 2011). As we have seen the full extent of audience on SNS is potentially unknown. Not knowing one's audience, therefore, is likely to complicate teenagers' sharing on SNS. After all, the audience helps teenagers to make sense of the social contexts online (Boyd 2008). According to Boyd, therefore, it becomes difficult for the users of sites such as SNS to determine to whom they shall adjust their behaviour to (Boyd 2008). This is not to say that people have no sense of their audience online (Marwick & Boyd 2011). After all, teenagers can perform for those they imagine their audience to be (Boyd 2008). Because the users of SNS do not necessarily know the true extent of their audience, however, the audience is only considered to be imaginary or partial (Boyd 2008). According to Marwick and Boyd, therefore, the audience online is often "...constructed by an individual in order to present themselves appropriately, based on technological affordances and immediate social context" (2011, p.115).

### **5.3.1 Who are teenagers' imagined audience?**

Boyd argues that "On social network sites, people's imagined—or at least intended—audience is the list of Friends that they have chosen to connect with on the site" (Boyd 2010, p.44). There are many ways to find friends on FB. If you know someone's full name or e-mail you can search for them in the search bar at the top of your profile (Facebook n.d.g). Thereafter one must visit the profile of the ones one wishes to befriend, and click the button add friend (Facebook n.d.g). Another way to add friends is by importing contacts from other online services such as Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo and Skype. Moreover, Facebook also suggests people you may know. The formula is calculated by many factors such as mutual friends and education (Facebook n.d.h). The profile owner can then choose whether he/she wishes to add any of these people as friends. If your friends are not on the site you can send a request to them from the "invite your friends" page (Facebook n.d.g). Becoming FB friends, however, is dependent on the other party accepting the friendship request. If the recipient accepts the friendship request he/she becomes part of the profile owner's friend list. In order to understand what teenagers' intended audience is, therefore, it is important to investigate who teenagers add as friends.

In the early 1990s, it was argued that the Internet presented people with new opportunities to form online collectives with people they did not know in real life (Rheingold 2000). This, of course, is still possible today. It is, however, argued that the Internet is used primarily to facilitate offline existing social relationships (Calhoun 1998; Castells 2001; Wellman 2004). In fact, previous studies have shown that most teenagers use SNS to maintain their already existing friendships (Lenhart & Madden 2007; Boyd 2008; Larsen 2009). Who the informants in my study added as friends, however, varied. Even so, Erle Emilie<sup>1</sup> was a good example of what kind of friends my informants add to their profiles. She starts by explaining that:

Erle Emilie: “Well. I do have many friends from my last grade (trinn) at THE NAME OF HER OLD SCHOOL.”

Eli Marie: “Mm..yes.”

Erle Emilie: “That I don't spend that much time with anymore.”

Erle Emilie, therefore, has friends on her profile that used to be part of her offline life. This is not uncommon amongst the participants. In fact, Saga explain that she likes FB because she can see what others are doing and keep in touch with them. She does, for example, use FB to stay in touch with people she went to kindergarden with. Some teenagers, such as as Troy Sakarias and Hedvig Amalie, also use the site to stay in touch with people they have met while they were on holidays. Moreover, Hedvig Amalie uses FB to stay in touch with people that live in other parts of the country. Thus, teenagers' FB friends are not necessarily part of their everyday offline life. One can therefore argue that digital media such as SNS give teenagers the opportunity to interact with and stay in touch with people they seldom see in their offline environment. Some of my informants friends, however, are likely to play a larger part in teenagers' offline everyday life. Erle Emilie, for example, goes on to describe that she has added family as friends. Adding family as friends is also common amongst other

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<sup>1</sup> A list of the informants' names and gender can be found in the appendix

informants. In fact, many teenagers explain that adding parents as friends was a prerequisite for joining FB. An example of this is Hedvig Amalie, who explains that:

“Dad just said that I could make it, but then I had to be friends with both dad and mum.”

Teenagers also befriend other family members such as siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins and even grandparents. While previous studies have shown that teenagers add adults from their offline world (Boyd 2008), it is often argued that SNS is primarily a peer space (Boyd 2007; Boyd 2008; Ito et al. 2008). Perhaps this was why adults were not frequently talked about during the interviews. Looking at teenagers' profiles, however, most of teenagers appeared to interact primarily with other teenagers. One example of who teenagers had as Facebook friends were other teens who participated in the same organized activities as them. Two group of friends that is frequently referred to, however, is their current class mates and offline peers. While other teenagers appear to be their main audience, teenagers also have adults as their audience. Not only, however, did my study reveal that teenagers have friends from different generations, but that they had different levels of friendships with their audiences. While most of my informants said that they only added people they knew offline as FB friends, to know someone could simply mean that they had talked to them and not just seen them. For others it meant that they knew who the people were and they had hung out together. Similar arguments were made throughout the interviews. Knowing their FB friends, therefore, did not necessarily mean that they were close friends. Despite my argument that the teenagers added people they knew offline, there was one exception to this rule. Troy Sakarias explained that he did not add people he did not know unless they were friends of his parents. Thus some teenagers add people they do not know as friends on FB. Even so, my study differed from some previous studies, such as Vandoninck et al. (2012) who found that 57.8% of their informants had contact with strangers. It is impossible to determine why so few of my informants said that they used the site to interact with strangers on the site. Perhaps it did not come forth during our interviews or that they did not feel comfortable with disclosing it to me. On the other hand, teenagers could have a different perception of privacy than the teenagers that participated in Vandoninck et al. (2012) study. Another reason could be that Facebook encourages people to send friends request to people from their offline lives

(Facebook n.d.p). Nevertheless, the majority of my informants FB friends or the intended audience on teenagers' SNS profiles consists of people from their offline community, especially their peers. My study, therefore, reaffirms Lenhart and Madden (2007), Boyd (2008) and Larsen (2009) findings that teenagers use SNS primarily to maintain offline relationships.

### **5.3.2 FB audience real or imagined**

The FB settings give teenagers some control over who their audience are. In order to join and get access to FB one must sign up and create an account. Without doing so, one cannot participate on FB and has limited access to the activities that take place there. Consequently, one can argue that the sign up feature serves as a boundary, separating those who are on FB from those who are not. The efficiency of this boundary, however, depends on another boundary feature: the privacy settings. Teenagers can influence who sees what by using FB's privacy tools. There are many ways to access these privacy tools. One way of doing so is by clicking on the settings gear at the upper right corner of one's FB profile and clicking on the privacy settings. Here, the profile owner can adjust who can view the things they post such as "Who can see your future posts?" "Review all you posts and things you're tagged in" and "Limit The Audience for Old Posts on Your Timeline" (Facebook n.d.i). It also allows the user to adjust who can look them up (Facebook n.d.i). Another way to adjust one's privacy settings is by clicking on the "Privacy Shortcuts" button shaped as a padlock positioned next to the to the settings tab (ibid.). This function serves as a shortcut for deciding who can see what you post, who can contact you and how to stop people from bothering you (ibid.). There are also easier ways to adjust who can see what you post. Before posting things such as status updates and photos, for example, one can decide who can see the information by clicking on the "post privacy setting" beneath e.g. the status updates (ibid.). Consequently, the privacy settings are easily accessible when people want to post something. Regardless of where one chooses to adjust one's privacy settings, one can choose between four different levels of privacy; public, friends, only me and custom. Setting your audience to Public, means that anyone on the Internet can see what you post (Facebook n.d.j). If the profile owner wants more privacy he/she can choose friends only instead (Facebook n.d.j). These friends, are the

ones he/she added to the friends list. If, the profile owner tags someone, however, the tagged item becomes available to the person who is tagged as well as their friends (Facebook n.d.j). As the name implies “only me” makes the content available to the profile owner only. The final setting custom is more advanced. Here one can choose to share information with specific people or a list of friends (ibid.). This setting also allows teenagers to choose people or lists of people who won't be able to see what they posts (ibid.). They can, however, choose a different level of privacy for each new thing he/she posts (ibid.). Thus people can have multiple levels of privacy simultaneously. Although these are only some of the possibilities teenagers have to adjust their audience, it is a basic overview of how they can adjust who can see what they post through FB settings.

Although referring to the Net generation, Rosenblum, express his concern about peoples usage of SNS arguing that “...because such forums are relatively easy to access, posted content can be reviewed by anyone with an interesting the users’ personal information” (2007,p.40). Concerns about the accessibility to the information people share on SNS and the potential unintended audience is not unusual. Naturally, it is not necessarily impossible for unintended audience to access the things teenagers share on SNS, through searchability, scalability, persistence and replicability. As we have seen, however, FB settings give teenagers some control over who can access what they post on the site. Whether ones audience is real or imagined, therefore, depends to a large degree on teenagers technical expertise (Litt 2012) and/or teenagers decision to make their profile public or private. Whether or not SNS users set their profiles to public or private, however, varies. A world wide study of teenagers MySpace profiles, for example, found that 45.6% of occasional users and 58.3% set their profiles to private teenagers (Patchin & Hinduja 2010). A study of USA teenagers found that 66% of the teenagers that participated in their study limited the access to their various SNS profiles. An even higher number 76.3% of the Cyprus teenage Facebook users investigated by Taraszow et al. (2010) had set their profile to friends only. EU kids online, however, have found that as little as 12% of Norwegian teenage Facebook users between thirteen and sixteen years of age set their profile to public (Livingstone, Ólafsson & Staksrud 2011). Thus most of the young Norwegian teenagers appear to create a privacy boundary around their profiles.

Similarly, most of my informants said that they limited their audience by setting their profile to friends only. While some of my informants used the privacy settings their parents set up for them or FB's pre-set privacy settings, others actively used the settings to create a boundary designed to prevent unwanted audience. Orion, for example, explained that only his FB friends could see the things he shared on FB.

Orion: "It's just because I don't want like complete strangers to like see what I am up to..."

One reason for creating boundaries between themselves and strangers is to avoid possible risks such as people tracking them down or misusing their photos. Because these boundaries are used to exclude unwanted others, teenagers must send friend requests to their friends in order to see and be seen. After sending the friend requests, their peers may or may not validate their friendship by accepting them as FB friends. My informants seemed to accept most friend requests if they knew the people who sent them the request. If they were unsure whether or not they knew someone, they would look at the profile pictures in order to determine if they knew them. People who they did not know, however, were ignored. Such boundaries, however, does not only serve to keep strangers out. It can also function as a boundary to avoid parents from accessing their profile. One of the informants, for example, explained that he/she did not befriend his parents because he/she did not want them to see what his/her friends posted on FB. Similarly, Othilie said that she thought about the fact that who she befriended on FB would see what she posted, before she decided whether or not she would add them as friends. This shows that it is not uncommon for teenagers to use the friending function and the privacy settings to prevent unwanted audiences from viewing what they share. Naturally, these boundaries are not necessarily foolproof. After all, there are always methods to circumvent these boundaries (Boyd 2010). Nevertheless, many of the teenagers that participated in this study appear to embrace the settings that allowed them some control who their audience were. Consequently, this thesis will follow Nicole B. Ellison, Charles Steinfield and Cliff Lampe's (2007) example "In contrast to popular press coverage which has primarily focused on negative outcomes of Facebook use stemming from users' misconceptions about the nature of their online audience, we are interested in situations in which the intended audience for the profile (such as well-meaning peers and friends) and the actual audience are aligned" (p.1145).

#### **5.4 Collapsed contexts: Same content, different people**

As we have seen, teenagers' friend lists consist of different groups of people. After all, teenagers add everything from distant others to best friends, parents to peers and sometimes even adults from their offline community to their friends list. Similar findings were made by Brandtzæg, Lüders and Skjetne (2010), who found that that people (both adults and teenagers), had contact with different groups of people on FB such as family, fiends and acquaintances. Not only, then, do teenagers have different levels of friendship with contacts, their “friends” are from different groups or indeed different generations. In the offline world these different groups of people are likely to be addressed separately (Boyd 2008). In fact, people often present themselves differently to different people (Marwick & Boyd 2011). The media, however, is likely to complicate this (Meyrowitz 1985; Boyd 2007b). On FB, for example, teenagers who post things on the public profile or timeline, often address all their different groups of “friends” simultaneously. After all, teenagers do not appear to use the settings that allow them to only share information with one particular group frequently. Consequently, the information they post on the timeline is likely to be visible to all of their contacts at once. Although collapsed contexts also occur offline, they are more likely to be experienced by public figures (Meyrowitz 1985). In social media, however, everyday people are continually exposed to this collapsed context (Litt 2012). This, of course, is likely to complicate teenagers' information sharing on SNS. When asked whether they had someone on their friend list that they did not want to see what they shared, however, most of the informants said that they would not add people if they did not want them to see what they shared. Othilie, for example, said that she thought about the fact that who she befriended on FB would see what she posted, before she decided whether or not she would add them. Most of the informants who had befriended their parents on the site were comfortable with their presence because they did not add things that they did not want their parents to see. In fact, one of the informants said that she liked the fact that her parents could keep an eye on her on FB. This is not to say that all teenagers were entirely comfortable with the presence of their parents. When asked what he/she thought about the fact his/her parents could see what he/she posted, one of the informants said that it was

Informant: “A bit weird. But it is fine.”

Eli Marie: “Mm. How do you think it is weird?”

Informant: “Well..because of that..I don’t dare to write something that I am not allowed to write.”

Eli Marie: “mm”

Informant: “But I usually don’t write things like that either.”

Eli Marie: “No”

Informant: Actually

Parents presence on the site, therefore, may influence what teenagers share on FB. To what extent the activities of the various age groups intertwined, however, varied. It was not, for example, unusual for parents to upload content such as photos to their children. These pictures often become tagged with the child’s name, and thus they would show up in the child’s photo album and become available to the children’s friends. Likewise some of the informants, had shared pictures of holidays they had together with their parents. Several informants even said that they used the site to stay in touch with their family members. Who teenagers intended audiences was, however, varied. The informants, for example, said that they shared information on their site so that others got to know about it. The others they referred to appeared to be everyone on their friend list; adults as well as teens, close friends as well as familiar others. Much of the public interaction that took place on the site, however, appeared to be with and for other teenagers. An example of this was quizzes where teenagers would ask each other questions and answer. If teenagers hang out with their peers offline public spaces such as parks and street-corners, adults such as their parents, are not necessarily witness to teens social interaction. Due to the collapsed context of sites such as FB, however,

adults who have befriended their child become the audience to this interaction. In some instances, however, an audience is all the adults should be. Some teenagers argued that adults' interaction with teens on FB should be limited. Hedvig Amalie, for example, explained that

Hedvig Amalie: "Erm...Most adults only press like and they don't like comment because they kind of know that I am just a child and they are adults so it becomes a bit- "

Eli Marie: "Yes."

Hedvig Amalie: "Wrong if they comment..."

Other teenagers, however, say that they seldom speak to their family on FB and some say that their parents don't really use the site. How much teenagers interact with adults on the site and to what extent adults are teenagers real or intended audience, therefore, is likely to vary. This, however, was not the only way teenagers information sharing was influenced by their audience.

Teenagers try to evaluate their information sharing to their different audiences. Several informants, for example, argued that due to the various levels of friendships on FB. it is especially important to be nice and friendly. An example of this was an explanation made by Hedvig Amalie. The way she addresses her closest friends privately on the site is very similar to the way she would talk to them in a face to face situation. She does, however, make an effort to be especially nice to her "regular friends" on FB. Hedvig Amalie does so, because she wants to avoid misunderstandings. She goes on to explain that if you write something on FB as a joke, the other person may not realize that it was a joke. This she argues, could ruin friendships. She could be referring to the lack of e.g. facial cues in a digital world. Because her friends cannot see her physical body, they cannot adequately judge her performance, and as such they cannot see that she is joking. Because her private communication with the closest friends is similar to that in offline contexts, however, she is also likely to refer to the level of friendship. Hedvig Amalie also made another argument that supports the idea that teenagers adapt their sharing according to their audience. She does, for example, describe that what you post on FB becomes very visible. When asked what she meant, she explained that

everyone would see what she shared on the site. Because similar arguments were made by several other informants, teenagers do not necessarily view the Timeline as a private space. While what was shared was not necessarily easily accessible to those they defined as strangers, it was usually visible to everyone that they had added as friends. As a result, Hedvig Amalie informed me that most people try to be careful about what they post. When prompted she explained that she had to consider what kind of people she had as friends on the site before posting content. After all, she like most of the teenagers' had quite a few friends some of whom were adults. Because she had so many friends and adults on the site, therefore, she felt that she could not post things that was too weird. The collapsed contexts of SNS, therefore, influence what and how teenagers share information on the site.

## **5.5 Norms:**

As we have seen, Boyd (2010) argue that people adjust their behaviour- as well as self-presentation to suit the norms of their imagined audience. Just like other online formations such as internet soap opera fan group (Baym 2000) and chat (Tingstad 2003), teenagers on FB seem to share norms about what and how to share information on FB. Previous studies such as Turkle (1995) have suggested that teenagers use the Internet for identity play. Boyd (2008), however, argues that “..the profiles that teens create in social network sites are typically tightly connected to the identity that teens embody in unmediated environments” (p.128). For the teenagers who participated in this study, for example, identity play did not seem to be an important part of their FB usage. Rather, the shared norm on FB was that teenagers' profiles should largely reflect their offline self; they should display accurate information about themselves. This could be because my informants friends or intended audience were people from their offline lives. The shared norm of displaying accurate information, for example, applied to identifying information such as real name and profile picture. When asked what names teenagers use on FB, Ask Leander explained that they usually used «The real full name». Although this was reaffirmed by other informants, there were also exceptions to this norm. Some of the teenagers, for example, said that their FB friends would add stylistic elements to their name, such as using a fake last name or middle name. Even so, all of the informants choose to use their real- or part of their real name. One reason for using part of

their real name was that their full name was too long. Moreover, some teenagers explained that other people did not necessarily know them by their full name. Thus some of the informants chose to display e.g. their nick name followed by their last name or to exclude elements of their name such as their middle name. Because teenagers' FB usage is embedded in their offline network, real names may serve as an identifier for those who wish to add them as friends. Similarly, most of the informant's profile pictures were self portraits. When asked if this was more common than other pictures, Hedvig Amalie explained that almost all of her FB friends had pictures of themselves. One of the informants, Ask Leander, informed me that these self portraits served an important function on FB.

Ask Leander: "It's because people that..don't remember the persons name. Or first name might recognize them from their picture."

Eli Marie: "Mm"

Ask Leander: "And because it is..I think it's okay (greit) to have a Facebook picture."

Eli Marie: "What do you mean with okay (greit) to have a Facebook picture?"

Ask Leander: "I mean that it is okay (greit) to have a Facebook picture. Because then people can recognise me by the photo"

Eli Marie: "Mm"

Ask Leander: "And yeah..I have added at least five friends only by looking at their first name and picture."

This idea is also reaffirmed by other informants. Although not referring to the profile pictures, Othilie, Erle Emilie and Troy Sakarias also used photographs to determine whether or not they knew someone on FB. This indicates that identifying information such as real names and photographs can play an important role when adding friends. In fact, teenagers

who do not add this information may be unrecognisable to their peers. Given the fact that many teenagers do not want to add people they do not know, those who do not add name and photo stand the risk of being excluded from the peer culture that takes place on FB. Not all identifying information, however, plays the same role.

Facebook's "about" section can also be used to display various forms of information about the profile owner. Examples of this include work and education, current location, hometown, relationship status, religion, political views, contact information and family. When signing up to FB all users are required to share information such as e-mail, name, birth date and gender. Thus the FB interface is likely to be their primary reason why teenagers share this information. This was confirmed by Erle Emilie, who, informed me that she had entered her e-mail and name in order to sign up to the site. Teenagers, however, can choose whether or not they wish to enter other information in their about section. The informants had often left much of their about me section blank. Most of the teenagers, however, had chosen to share the name of their city, and some had chosen to share the name of their school. The likelihood of sharing this information is evident in other studies such as Patchin and Hinduja (2010) who found that 69.6% and Lenhart and Madden (2007) found that 61% shared the name of their city/town. Whether teenagers add the name of their school, however, varies. While Patchin and Hinduja (2010) found that only 11.1% added the name of their school, Lenhart and Madden (2007) found that 49% had included the name of their school. Like my study, therefore, it appears to be more common to share hometown than the name of their school. One interesting finding made by Lenhart and Madden, however, was that "... a teen's school name seems to be the exception to the general rule of withholding specific location information, or information that can be used to contact you in the real world" (2007,p. 18). This coincides with my findings. After all, several of my informants said that they would not add information such as telephone numbers, home addresses on the public part of their profiles because they were afraid that others could locate them. None of the informants, however, said that they were afraid that others would be able to track them down if they shared the name of their school. Nor did I discover that sharing the name of the school had any particular function. Instead, none of the informants who were asked had an answer for why they shared school or hometown. This could indicate that some teenagers choose to

share the information simply because the site encourages them to do so. One interesting finding, however, was that one of the teenagers, Erle Emilie had asked her parents whether she could share this information before she did so. Information sharing on FB, therefore, is not only influenced by peer norms, but also adult decisions. Moreover, all of the informants who shared school and hometown had or at least attempted to enter accurate information. This could indicate that the norm of accuracy applies. Upon visiting their about section, however, two of the informants noticed that they had displayed inaccurate information about what school they went too. Because none of the teenagers had noticed this before, one could draw the assumption that teenagers does not visit this part of their profile frequently. One of the teenagers who had displayed inaccurate information, laughed it away saying “Apparently I have..I have attended two upper secondary schools.“ (laughs). The other informant who, had according to FB already graduated from his school said that he could not be asked to change it. Yet another informant, Troy Sakarias said that he had not gotten around to sharing his education yet. This was also the argument of Orion, who had not shared what part of town he lived in. Because both boys had been on the site for quite some time, sharing education and what part of town one lived in did not seem to play an important role on FB. Although the norm for this section appeared to be to display accurate information, not doing so did not seem to have any consequence for the informants. The norm of sharing accurate information, however, did not always apply.

Although several informants had written their date of birth, this information was not always accurate. Because FB has a lower age limit of 13 years of age, some of the teenagers had been too young to join when they signed up. Previous research have shown that some teenagers display incorrect age in order to bypass such restrictions (Livingstone, Ólafsson & Staksrud 2011). Similarly, my study found that teenagers', in order to bypass FB. regulations, had falsified their year of birth. This did not seem to have any negative consequences for the informants. It did, however, reinforce my belief that the about section was seldom updated. After all, all of the teenagers had turned thirteen years of age. Even so, some of the informants had not corrected their year of birth. Sharing inaccurate information, however, was not only done in order to bypass regulations. One example of this could be found on the about section. Here FB has the ability to display their family members. Real family members,

however, were not the only people teenagers had added as “family”. One of the informants, for example, explained that one of his/her friends had added one of his/her peers as grandparent. Perhaps they did so to be funny or to display their humorous relationship. After all, Livingstone (2008) found that the information teenagers displayed on their profiles were not necessarily self disclosure, but a way to show their humorous relationship with family and friends. Nevertheless, another teenager, Hedvig Amalie explained that one reason why people added others as family was because they were close friends. She did, for example, say that it was not uncommon for teenagers to add their best friends as e.g. sisters. Similarly, Troy Sakarias, explained that one of his friends had added him as brother. This, he continued was

Troy Sakarias: “Because we are so close.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Troy Sakarias: “That we could almost have been brothers.”

Thus, some teenagers used the family section to publicly display their level of friendship. Another informant explained that false information such as this was easy to spot, and thus it was unlikely to cause any misunderstandings. This was also the case with those teenagers who added a fake job. After all, their alleged job-titles were often very unrealistic such as being the «boss» of company, or working for their favourite sports team. Other teenagers would write humorous sentences saying that they did not have to work because their parents had money. Clearly then, the norm of sharing accurate information does not apply in all situations.

### **5.5.1 Interestingness**

Another norm on FB is that what you share should be interesting and relevant for your audience. An illustration of this is Erle Emilie who did not add Norwegian as language in her about section because everybody knew that she spoke it. Because it was common knowledge, she explained, it would have looked silly if her friends had received a News Feed saying that

she spoke Norwegian. Similarly, Saga, a teenager who said that she shared little information on the about section explained that she did not feel the need to post where she lived because her friends already knew. Because her friends knew pretty much everything already, she went on to explain, she did not feel like she did not necessarily feel compelled to post things. In instances such as this, therefore, what kind of information shared is influenced by the fact that their audience was people from their offline life. The norm that teenagers should not share information that their FB contacts were familiar with, however, was not shared by all teenagers. After all, many of the informants would share information about what school they went to and their hometown.

All of the teenagers said that they did not post things about themselves frequently. One common reason for this was that they felt that what they posted on the site should be interesting for their audience. When asked why he did not update his profile often, for example, Orion said that that he did not have much to tell. He then went on to explain that he didn't like to post things that he did at home, like eating. Instead he preferred to share things that were more special such as going to a concert and not everyday activities. Another illustration of this is Hedvig Amalie who explained that she don't usually share everyday events such as going to ORGANIZED ACTIVITY. The reason for this, was that she did it almost every day, and thus considers it to be less interesting. Instead she posts text or pictures of more unusual things she has done or is going to do. Similarly, Othilie said that she seldom shares boring things she has done or everyday activities. She adds that sharing everyday activities would be more like a blog. Thus, she prefers sharing if she had done something exciting. It is important to note, however, that this did not seem to apply to all forms of sharing. None of the teenagers, for example, talked about the interestingness of sharing that they liked things such as books and movies. Although there did not seem to be any sanction against those who shared everyday activities frequently, teenagers did not necessarily enjoy oversharing. When asked what she thinks about the people who share a lot on their profiles, Saga informs me that:

Saga: "Yes some people can share kind of too much. If they like write everything they do. Like I am eating dinner, I am out, things like that."

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Saga: “Then it becomes a bit too much. Because everyone doesn’t need to know what you have for dinner and what time you go to bed and things like that. So..but it's their choice. It's their decision.”

Thus it seems to be a norm that teenagers should not share trivial information about themselves because it is considered less interesting. Everyday activity is not the only information that is considered as less interesting. Erle Emilie, for example, finds it less interesting when people post what she describes as nonsense. When asked what she meant by nonsense, Erle Emilie explained that she referred to the times that people just posted two letters on their FB. My interpretation of Erle Emilie's account is that she describes teenagers that post things without any substance, or in other words, posting for the sake of posting. When asked what kind of profiles he/she thinks are cool one of the informants explained that he/she does not like it when people post trivial content such as a letter that was copied from another profile and then reposted by someone, and then copied and reposted by someone else. If someone does this he/she explains that, he/she will adjust her settings so that he/she won't get much information about this person anymore on his/her News Feeds. Thus some teenagers sanction those who share trivial information.

## **5.6 Timeline**

When you enter your “friends” profiles, the first thing you see is their timeline. The timeline is a chronological collection of the things people have posted about themselves. The FB interface gives teenagers some control over who can see the different things they have posted about themselves on the timeline. Even so, the informants described this as their public part of their profile; public in the sense that what appeared here was usually visible to all their FB friends. As a result the timeline could be described as the teenager's public self-presentation. At the same time, however, the profile owner's friends can post content on the owner's timeline. They can do so by e.g. writing a post or uploading a photo and then tagging the

profile owner (Facebook n.d.k; Facebook n.d.l). Although the profile owner can decide who can see this information, friends also have the opportunity to contribute to teenagers' self presentation (Facebook n.d.k). In fact, Facebook describes the timeline as "...your collection of the photos, stories, and experiences that tell your story" (Facebook n.d.m). Despite the apparent function of the timeline, it also has social opportunities. Those who visit the timeline, for example, can comment and like the profile content. Moreover, some teenagers enter content on their timeline that encourages other to interact such as quizzes and questions. Sharing on FB, therefore, is not necessarily an isolated experience, but a social activity.

### **5.7 See and be seen**

While one might assume that teenagers come to FB in order to share things about themselves, this is not necessarily the case. The teenagers that participated this study, for example, were more preoccupied with observing rather than posting content about themselves. These findings coincides with the Norwegian study conducted by Skog (2008). In fact, most of the informants that participated in my study explain that they often log on FB just to check what's new. Being updated on others seem to be an important part of FB. Ask Leander describes that FB is a way to stay updated on what's going on in the world around you. For him, FB is his primary news-source, where he for example, learns who won the USA election. For some teenagers, such as Orion, the site is also place where he can get informed about hobbies and interests. What most teenagers seem most interested in, however, is being updated on their peers. For Ask Leander, for example, FB is a place where he can be updated on what his friends thinks about everything from the newest pop groups to American politics. He also describes it as a place where you can find out what is going on in your friends' lives. In fact, Saga lists getting updated on others as one of the reasons for why she joined the site. Another informant, Hedvig Amalie, explains that she spends more time on FB during the weekend. One of the reasons for doing so was that she wanted to stay updated on everything that was going on. The interest in getting updated, is also evident in teenagers' own activities. After all, most of the informants explain that they start their FB session by checking what is new. Examples of this include recently shared photographs, status updates, likes and comments. It is important to note, however, that the News Feed also give them information about recent

activities that concerns them more directly, such as being tagged in photographs and receiving friend requests and invites. It also gives them updates who have liked and commented on the content they have posted on their own profile. Teenagers, however, do not necessarily share much information on their profile. When asked what she posted on her own timeline, for example, Saga explained that she usually only looked at updates from others. Similarly, when asked what he updated most often Ask Leander, explained that:

“Yes..No. Nothing really. I just log on and see what other people have posted.”

Similar arguments were made by all of the informants. This indicates that some teenagers are more likely to look at what other posts rather, than updating their own profile. While some of the informants used the site to become updated on everything from celebrities to politics, most of the teenagers were primarily interested in becoming updated on the people in their network. It also underpins another of my findings; that teenagers do not necessarily share information frequently. Although the frequency of information sharing, and how much they shared varied, none of the teenagers in this study felt that they shared information on FB often. Their conclusion that they seldom shared information on FB was often reached by comparing themselves to their peers. This, however, does not mean that teenagers never shared information on FB.

## **5.8 Being seen**

There are many reasons why teenagers choose to share information on FB. Although the most prominent motivations will be discussed throughout this chapter, this section will focus on the motivation of “being seen”. Some teenagers use FB, to inform their audience what they are doing. When asked why he posts things on FB., for example, Ask Leander explains that

“...It's so that people get to know what I am doing.”

When prompted as to why he wants people to know what he is doing, he explains that it is what FB is for. Although other teenagers such as Orion and Hedvig Amalie, are more

hesitant, they too describe FB as a place where they can inform others about what they are doing. Similarly, Orion explains that he sometimes shares the FB the fact that his team are going to have a match. When asked who he writes this to, he explains that it is not to anyone in particular. Instead he says that he shares it so that people get to know about it. This indicates that teenagers do not necessarily share information with one group in particular. Instead, they will sometimes share information with everyone on their friend list. Another informant, Hedvig Amalie, was not sure why she chose to share certain information on FB. After contemplating it, however, she explained that maybe she shared it so that others people got to know about it. When asked who these other people were, she explained that it could be people who lived elsewhere. This could indicate that some teenagers share things on FB. in order to update their distant friends and relatives. Moreover, the teenagers who said that they wanted others to know about it could be referring to the scalability of the site; the information they share can reach their entire friend list with the click of a button. The collapsed contexts of social networking sites, therefore, does not only present teenagers with problems, but also opportunities. In fact, the scalability of the site was emphasised by Hedvig Amalie. When asked why people share things on Facebook, she explained that people shared things on the site so that everyone got to see it. Later in the interviews, Hedvig Amalie also explain that:

“You just want to like have a lot of likes and that someone will see you and know that you exist.”

In fact, some teenagers said that they almost forgot that the people who seldom shared on FB existed on the site. As a result the profiles that were seldom updated were less visited. Perhaps this was the reason why Hedvig Amalie argued that sharing things in order to be seen was a way for teenagers to remind others about their peers and other potential audience about their existence. Why they want others to see things, however, is likely to vary. Speaking about people who post pictures, Othilie mentions several possible motivations. The first reason she mentioned “If they want to do so.” I interpret this as people posting without having any particular motivation. Perhaps, it is just something to do while they are on the site. Another motivation is showing what they have done. She elaborates by explaining that maybe they want to show themselves, what they have made or where they have been.

Similarly, Hedvig Amalie, who would sometimes “show” pictures of things she had made if she was satisfied with them. She also speculated about why people posted videos of themselves while e.g. performing sport. The conclusion she reached was that perhaps they were proud about it and wanted to show it to others. Then other people could comment on it. This leads us to the third reason outlined by Othilie, wanting to get more likes. This, however, will be discussed later in the chapter. Other informants, however, outlined a fourth motivation. According to some teenagers, sharing things about yourself was a way for others to find out more about you. The two boys, Ask Leander and Troy Sakarias shared one motivation for adding things such as movies and television shows to their likes list. Ask Leander explained that he had added e.g. games, TV-shows and movies because he liked them. When asked whom he posted it for, he explained that it was so that others could see what he liked. Troy Sakarias said that he pressed the “like” button because he thought something was funny and that he liked it. He went on to explain that he also liked things so that others could find out more about him. Although it is not uncommon to share things so that others get to know about it, the motivations for doing so are many.

Wanting to see and be seen is not new to this generation of teenagers. It has, for example, been argued that teenagers during the 1950s drove around town, visited soda shops and drive-in restaurants so that they could see and be seen by other teenagers (Edge 2011). In like manner, my study as well as that of Boyd (2008), have found that today's teenagers' use SNS to see and be seen. My study, however, did not find that teenagers used SNS as a replacement of lost physical space. While SNS is not necessarily a replacement of offline public space, therefore, it appears to share the same functions. After all, teenagers' gather on these sites because it is where their friends, thus FB becomes a place to see and be seen. Perhaps, then, SNS is an extension of offline space. A new place that is highly accessible and scalable, and thus provides teenagers with new opportunities to see and be seen. While I have argued that teenagers come to the site to see and be seen, however, it is essential to emphasize that, unlike studies such as that of Larsen (2005), my informants were much more preoccupied with seeing than being seen.

## 5.9 Comments and likes

Previous studies have found that teenagers receive feedback and reaffirmation from peers after sharing content on SNS (Larsen 2005; Lenhart and Madden 2007; Johannsen 2012). Similarly, my study found that teenagers on FB get reaffirmation and feedback through e.g. the public comments and likes. When asked whether or not they have had any positive experiences with FB, for example, several informants point to the feedback they got from friends. Troy Sakarias and Ask Leander, for example, say that they have received positive feedback such as friends commenting and saying that what they posted was cool. A *like* can also be used to give reaffirmation. According to Ask Leander, like mean that someone thinks that the things he posted were funny or that the picture he posted was nice. As we saw in the previous section Hedvig Amalie explained that teenagers want to get many likes because they want to be seen and that they want others to know that they exist. Perhaps, then, receiving likes and comments is a way to reaffirm ones existence, a way to know that your peers have seen what you have posted. Not only have they seen it, they liked it and as such they reaffirm their social existence. Nevertheless, like teenagers in previous studies (Larsen 2005; Lenhart and Madden 2007), my informants described receiving comments and likes as a pleasurable experience. Elaborating on reaffirmation, Othilie explained that she had only received positive feedback from others e.g. when the people liked her photographs and gave her nice comments. When asked what she thought about it, she explained that she think it is fun and nice. Similarly, Orion explains that he enjoys the feedback he gets when posting things on FB. The importance of getting validation online is highlighted by Stern (2008). She does so by pointing to the idea that peers are becoming increasingly important during adolescence (ibid.). Teenagers, therefore, want to conform to peer norms and gain their peers approval and acceptance (ibid.). As a result, it is not uncommon for teenagers' to access their self-worth based on other teenagers feedback (ibid.) In fact, she even argues that “Such feedback, either offline or online, is crucial for identity achievement” (Stern 2008, p. 109). Perhaps then, SNS present teenagers with new convenient way for teenagers to get reaffirmation from their peers that may even influence their identity achievement. All of my informant's, however, did not necessarily consider reaffirmation as important.

Talking about youngsters that post content online, Susannah Stern, argued that “...receiving

audience feedback constitutes most youth authors' primary objective when posting a personal site on the Internet" (2008, p.108). While not describing it as a primary objective, research on SNS have also shown that feedback is an important part of teenagers usage on the site. Lenhart and Madden (2007), for example, found that one of the reasons why teenagers were such avid users of SNS was because of the possibility of getting feedback and reaffirmation when they presented themselves on the site. While my informants enjoyed feedback and reaffirmation, they said that they did not necessarily consider it important. All of my informant, for example, explained that they were much more likely to comment on others content than sharing things themselves. This could indicate that the informants that participated in my study were somewhat less preoccupied getting reaffirmation by their audience than previous research. Another example, was Ask Leander, who linked the need to get comments and likes to vanity. He suggested that many other teenagers were vain and thus wanted to be popular. In order to appear perfect, therefore, it was important for them to have lots of followers and people that liked the content they posted. He himself, however, did not see the reason for being popular when he could have good friends that liked him for who he was and not for what he had. One teenager, however, appeared to prefer reaffirmation from a particular group of friends. Troy Sakarias explained that he did not necessarily want everyone to look at him. Although he did like to get attention, he did not want attention from everyone who would go around and comment. This could be interpreted in several ways. This could indicate that Troy Sakarias do not like comments. He did, however, say that he liked to get attention, but not from everyone. One could, therefore, speculate whether there were some people he liked to get comments from, for example, his closest friends, and other people he did not like to get comments from, such as peers he did not know that well. This is of course impossible to determine. For some teenagers, such as Orion, however, it was usually his closest friends that gave him feedback. Similar arguments were made throughout the interviews. Despite the public nature of the site, therefore, the interaction and reaffirmation that takes place on the site appears to be largely friendship driven. My findings, therefore, contrast that of Larsen (2005) who found that teenagers also got compliments and comments from strangers. The difference between the two studies could have a simple explanation. Because most of my informants said that they had set their profiles to friends only and only invited people they knew, it becomes difficult for strangers to access and give reaffirmation to

my informants. While FB boundaries can explain why strangers did not give reaffirmation, it does not account for the fact that it was mostly close friends that gave feedback through comments and likes.

While most of my informants did not consider it important to be popular on the site, comments and likes could result in a contest among teenagers. According to Hedvig Amalie most people want to get likes.

Hedvig Amalie: “Eh..erm it's just that..most people want many others to like their photo.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Hedvig Amalie: “Because maybe someone enters and..wow, there's a lot of people who likes this. Then maybe she's very popular or something.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Hedvig Amalie: “So that's just how people think.”

For some teenagers, therefore, comments and likes are not only a way to receive reaffirmation, but also an indicator of one's status in the peer group. This finding can be strengthened by previous research that have found that comments and likes is a way to display ones popularity (Lenhart and Madden 2007). The competitiveness amongst the teenagers, however, is also evident in my other informants' accounts. One of the reasons why Ask Leander post funny content such as photographs on his profile, was because he wanted to get likes. When asked why he wants to get likes, Ask Leander explained that:

Ask Leander: “...It is..Me and my friends have a bit of a competition going of who can get the most likes.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Ask Leander: “and we usually don't get many likes so the competition is fairly even (hehe)

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Ask Leander, therefore, does not appear to take the competitive nature of the site very seriously. Saga, however, says that she finds it a bit difficult to know what to post. After all, she explain, it would not be fun if many other people got likes but she did not. For some teenagers, therefore, what they share is influenced by whether or not they think their audience will like it. This takes us back to the norm of sharing interesting and relevant information. Perhaps teenagers share information that they think that others will enjoy in order to get more likes and comments. Not getting likes may indicate that their audience does not consider that the information they share is interesting. In order to get likes and comments, therefore, they may adapt their information sharing to please their audience.

## **5.10 Giving**

Teenagers' information sharing is not just egocentric. Hedvig Amalie, for example, explains that she is more likely to write something on other people's profiles than to update her own status. Similarly, Othilie comments on and likes things others have posted more frequently than she posts things about herself. One of the most common things to post on other peoples profile, seems to be comments and likes. As we have seen, comments and likes can be used to give reaffirmation to one's peers. Ask Leander, for instance, often comments on or likes things his friends have posted if he thinks they are funny. Another informant, Saga, gives likes to her friends when they have uploaded something new such as profile photos. She does so because she herself enjoys getting comments and likes from her friends. Similarly, Othilie explains that she gives likes and comments just to be nice. After all, she explains:

Othilie:

“If someone has posted like a pretty picture..then it's like unfortunate (dumt) to not get any comments or likes.”

Whether one comments or likes, however, seems to be influenced by teenagers' level of friendship. When asked who he gave comments to, Orion explained that it was the people he knew well. Talking about giving likes and comments to people's profile pictures, Saga also argues that the likelihood of giving feedback is influenced by the level of friendship. She explains that she usually only give her closest friends comments because she does not have the same level of friendship with all her FB friends. Sometimes teenagers also share things because they think their friends will like it. Like many of the other informants, Troy Sakarias explains that he seldom shares things on his profile. He does, however, sometimes share things that he thinks his audience would enjoy. He gives several examples of this throughout the interviews. He has, for example, posted music that he thought that his friends would like. Music, however, is not the only recommendation he gives to his FB friends. He also uses FB to post things that he has seen or experienced that he thought were cool or enjoyable, like going on a trip. He does so because he wants to pass the experience on to others or wants others to experience it. For one teenager, Ask Leander, posting content that other might enjoy is not unusual. When asked what he posted most frequently, he explains that he usually posts funny pictures or funny video clips. He does so, he explain, because he wants others to have a laugh. Previously in the interviews, however, he said that he shared funny things on his profile because he wanted to get more likes. Ask Leander's motivation, therefore, is ambiguous. It is impossible to determine whether he shares information because he wants to give others a laugh or that he wanted to get more likes. It could even be a combination of both. Another informant Hedvig Amalie, however, also indicate that some teenagers give comments and likes in order to get more comments and likes themselves. The motivation for sharing information they think others will enjoy, therefore, is likely to vary. Because giving comments and likes was one of the most frequent activities, however, sharing information designed to please their audience, therefore, is not uncommon. Wanting to please their audience, however, is not the only motivation for sharing information on SNS.

### **5.11 Hanging out publicly**

Public spaces such as shopping malls and street-corners have often been describe as public

hang out spaces for teenagers (Valentine 1996; Maguire 2008). It is, however, argued that teenagers access to these spaces are becoming increasingly limited (Valentine 2004). In some instances teenagers are even pressured away from their gathering places (Buckingham 2000). In the UK teenagers appears to be more homebound and mobility restricted than previous generations (ibid.). Similarly, Frøyland and Sletten (2011) have found that the time Stavanger teens spend being at home all night have increased by 15% since 1994. One Norwegian author even speculate whether today's risk society limits children opportunity to explore the world on their own (Svendsen 2007). In fact, risks have played an important role in the debates surrounding children and public space (Valentine 2004). Outlining the ideas dominating this debate, Valentine (2004) argues that people in North America and Europe, during the twentieth and early twenty-first century, became increasingly concerned about children in public space. On one side of the coin, adults became worried about the dangers children could be subjected to in public space such as sexual assault (ibid.). On the other side of the coin, factors such as increased juvenile crime rates made adults increasingly worried that teenagers were dangerous (ibid.). Teenagers in public space, therefore, have been constructed as both menacing and dangerous and as vulnerable and in need of protection (ibid.). These could be some of the reasons why teenagers access to public space appears to become increasingly restricted. An example of these restrictions can be found in Boyd (2008). She found that limited access to offline physical space motivated some teenagers to sign up to SNS (ibid.). My informants, however, did not explicitly state that they joined FB because of restrictions to offline public spaces. This of course does not necessarily mean that lack of space did not influence their decision to join the site. As we have seen, however, it is often argued that teenagers do not have the same access to public space as previous generations. Thus one could, like Tingstad (2003), argue that "...in a literal interpretation, contemporary children can hardly recapture something they have never experienced" (p.206). Perhaps this was one of the reasons why none of my informants said that lack of offline space motivated them to join SNS.

None of my informants pointed to the lack of offline space. As we have seen, however, they flocked to the site because their offline connections such as peers were on it. I have also argued that it was seen as a space where they could communicate with-, become updated on-,

share information with or simply hang out with their offline connections. As such FB have many of the same possibility for being together with peers as offline spaces. It is important to note, however, that teenagers did not describe FB as a replacement of offline space. Nor was it described as a replacement of other activities such as being with friends. In fact, my study reaffirmed that of Lüders (2009) who argued that teenagers preferred face-to-face contact with their friends. My informants, therefore, logged on to FB when they were not otherwise occupied; it was something they did when they were bored or wanted to be entertained or just to hang out with their peers. While my informants did not necessarily use the site as a replacement of offline space, one can argue that it provides them with new opportunities to be together. Because the Internet can be accessed from almost anywhere anytime, teenagers' may have new opportunities to be together with their peers when ever where ever, even between structured activities. Nor are they dependent on accessible offline spaces or mobility. It is important to note, however, that because some parents may restrict teenagers' access to the Internet, and some teenagers may not have access at all their opportunities to interact with peers on SNS may be limited. As we will see later in this chapter, however, social interaction is at the heart of much of teenagers information sharing on the site. Firstly, however, it is important to stress that teenagers' information sharing did not always appear to be rooted in their needs to see or be seen or to hang out with peers.

Teenagers did not necessarily have a deep underlying reason for sharing information. An example of this is Ask Leander. He would sometimes hang out on FB when he was bored on Saturday evenings. If he was tired, he would find things such as commenting arduous, he therefore chose to like things instead.

Ask Leander: “And..it’s things like that I do when I am bored on a Saturday night. Just pressing like on lots of weird stuff.”

Sharing content on FB, therefore, can simply be a cure for boredom. Earlier in his interview, he revealed another motivation for sharing content on the site. Ask Leander had explained that one reason for signing up was because he wanted to post pictures of himself and friends on FB. When asked why, he explained that there wasn't a particular reason «That’s what most

people do on Facebook». Some teenagers, therefore, share information because they think that's what they are supposed to do on the site. Sometimes, however, teenagers choose to share information simply because they considered it to be fun. An example of this is Othilie who would leave comments when her friends posted things that they have done together. When asked why, she explained that it was just for fun. Likewise, Hedvig Amalie pointed to those who shared fake jobs and explained that it was something people added for fun. This indicates that entertainment is an important motivation for sharing information on FB. Another interesting example was given by Erle Emilie. Erle Emilie remembers that she used to post more information back when Facebook was still new and exciting. Today, however, she rarely posts pictures on the site. When first signing up to the site, however, she posted pictures because she thought it was fun to post pictures. Similarly, she used to enjoy posting information such as her favourite books. When asked whether she had shared it for her own sake or for her friends' sake, she explained that "It's just..I wanted to post things because I had just gotten Facebook." Teenagers, therefore, do not necessarily always have an underlying reason for sharing information on FB. Rather they share information because they find it entertaining or they believe that it is what you are supposed to do on the site. Teenagers posting of information, however, was also a way to interact with their friends.

### **5.12 Interactive content**

There are many ways of interacting publicly on SNS, and this thesis can only touch upon a few. As we have seen, giving and receiving comments and likes is a common way to interact with one's peers publicly. As discussed earlier, these functions can be used to give and receive validation. They can, however, also be used for other forms of social interaction; interactions that are frowned upon by some teenagers and embraced by others. According to the teenagers, content that encourages the audience to interact with the content by liking or commenting is especially popular amongst their peers. One example of this is users who post things where they ask other users to like if they agree. According to Hedvig Amalie, many teenagers would visit the FB pages from people in the U.S. Who had profile content such as "like if you agree» and «like if you think she is pretty." Because many of her peers liked it and shared it, it often came up on her News Feed. Another teenager, Ask Leander, seemed to

enjoy similar content. He informed me that he would occasionally visit the FB profile of “this guy in the U.S.” that shared funny pictures. He eagerly explained that he had visited the profile the day before and found an image of a television program he used to enjoy as a child with the text «like if you agree» at the bottom. While showing me this picture, that he had now posted on his own profile, he said that: “And then it's often like you gets more likes because it says like if you remember this.”

This could be interpreted in many ways. On the one hand, he could have shared the picture because he liked it and/or that he wanted his friends to see it. On the other hand he could have shared it because he wanted to get more likes. Indeed, it could have been a combination of both reasons. Other posts, however, appear to be obvious in their quest for likes such as: “If you like my profile photo I will like yours. Or I will answer a question for every person that likes this.”

or the “I will put a photo of the first person who likes this as my Cover Photo.” Referring to the latter, Troy Sakarias explains that he did not like it. When asked why, he explained that:

Troy Sakarias: “I think it's too stupid.”

Eli Marie: “Mm”

Troy Sakarias: “That they write things like that in order to get attention. That people are going to like it. That they are going to get more likes. It's like a competition.”

Troy Sakarias statement could indicate that some teenagers share interactive content so that their audience will see them, give them reaffirmation and appear more popular than their peers. This, however, is not necessarily the case. After all, it is just one person's opinion. Perhaps it was simply a way to interact with their friends, something to do when they were bored or something to share when they did not have anything else to share. Nevertheless, sharing information that encourages others to interact appears to be a common practice for some. Other examples of this includes sharing questions and quizzes.

Erle Emilie suggests that posting questions is one of the most frequent status updates. These questions or quizzes come in various forms. Erle Emilie, for example, explain that teenagers can post questions on other peoples profiles asking them if they like this and that. Teenagers can also answer questions about themselves and post them on their own profiles. Another form of questions are described by Hedvig Amalie.

Hedvig Amalie: “People that write like. Aand this is a quiz, don't look below. And then they write questions and things like that and copy it.”

Comparing it to chain letters, she explains that many teenagers copy questions and post them on their own profiles. Few of my informants admitted to sharing such quizzes. Thus it is difficult to determine why teenagers share these quizzes. Perhaps this is jet another way to get more likes and comments; a way to be seen and get reaffirmation. At the same time it could be a way to hang out with friends, a cure for boredom, something to do or even entertaining. Teenagers, however, do not necessarily copy the questions from others. An example of answering questions was witnessed during one of the observations. Ask Leander was looking at recent updates. He scrolled down the page, reading, then he stopped at a picture. The picture contained four smaller pictures. On each of the smaller pictures there was a set of eyes. Each set of eyes had a number next to it. He liked the picture and explained that he did so because he knew which eyes belonged to Justin Bieber. For Ask Leander therefore, interacting with this content was not likely to give him any likes. Thus one could speculate whether he did so simply because he found it enjoyable. It may also simply be a way to interact with ones peers on the site. When asked why people posted and answered questions, however, Erle Emilie answered that it is just how it is, that a lot of the things they do on Facebook does not necessarily make any sense. This could indicate that some teenagers share quizzes because they think it is what you are supposed to do at the site. Some teenagers, however, are sceptical about this form of content. Talking about questions copied from other profiles, Hedvig Amalie, for example, says that she does not want to post things like that. After all she knew quite a lot of people. Hedvig Amalie's decision not to share much information on the site, therefore, was based on her audience. Adopting one's sharing to one's audience, however, is not necessarily unproblematic.

### **5.13 Creating private spaces in networked publics**

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, teenagers attempt to limit their audience by creating boundaries around their profile. Throughout the interviews, however, many of the informants expressed concerns about the possibilities that strangers might be able to get access to their profiles. Talking about what she disliked about the site, for example, Hedvig Amalie explained that:

“That it is..I like the fact that it is public, but it is a bit, maybe a bit too public..It's so easy for others to get hold of the information you post.”

Similar responses were made across the interviews. Beyond making their profiles available to friends only, teenagers, tried to avoid posting content they felt would put them at risk from strangers. Examples of this included not displaying contact information such as telephone numbers publicly, not sharing what part of town they lived in, not writing that they were home alone, to name but a few. In contrast to popular discourses studies such that of Pierce (2007), therefore, this study found that teenagers were not necessarily unaware of the risks associated with information sharing on SNS.

Strangers, however, were not the only potential audience that affected their information sharing. While some teenagers said that they would only add people who they wanted to see what they shared and adopt their sharing to their imagined audience, the different levels of friendship, was not necessarily unproblematic. As we have seen, Hedvig Amalie points out the difficulty with juggling information sharing in a world where both adults and peers are present. Another teenager identified another problem. One of the informants described that he/she has people on his/her profile that used to be his/her friends that he/she has not yet de-friended. Because these “old friends” sometimes give people mean comments, the informant never posts things that are personal. In order to solve the complexity of different levels of friendship, information sharing and privacy, however, some teenagers use chat and groups in order to create more “private spaces”.

### 5.13.1 Groups

The information sharing that takes place on F.B, groups differs from that takes place on timeline. While the timeline is usually visible to all friends, FB groups give the teenagers the opportunity to create more intimate or private spaces with a group of people (Facebook n.d.n). The number of people in these groups varies, from a few intimate friends, one's family members, to larger interest-, organized activity- and even class groups. One can also choose whether one wants the groups to be secret, closed or open (Facebook n.d.n). As the name implies open groups are public (Facebook n.d.n). This means that “Anyone can see the group, who's in it, and what members post” (Facebook n.d.n). Secret and closed groups, however, allow for more privacy. Groups that are secret are invisible to those who are not in the group (ibid.). Also the content that is displayed there and who participate in the group remains invisible to non-members (ibid.). Closed groups, however, are a mixture of both. While everyone can see that the group exists and who is in the group, the content remains visible to members only (ibid.). As opposed to the relatively public timeline, groups can be used to create a more private space with a limited audience. In order to manage the collapsed contexts of SNS, therefore, teenagers can create groups. In fact, groups are frequently used by some of my informants. In one of my early interviews, Hedvig Amalie explained that she had joined several groups that she described as private. She then showed me one of these groups. The group she showed me was created for an organized activity that she participated in. Pointing to the groups, she explained that “Then we can go in here and write like private things.” She described this group, like most of the groups she was a member of as «locked» (låst). Hedvig Amalie, therefore, went on to explain that only those who were invited could see that it was there. The level of privacy is also embraced by teenagers such as Erle Emilie, who explains that she was not comfortable to let all of her FB friends view everything she posted. In order to solve this, she created a group with her closest friends.

Erle Emilie: “And we have done that. And then it's just like us who can see it...because it is a little better (greiere) to post. Kind of like if I plan to post this picture kind of as a joke.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Erle Emilie: “And then it is a little..unfortunate if all the cool boys in my class can see it or something like that.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Erle Emilie: “Then they might tell the whole class.”

Eli Marie: “Yes.”

Erle Emilie: “And just want my friends- those who I am closest to like to see it.”

Erle Emile statements shows that teenagers are not always comfortable with sharing information in the public part of their profile. After all, she does not necessarily have the same level of friendship and trust with all he audience members. In order to solve this, however, she uses groups to limit her audience and create more private spaces where she feel confident joking around with friends she trust. While this indicate that the collapsed contexts of SNS can sometimes be problematic, it also shows that some teenagers take active choices to limit their audience. For some teenagers, therefore, groups become a place where they can share information that they only want their closest friends to see, a place for privacy and intimacy. This, however, is not necessarily the only reason why teenagers create groups.

The information teenagers share in groups, does not necessarily have to be private. Teenagers also use the groups to share information that is relevant to a particular group of their audience. Troy Sakarias, for example, has groups for family members. Here, he explains, they can post things that were «a bit special». Although, he did not explicitly state what «special» meant, the content that was displayed on this family group seemed to be thing that perhaps his family was more likely to appreciate than a wider circle of friends. Many informants also explained that they had class groups. As the name implies they are groups where they can gather with their class mates. Erle Emilie describes how these groups are used:

Erle Emilie: “But like in like class groups its written like..where..like..it's written like..like if they know what homework we have and things like that.”

Eli Marie: ”Oh. Okay”

Erle Emilie: “Got an extra pair of trousers after PE and things like that.”

Similarly, Ask Leander explain that teenagers use Facebook class groups to discuss trips or to ask their classmates questions. Teenager, therefore, appear to use class groups to share information that is relevant for this particular group only. The information sharing that takes on the groups, therefore, appears to be largely influenced by the nature of their audience. At the same time, Ask Leander adds that class groups are used to discuss what the pupils think about a particular matter. This “matter” does not necessarily have to be school related. During my observations, I also noticed that not all of the information sharing was related to school. In one class group, for example, there was a photograph featuring different members of that class. Someone, however, had put funny cartoon faces on everyone except one of the teenagers. Regardless of what teenagers shared on these groups, however, the informants frequently pointed to convenience of gathering one set groups of friends in one group. An example of this was Troy Sakarias who argued that he found groups convenient because he could address everyone simultaneously instead of giving each and everyone the same message individually. While addressing a larger audience is also possible in un mediated context is possible, doing so is likely to have been much complicated. One could, for example, gather everyone in the same space at the same time. Technologically mediated communication such as FB, however, present teenagers with more convenient ways to social interact with a groups of people. In fact, groups is also a convenient way to organized offline activities.

Groups can be used to organize small-, large-, public- and private offline activities. Saga, for example, used groups to organise girls' nights with a few of her FB friends. There were several reasons why they choose to organize their girls' nights using groups. She started by

explaining that she could use the groups to talk privately. At the same time it was easier to gather everyone in one place so they did not have to send long individual messages back and forth. Similarly, Ask Leander highlights the convenience of using digital technology to gather groups of people and make plans. While people used to send give each other physical birthday invitations, he explains that it much easier to to so on FB. He goes on to explain that

Ask Leander: “..like today, I am going to that birthday party later on.”

Eli Marie: “Mm”

Ask Leander: “So instead of sending invitations...I am going to his party. and he has made like a FB group for his party.”

Eli Marie: “Oh. Okay.”

Ask Leander: “So then they like ask what they are going to do at the party. And do you want to come. But first you get like an invitation.”

Like other groups, therefore, birthday groups are a way to gather a particular group of people, organize and discuss offline activities. At the same time, groups are used to coordinate offline organized activities. For one teenager, Orion, the groups for one of his organized activities was the only one he really used. The group consisted of all his team members, and they used the groups to e.g. write workout times. Similarly, Saga knew people who participated in an organized activity where organizers posted content essential for the participation of the offline activity. This indicates that the information that is shared on these forms of groups can be essential for participation in organized activities. It also shows that FB is can be a convenient way to organize offline activities.

### **5.13.2 Chat**

The chat function on FB allows teenagers to chat with their contacts. If the user is logged on,

and have not turned off the chat function, it will always be available in the lower right corner of any FB page (Facebook n.d.o). At the most basic level chat allows teenagers to talk privately or in groups with their Facebook friends. While some teenagers are avid users of this function, it's hardly used by others. One of the informants explain that it is more common to share information on chat than on the more public parts of their profile.

Hedvig Amalie: «...I use it quite a lot really..I like go Facebook and check it, because..it's used a lot on Facebook.”

Eli Marie: “Mm.”

Hedvig Amalie: “I think that most people chat..and then they sometimes post what they- some things like publicly.”

This, coincides with the arguments of other informants who said that they were more likely to chat than post things on the timelines. Others, however, seldom used the chat. What distinguishes the chat from the timelines and larger groups, however, is often the extent of the audience and the level of privacy. Although teenagers can add several friends to one conversation, the most used function appears to be one-to-one communication. This appear to influence what kind of information teenagers share on the site. Hedvig Amalie and Othilie, for example, explain that one can write more private things on chat. After all, it is not visible to everyone like timeline to timeline communication. Hedvig Amalie elaborates, by explaining that in chat and the message function

“...You can write what you have done and where you are now and things like that. Because only the person you send it to can see it.”

Although few teenagers chatted while I observed them, sharing their whereabouts and what they where doing appeared to be common practise. In fact, all of the teenagers who did chat asked their friends what was going on, by using various variations of “Whatz up”. Because the chat function was considered as a more private space, they could also share things they

did not want everyone to know about. One of the teenagers, for example, had gotten a job. Because he/she did not want everyone to know, he/she had not shared it on the timeline. Instead he/she had disclosed it to one or two friends on chat. Although chat is considered more private, one of the teenagers, Othilie explains that only way to be completely sure who one is talking to is to talk to them face to face. One common argument for this was that the other person could have been “Faceraped”. This meant that someone else could have gotten access to the other person profile and were impersonating them. Privacy, however, was not the only motivation for using the chat function. Troy Sakarias, for example, said that he used the chat to share things that only concerned his friends. Similarly, Hedvig Amalie says that she uses chat to share information that is only meant for the person she is chatting to. What teenagers shared on chat, however, varied.

Sometimes teenagers would use the chat function to give short messages to peers. An example of this was Troy Sakarias who explained, that although he would often contact people by phone, he would occasionally use FB chat to give important messages to his peers. Also Saga would sometimes use chat to give short messages, but she usually used her mobile phone for this. As such, the Facebook chat shares some of the functionalities of e.g. a mobile phone. In some instances, however, FB becomes a replacement for their mobile phone. If someone is hard to get hold of, or if they are more likely to be on FB than on their phone, some teenagers use chat to give them messages. Another frequent argument is that Facebook, and especially chat is a free alternative to mobile phones. After all, many of their offline contacts are on the site. Thus they can communicate with friends and family without spending money. Perhaps the affordability of the site motivates the teenagers to make appointments on chat. Saga, for example, explained that she would sometimes ask her friends if they should walk together to an organized activity. She, however, was not the only teenager who used the site to make appointments. While being observed, for example, Troy Sakarias, chatted with one of his friends about where and when to meet. I did, however, never observe that any of the teenagers made plans on the timeline. There could be many reasons why teenagers seem to prefer to make arrangements on chat. One explanation, could be that teenagers, in accordance with Hedvig Amalie and Othilie's argument, feel able to share more “private” things on chat. After all, it is harder for unwanted others to access what they share

on chat. At the same time, however, Hedvig Amalie says that she is more likely to make appointments using her phone, precisely because she thinks it is easier for others to get access to her FB chat than the text messages on her phone. Another explanation, for why some teenagers use chat to make appointments could be that it is not relevant for- or intended for anyone other than the one recipient. Yet another reason could be that there appears to be a general consensus of where teenagers should share specific information. Looking back, Ask Leander remembers his first time on Facebook with embarrassment.

Ask Leander: "...I remember that I was so clever that I went around writing on peoples pages rather than writing to them on the chat."

Eli Marie: "Mm."

Ask Leander: "That was like a bit embarrassing .“(embarrassing with a theatrical voice?)

Eli Marie: "What, so you wrote like-"

Ask Leander: "No I went around..writing on their pages like I was chatting to them."

Eli Marie: "Oh, okay."

Ask Leander: "So that was a bit embarrassing."

Eli Marie: "Yes, what-How did you find out how you were supposed to do it?"

Ask Leander: "Some friends showed me"

Teenagers, therefore, may choose to share certain information on the chat because that is the norm of their collective. Norms that are gently pointed out to newbies by other members. Consequently, there can be many reasons why teenagers choose to share information on the chat. Nevertheless, making appointments and giving messages, was not the only usage of the

chat.

Like other chatting services, FB is used to have general conversations with their FB friends. As we have seen teenagers frequently used the chat to ask their friends what was going on. Perhaps, this was another way for teenagers to get updated on what is going on in their peers lives. It may, however, simply be a way to make a conversation. Regardless, a common response to this appeared to be various variations of “nothing much”. Unlike, public communication, therefore, there seemed to be less pressure to share information that was interesting. Another example of this was given by Othilie. When Othilie and one of her friends were bored they sometimes had conversation with each other where they would continue to write “hi, hi, hi” just to annoy each other. Whether or not teenagers chatted to people, however, often depended on how well they knew them. Othilie, for example, explained that “I usually talk to those that I know best.” She also explained that what was shared was influenced by how well she knew the people she chatted to. The conversations Othilie had with her best friends on FB appeared to consist of short comments, rather than long conversations. When I commented on this, she explained that they had just become friends and thus they had not yet written much to each other. She then pointed to another of her friends and explained that she used to know the girl very well, and thus they might have longer conversations. What teenagers share, therefore, is likely to be affected by how well they know each other. Also the way teenagers address the friends on the chat is different from the more public parts of their profile. As we saw earlier in the chapter, Hedvig Amalie, would try to be especially nice and friendly on the public parts of the profile to avoid misunderstandings. Together with her close friends e.g. on the chat, however, she would write “...more like I am in reality”. Similarly, Troy Sakarias said that unlike timeline communication, he could communicate in a way that only the recipient would fully understand by e.g. using inside jokes. This indicates that size of the audience, the privacy of the chat as well as the level of friendship influence what teenagers share.

## **5.14 The role of sharing**

Content sharing have been described as one of the “...most important criteria for the success of

social network sites...” (Brandzæg, Lüders & Skjetne 2010, p.1006). Naturally, SNS would lose much of its purpose if it was not used for information sharing. As we have seen, for example, much of the social interaction that takes place on the site is based around information sharing. When asked whether they thought it was important to share information on FB, however, all of the informants that were asked agreed that it was not. To some extent, this could be a result of their idea about information sharing. After all, they might not have thought about that even chatting with one's friends is a form of information sharing. It could also be a result of their conception of the word important. Orion, for example, explained that although he did not consider it important, it was fun (kjekt) to share, so that others got to know about it. This did not mean that he shared information often. Instead, he explained that he posted information when it suited him (passe). When asked what he meant, he explained that he shared things when he had done something special that he wanted to post. Likewise, Othilie explained that:

“Erm, I don't really feel that it's important. But it can- It depends on whether or not I have done something fun.”

She went on to explain that she only shares information when she has done something fun and not when she has done something boring or on an ordinary day. As we have seen, similar arguments were made throughout the interviews. After all, several of the informants said that they preferred to post things that were interesting rather than oversharing. Among my informants, therefore, there appears to be a general consensus towards quality rather than quantity. Another argument that was made throughout the interviews was that they did not share information often. This was precisely the argument of Ask Leander, who explained that he seldom shared information because he did not consider information sharing important. Although my informants said that they did not consider sharing information important, doing so is likely to have some benefits.

When asked whether or not she found some profiles boring, Saga explains that other people might find her profile boring. After all, she does not do much on it. Lack of sharing also linked to interestingness by other informants. Hedvig Amalie, for example, explained that she

considers it to be “A bit boring” when people do not update. As a result she is much more likely to look at those who update more often. This coincide with Erle Emile, who say that she is more likely to visit the profiles of those who do things often than those who never change their profile. Describing profiles with little content Hedvig Amalie, explains that:

“It’s a bit boring really...Because then I kind of forget..that..they like exist on Facebook and things.”

Teenager who do not share, therefore, may get less visitors on their profiles. In some instances they may even become “forgotten” by their FB friends. This could indicate that information sharing is essential for being “seen” on the site, one of the key motivations for sharing information. Not sharing information on the site may also have other implications for teenagers. My informants, for example, described that they frequently got positive reaffirmation when they shared information on the site. In some instances, this was even the reason why teenagers shared content on FB. Because teenagers primarily get this reaffirmation on the information they have shared, teenagers who do not share information on the site may not get this sought-after reaffirmation. While non of my informants considered information sharing as important, therefore, not sharing information may limit their opportunity to be seen and get reaffirmation.

Some teenagers appear to consider information sharing on FB as important. Ask Leander explain that some of his peers would share content everyday. Similar arguments about peers sharing information frequently were made throughout the interviews. Othilie, for example, explained that some teenagers shared profile pictures almost every week. For some teenagers, therefore, sharing content appears to be more important. Because none of my informants said that they considered it important to share information, it is impossible to determine why other teenagers appear to consider it so. Some of my informants, however, speculated in why other teenagers shared information often. Ask Leander suggested that some teenagers might be a bit addicted. Talking about profile photos, Othilie suggested that perhaps they were not happy with their photo, just want a new profile photo or that they feel that they have to update more. Perhaps, she continued they want to get more attention, comments or likes. Again, teenagers

links the need to share with reaffirmation and the need to be seen. Talking about those who share a lot, one of the other informants, Hedvig Amalie explain that:

“It’s a lot of people who have quite a few friends and maybe they think that they have to post a lot and just to keep their status up and that they. They still existt. Aand they are going to have contact with others.“

Although she introduce another point, reaffirming ones existence, this to is rooted in the need to be seen by others. She also points to the social aspects of the site, communicating. The teenagers who participated in this study, therefore, believe that other share more information because they feel the need to change, were unhappy with their current content, wanted to communicate, be seen by and get reaffirmation from their FB friends.

### **5.15 Summary**

In accordance with previous research (Lenhart & Madden 2007; Boyd 2008; Larsen 2009), I found that teenagers' usage of social networking sites are rooted in offline relationships. First of all, teenagers primarily add people from their offline network as friends on the site. Secondly, my informants described FB as a space where they could communicate with-, become updated on-, share information with or simply hang out with their offline connections. While they could use the site to interact with both adults and peers, most of their interaction on the site appeared to be with their peers, particularly their closest friends. In fact, most of my informants used FB primarily to stay updated on their peers, especially their closest friends. My informants, however, would also use the site to share information. My study, however, showed that teenagers' did not necessarily have a deep underlying reason for sharing information. It could, for example, be something they did because it was what they were supposed to do on the site, or that it was something to do. Why and how teenagers shared information on the site, however, was often influenced by their intended audience; their offline contacts. In some instances, for example, information sharing had an important function. While teenagers are often criticised for sharing what adults label as personal information (Barnes 2006), several of my informants explained that using their real name and profile picture made them identifiable to their offline contacts who wanted to add them as

friends. Because they knew their FB friends, however, the norm was that what teenagers shared should largely mirror their offline identities. Teenagers information sharing was to a large extent part of their social interaction on the site. Examples of this included wanting to update their FB friends on what they were doing, be seen, give and receive reaffirmation, share things they believe their friends would like, communicate and hang out. While my informants said that they did not consider this information sharing important, teenagers who did not share may only have limited opportunity to participate on FB. After all, much of the interaction that took place on the site was based around information sharing. Moreover, not sharing information might also limit their opportunity to be seen and get reaffirmation.

It has been argued that teenagers' lack of offline places to be together and limited mobility have influenced teenagers' decisions to join SNS (Boyd 2008). My study, however, did not confirm this. Instead my informants appeared to use the site when they were not otherwise occupied or as a cure for boredom. Although SNS is not necessarily a replacement of offline space, however, it can give teenagers new opportunities to gather publicly when they are bored, spend time and interact socially without being dependent on an offline space or mobility. Consequently, FB was not a replacement for, but an extension of offline life. Because so many of their offline connections are on the site, it is also a convenient and alternative way to send messages, organize offline activities and an accessible space for group communication. While social media may provide teenagers with new ways to organize and be together, it also complicates their social interaction. This thesis, for example, has focused on how teenagers' information sharing was influenced by their audience on SNS. In offline contexts, people usually adapt their behaviour to the audience they can see and hear (Goffman 1959; Schlenker 1980; Litt 2012). Although there may be unintended audiences offline, the audiences are usually limited by physical boundaries (Tufekci 2008). The collapsed contexts of social media, such as persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability, however, increases the possibility of an unknown audience (Boyd 2008; Marwick & Boyd 2011). Despite public discourses, however, this thesis has found that teenagers are not unconcerned about unwanted others accessing their profiles. In order to limit strangers' access to what they shared on the site, therefore, most of my informants said that they or their parents had set their profiles to private and that they only added people they

knew as friends. Because these boundaries are not necessarily fool proof, some of my informants tried to account for the possibility that unwanted others may be able to access the information they shared by e.g. not including home address and phone numbers on their timeline. While teenagers are not necessarily immune from the new risks associated with SNS and information sharing, teenagers do not appear to be just vulnerable and in need of protection but also media literate. This, however, was not the only way that the collapsed context of SNS influenced teenagers' information sharing on the site. As we have seen, teenagers' friend lists consist of different groups of people. After all, teenagers add everything from distant others to best friends, parents to peers and sometimes even adults from their offline community to their friends list. Not only, then, do teenagers have different levels of friendship with their contacts, they are from different groups or indeed different generations. Offline, these groups are not only likely to be addressed separately (Boyd 2008), but also differently (Marwick & Boyd 2011). The media, however, often complicates this (Meyrowitz 1985; Boyd 2007b). On FB, for example, teenagers who post things on the public profile or timeline, often address all their different groups of "friends" at once. After all, teenagers do not appear to use the settings that allows them to only share information with one particular group frequently. As a result, the timeline was considered as the public part of their profile. This, I found, had implication on how teenagers shared information on the site. On the one hand it provided teenagers with new opportunities to share information so that e.g. everyone got to know about it. At the same time, the collapsed context of SNS also complicated teenagers' information sharing. Because of adults' presence on the site, for example, some felt that they could not share things that they were not allowed to, or things they considered to be weird. Moreover, because they did not have the same level of friendship with all of their FB friends, several informants said that it was important to be especially nice and friendly to e.g. avoid offline conflicts. Because they did not have the same level of friendship with all their contacts, however, some teenagers did not appear to trust all of their friends. Some teenagers, for example, would not share things they considered as personal, or things they did not want others to share. As a result, teenagers used the site group function and chat function to create spaces where they could have more private communication with their closest friends. My study, therefore, has indicated that FB appears to provide teenagers with both new opportunities and new challenges.



## **Chapter 6: Concluding chapter**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Coming to an end of the thesis, the following chapter will set out to conclude the present study. Before summarizing my main findings the chapter will outline my approach to the research question. Next, I will move into a discussion about the limitations of this study. Then, drawing to a close, I will conclude my thesis by giving recommendations for future studies.

My journey ends where it first began, with the question "Why and how do teenagers' share information on social networking sites". The intention behind the question, and indeed the aim of the study, was to investigate teenagers' thoughts and experiences of information sharing on SNS. My reason for undertaking this study was the gap in previous literature. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, previous studies indicated that information sharing on SNS was part of teenagers' participation in peer culture. Previous literature, however, had primarily investigated teenagers from an adult ethnocentric perspective. After all, the studies had looked at what kind of information teenagers shared in light of adults' perceptions of risks and concerns without involving children's own opinions. Nor had the studies focused on why teenagers choose to share information on SNS. I therefore pointed to an apparent gap in research, arguing that more research was needed in order to understand the role of information sharing on SNS in Norwegian teenagers' peer culture.

One fundamental theoretical perspective underlying this thesis was the new social studies of children and childhood. This theoretical perspective guided the research process; it influenced my research question, aims and even the approach to the study. Children, for example, were considered as active beings with agency and thus their voices should be given a more direct voice in research.

Moreover children, their relationships and their culture should be studied from children's own point of view free from adult presumptions. In order to get teenagers' own perspectives about

their information sharing on SNS, I conducted a qualitative study of 7 eighth graders from the Stavanger area, in Norway. First of all, qualitative research methods were deemed most appropriate for getting teenagers' thoughts and experiences of sharing of information on SNS. Secondly, qualitative research methods often leave more room for children's own opinions. In order to validate my research findings I employed multiple methods including semi-structured interviews, solicited diaries and observations.

## **6.2 Main findings**

My discussion chapter focused on how teenagers' information sharing was shaped by their various audiences and the collapsed context of the site. One of my most important findings was that teenagers' information sharing was influenced by their offline connections. I therefore started the discussion chapter by pointing out how popular social networking sites had become among Norwegian teenagers, and how their peers' and families' presence motivated them to join FB. Teenagers also came to these sites because they wanted to hang out with, communicate with, become updated on and share information with their offline connections. As a result of this, the people my informants added as friends were people who they had met offline. My argument, therefore, was that these friends became teenagers' intended audience. Not only were these "friends" teenagers' audience, they were also the groups that teenagers were likely to "...adjust their behaviour and self-presentation to fit the intended norms of..." (Boyd 2010, p. 44). Confounding my own expectations, however, I discovered that FB was not just a peer space. After all, my informants did not only add their peers, but people of all ages including their parents. Not only did teenagers add people from different generations, they also added people with whom they had various levels of friendship. Teenagers audience, therefore, consists of different groups of people. Unlike many offline contexts, however, these groups are gathered in the same space, and all are addressed simultaneously. In line with Boyd's (2008) argument, therefore, I argued that SNS resulted in collapsed contexts.

Information sharing on SNS does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, my study showed that it is mainly a social experience. As a result, what teenagers shared was influenced by their

audience. Throughout my study, I found that why and how teenagers shared information was influenced by the collective norms shared with their FB contacts. One such norm was sharing accurate information. While this norm was evident across teenagers' profiles, it was especially important when choosing a profile picture and profile name. After all, accurate information made them recognisable to their offline connections that wanted to add them as friends. Another norm was that what teenagers shared on the site should be interesting for their audience. This influenced teenagers' sharing habits. Instead of sharing everyday activities, for example, they shared information when they had done something special or unusual. When the informants felt that they did not have anything interesting to share, they seldom updated their profiles. This, however, did not mean that never updated their profiles.

The thesis revealed that one motivation for sharing information on the site was being seen by one's FB friends. Several of the informants, for example, explained that they shared information because they wanted others to know about it. Occasionally these others were people who lived elsewhere. Most of the time, however, they appeared to be everyone on their friends list. The informants listed several motivations for wanting to be seen. Some examples included showing others e.g. where they had been and what they had done and even the accomplishments they were proud of. It was also a way for others to learn more about them. At the same time, however, it could be a way to remind others that they existed and a way to get more comments and likes. This kind of information, however, appeared to be directed towards their peers. While the need to get comments and likes varied, all of the informants explained that they liked to get positive reaffirmation through comments and likes. Not only did this reaffirmation make them feel good, it could also serve as an indicator of one's status within the peer group. Although the timeline, where teenagers receive comments and likes, is visible to all their friends, it was usually their closest friends that gave them this reaffirmation. Despite teenagers' need to be seen and get reaffirmation, the information they shared was not only for their own gratification.

One important finding was that teenagers' information sharing was not necessarily egocentric self-display. They would, for example, sometimes share information that they thought that their friends would enjoy. In fact, teenagers seldom shared information on their own profile.

Instead, they commented and liked the things they saw on their friends' profiles. They did so because they liked what their friends had posted, wanted to be nice, wanted to get more likes or just because it was fun. It is important to note, however, that the informants gave and received reaffirmation primarily from their closest friends. This was also the case with many of those who shared information they thought others would like. In some instances therefore, information sharing was largely friendship driven.

The time teenagers spent on the site did not appear to be a result of a lack of offline spaces in which to meet or a replacement for other activities. Instead, it was something to do when they did not have anything else to do or when they were bored; it was another place to hang out. I therefore, argued that SNS appeared to provide teenagers' with new opportunities and alternative ways to be together with and interact with their friends. This, I found, might have influenced teenagers' information sharing on the site. After all, teenagers said that they shared information because it was fun. It is likely that this was the motivation for answering and sharing the highly popular quizzes. It may also simply be another way to interact with their friends. In fact, social interaction with friends appeared to be an important motivation for sharing information on the site, especially the chat. At the same time, however, teenagers shared information because it was what they were supposed to do on the site. In some instances, it was even a requirement to share certain information when signing up. I also speculated about the possibility that teenagers shared information in the information fields that were part of the FB interface simply because they were there. Consequently, my study showed that teenagers did not necessarily have a deep underlying reason for sharing information on the site.

### **6.2.1 Public and private space**

Another major finding was that my informants viewed some parts of their profiles as public and others as private. The timeline, for example, was considered as the “public” section of their profile. This, however, does not mean that what they shared here was visible to everyone. After all, most of my informants created boundaries around their profiles by setting their profiles to “friends only”. The teenagers' that participated in my study, therefore, were

not necessarily unconcerned about their privacy. Their timeline, therefore, was only public in the sense that what they shared here would usually be visible to all their FB friends. Although teenagers usually only added people they would be comfortable with as audiences, the collapsed context of the site appeared to complicate their information sharing; after all their audience consisted of very different groups of people. It was, however, not uncommon to adapt one's sharing to take account of the public nature of the site and their different audiences. Some teenagers, for example, said that they considered their different audiences and the publicness of the site when deciding what to share and how to share it. Because they did not have the same level of friendship with all their contacts, for example, some teenagers made an effort to be especially nice and friendly. Although most teenagers seemed to adapt well to the public nature and their different level of friendships, this was not necessarily unproblematic.

My study revealed that although teenagers had set their profiles to “friends only”, some were concerned that strangers could access what they posted. Most teenagers, therefore, avoided posting information they felt would put them at risk from strangers. The study also showed that teenagers were not always comfortable with the fact that all their FB friends could see what they shared. After all, my informant's did not necessarily have the same level of friendship and trust with all of their audience. As such the collapsed contexts of SNS complicates teenagers information sharing. In order to solve this, however, they used groups and chat to create more intimate or “private spaces”.

One important finding was that private nature of groups and the ability to decide who their audience was, influenced what teenagers shared on the groups. Because of the closed nature of the groups, they felt that they could use the group to share things they only wanted their closest friends to see and information they considered to be more private. In some instances, therefore, groups became more intimate spaces where they could share information with their closest friends. At the same time, however, the groups were used to gather a set group of people such as classmates or people they met during organized activities. Teenagers used these kinds of groups to share information that was relevant for a particular group of FB friends only, such as organizing offline activities. In fact, teenagers' often used groups

because it presented them with new and convenient opportunities to gather groups of people and/or organize activities. Most of my informants, however, appeared to use the chat to share information more frequently than any other part of their profiles.

Unlike the timeline and most groups, chatting was usually used for one to one communication. Most of my informants, therefore, considered it as the most private space on the site. This was evident in the kind of information teenagers shared here. First of all, some teenagers felt that they could share more private things on the chat because it was less visible. In other words, it was a place where they could share things they did not want everyone to know about. It was, for example, not unusual to share what they were doing, where they were and discuss when and where to meet.

Like groups, however, privacy was not the only motivation for using the chat. The chat was also used to share information that was only relevant for or intended for one recipient. Examples of this included giving short messages, making appointments and simply having conversations. As on the timeline, teenagers were more likely to use the chat to communicate with their closest friends. This influenced the kind of information teenagers shared on this space. Because the teenagers knew their friends well, they could be more relaxed about how they shared information. They did, for example, not feel compelled to share interesting information. Moreover, they could use the site to share things that only the recipient would understand, such as inside jokes. The information teenagers shared on the site, therefore, was often friendship driven.

Although teenagers would occasionally share information on the site, my study revealed that this was not their main priority. Instead they would log on to get updated on their peers. None of the informants, therefore, considered it important to share information often and keep an updated profile. This of course, could be a result of their conception of the word “important”. After all, teenagers outlined several benefits of sharing information on the site. Moreover, most of the interaction on the site was dependent on information sharing. It is also important to note that many teenagers said that some of their peers would share information frequently. Thus the importance of sharing information on FB is likely to vary.

In summary, my study found that why and how teenagers' shared information of FB was influenced by the nature of their audience and the collapsed contexts of the site. On the one hand my study indicated that FB gave teenagers new opportunities for social interaction with their offline contacts; at the heart of which lies information sharing. At the other hand, the collapsed context of FB also presents teenagers with new challenges. After all, teenagers' information sharing is often visible to adults, peers, close friends, different others and potentially unintended others.

### **6.3 Limitations**

As outlined in chapter four, the research had several limitations. Although the qualitative research methods used in this thesis were very useful for getting teenagers' own thoughts and experiences, qualitative research methods have limitations. The number of participants who participated in this study was limited, and they were from the same area and from the same socio-economic background. As a result I could not make the same generalizations I could have made if I had undertaken a quantitative study. Furthermore, having a larger number of informants may have had implications for my research findings. My informants, for example, frequently said that their peers shared more than them. By having a larger sample of informants, my chances of getting informants who shared information often might increase. Another important limitation that influenced the study negatively, was the time limit. Longer time in the field, for example, may have helped me build better rapport with informants. This in turn, would most likely have influenced the kind of information teenagers shared with me. It might also have made the informants comfortable enough to let me observe them. At the same time, having longer time in the field may also have resulted in a deeper understanding of teenager FB usage.

### **6.4 Future recommendations**

The present study has given us important insight into why and how teenagers share information on FB. Because of the time limit and the scale of the study, however, the evidence gathered in this thesis may only have captured the tip of the iceberg. In order to get a deeper understanding of teenagers' information sharing on SNS, therefore, further research

needs to be undertaken. This research should be longitudinal with a larger sample of informants. There are numerous interesting ways in which future studies of teenagers' information sharing could be carried out. It would, for example, be interesting if future studies included content analyses of what teenagers shared on their profile. Another way to approach the topic could be to conduct a comparative study of teenagers' information sharing with peers offline and online. It would also be interesting to replicate the study in other parts of the country, or even conduct a cross-national examination. Furthermore, my study raised questions about the role of information sharing in teenagers' peer culture. Although my informants said that they seldom shared information on FB, they also explained that some of their peers would share information on FB very frequently. This could indicate that some teenagers consider information sharing on FB as highly important. Consequently, more research is needed to better understand the role of information sharing on SNS and in teenagers' peer culture.

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## **Appendix 1: Informant's names and gender**

This is a list of the informants names and gender

### **Boys:**

Ask Leander

Orion

Troy Sakarias

### **Girls:**

Erle Emilie

Hedvig Amalie

Othilie

Saga

## **Appendix II: Informasjonsskriv**

Hei,

I forbindelse med min masteroppgave ved Norsk senter for barneforskning, NTNU (Trondheim), er jeg interessert i å vite mer om hvordan du bruker sosiale nettsamfunn.

Grunnen til at jeg spør nettopp deg om å delta er fordi du vet mer om hvordan ungdom bruker sosiale nettsamfunn enn voksne gjør. Informasjonsinnhenting vil skje gjennom intervjuer, observasjoner, e-post og en loggbok. Gjennom undersøkelsene vil du få spørsmål om din bruk av sosiale nettsamfunn. Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker sammen. Jeg vil møte deg minst tre ganger. Hvert møte vil vare maks 60 minutter. Møtene vil foregå i skolens lokaler og i ditt eget hjem. Datoer og klokkeslett vil bli diskutert med deg.

Det er frivillig å delta, og du har mulighet til å trekke deg når som helst underveis, uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Dersom du trekker deg vil alle innsamlede data om deg bli slettet snarest mulig. Alle opplysninger som kan spores tilbake til deg vil bli behandlet på en måte som gjør at ingen skal kunne gjenkjenne deg i den ferdige oppgaven. Det du forteller meg vil bli mellom oss to, med mindre du forteller meg at du eller noen andre er i fare. Alle opptak slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen utgangen av 2013.

Som informant har du rett til å bli behandlet med respekt. Du skal også behandle meg med respekt. Din rolle i prosjektet vil være å gi meg innsikt din bruk av sosiale nettsamfunn. Viktig informasjon jeg gir til deg vil jeg også gi til dine foreldre/foresatte.

Har du noen spørsmål kan du kontakte meg på telefon (telefon nummer slettet) eller på e-post [emkvaest@stud.ntnu.no](mailto:emkvaest@stud.ntnu.no)

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (NSD).

Med vennlig hilsen  
Eli Marie Hoftun Kvæstad  
(Gatenavn og nummer slettet)  
4013 Stavanger

Dersom du har lyst til å delta, må du og dine foreldre/foresatte skrive under på neste side. Når dere har skrevet under kan du kan skanne den og sende den til meg på e-postadresse [emkvaest@stud.ntnu.no](mailto:emkvaest@stud.ntnu.no).

**Samtykkeerklæring:**

Jeg har mottatt skriftlig informasjon om prosjektet, og jeg ønsker å delta.

Din signatur:

.....

Ditt telefonnummer :

.....

Din e-postadresse:

.....

Foreldre/foresattes signatur:

.....

Foreldre/foresattes telefonnummer:

.....

## **Apendix III:**

### **Interview guide**

Before the interview begins I will tell the informant:

“In the following interview I will ask you to tell me about your use of social networking sites. I want you to tell me about this because you know more about teenager’s use of social networking sites than any adult.“

### **Part 1: Introduction**

During the introduction section it is important to get the informant to tell me about:

- a) What SNS the informants uses.
- b) The role of social networking sites (SNS) in their life, how much time the informant spends on SNS
- c) What the informant do on SNS networking sites and what pleasures they derive from it.

Can you tell me something about the social networking sites you use?

Can you tell me what made you decided to join these social networking sites?

Do you feel that social networking sites are important to you, why/why not?

Can you tell me about how often you use social networking sites and how long you are logged on?

Can you show me what you do on these sites?

What do you like about these sites?

What do you dislike about these sites?

## **Part 2: Information disclosure**

The focus of this section is to investigate:

a) How the informant interacts with others on SNS and the informant's perception of the role of information sharing on SNS.

c) What kind of information the informant shares on SNS, and why he/she shares this information.

d) How the informant defines personal information on SNS and why/ why not, does the informant share personal information on SNS.

f) The informant's opinion and experience of the effects of information disclosure on SNS.

- Can you show me how you interact with you friends on SNS?
- Can you show me how you get people to visit you profile?
- Can you tell me about what kind of information you share on social networking - sites?
- Do you think it is important to share this information on social networking sites why/why not?
- Can you tell me what personal information means to you?
- Do you think that personal information means something different on SNS than other places? why/why not?
- Can you tell me something about why you share or why you do not share personal information on SNS?
- How do you feel that sharing personal information on SNS can be positive or negative?
- Can you tell me something about your own experiences of sharing information on SNS both positive and negative.

## **Part 3: Privacy**

This part will focus on:

- a) How the informant define privacy and how the informant define privacy on SNS
  
- b) Does the informant feel that SNS compromises their privacy, why/why not?
  
- c) Does the informant protect his/her privacy on SNS, why/why not?
  
- d) How does the informant protect his/her privacy on SNS?
  - Can you tell me what privacy means to you?
  - Do you think that privacy means something different on SNS than other places? why/why not?
  - Can you tell me if you feel that the information you share on social networking sites are private? Why/why not?
  - Do you protect your privacy on SNS? Why/why not
    - Can you show me how you protect your privacy on SNS?

#### **Appendix IV:**

## Observation

Date:

Place:

Research tool:

Research name of participant

Participants age

a) Ask unanswered questions from the interview guide.

b) Observe, ask them what they do on the site, ask them about the various functions.

### Participant's own profile

Information sharing	Other activities

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Alternative 2: Other teenager's profile

Information sharing	Other activities

## **Appendix V:**

Loggboken:

Eleven skriver i loggboken minst en gang i uken i tre uker. Etter et besøk på sosiale nettsamfunn skriver eleven en logg om hva hun/han gjorde og tenkte mens hun/han var på det sosiale nettsamfunnet. Eleven kan godt skrive detaljert. Elevene skal ikke skrive navn i disse loggbøkene kun alder og kjønn.