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PROFILE WORK FOR AUTHENTICITY

SELF-PRESENTATION IN SOCIAL NETWORK SERVICES

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation explores the experience of maintaining a social network service (SNS) user profile. This is topical, with 1.49 billion profiles on Facebook alone and the numbers only growing. The social dynamics of self-presentation have changed dramatically in SNS contexts, and research into identity and behavior has focused on concepts such as self-presentation and impression management to understand these changes. The dissertation, forming an attempt to understand the phenomenon via both qualitative and quantitative research methods, shows how the process becomes very complex for an individual.

Three key changes in social dynamics are presented. The first involves the role dynamic: the role presented in an SNS is now a meta-role, touching several social circles. A second dynamic, temporality, reveals that all actions one takes with an SNS profile are managed so as to maintain consistency. A final core change is found in the communication realm, where the mediated nature of the interaction means that social cues are different and asynchronous. In light of these changes, self-presentation is directed toward a **prolonged identity performance**, which is a non-traditional phenomenon in ordinary people's lives and social psychology. Prolonged identity performance with these changed social dynamics is manifested in several challenges facing self and identity. For instance, overlapping identities, identity development, coherence and consistency, and the "realness" of the self seem threatened.

Drawing from the work of Goffman (1959), Giddens (1991), Gergen (1991), and Mead (1934), a concept is developed to illustrate the phenomenon of strategic self-presentation for prolonged identity performance through an SNS user profile. This concept, **profile work**, illustrates the essence of maintaining an SNS user profile. The dissertation situates profile work within the field of social psychology and in SNS research and research into self and identity.

The dissertation elaborates on profile work in relation to the notion of authenticity. As the analysis reveals, profile work has a central role in maintaining authenticity of prolonged identity performance across offline and SNS contexts. The inescapable conclusion follows that there are double standards for performative authenticity. From these double standards, it emerges that what an SNS profile offers at its base is the possibility of constructing a socially-defined **profile self**. An SNS user profile enables an efficient conduct for social validation and negotiation of identity claims. The profile self is composed and maintained in relation to the social realm in which one operates, not relative to the SNS context.

For the future, this research into profile work opens new avenues for SNS research, personal and social psychology, and self and identity research. The message of this dissertation is clear: The social powers in SNSs are changing the conception of identity in a way that is reflected in the sociocultural zeitgeist and in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirja käsittelee sosiaalisen median yhteisöpalveluita. Tutkimuksen kohteena on käyttäjäprofiilin ylläpitämisen kokemus. Aihe on varsin ajankohtainen, sillä jo ainoastaan Facebookilla on yli 1.49 miljardia käyttäjää. Aihepiiriä on lähestytty esimerkiksi käyttäytymisen ja identiteetin esittämisen näkökulmista minän esittämisen ja vaikutelman hallinnan käsitteiden avulla. Yhteisöpalveluiden sosiaalinen dynamiikka eroaa muista konteksteista kuitenkin siinä määrin, että yhteisöpalveluissa syntyvien ilmiöiden tutkiminen näillä perinteisillä käsitteillä on epätarkkaa ja huomiota toissijaisiin suuntiin ohjaavaa.

Väitöskirja tarkastelee käyttäjäprofiilin ylläpitämisen ilmiötä laadullisin ja määrällisin tutkimuskeinoin ja esittää, että sosiaalisen dynamiikan muutos profiilin identiteettiesityksessä monimutkaistaa käyttäjän minän esittämistä.

Väitöskirja esittää kolme yhteisöpalvelukontekstin tuomaa sosiaalisen dynamiikan muutosta. Ensimmäinen muutos, roolien dynamiikka, kuvastaa sitä että käyttäjä esittää yhden arkielämän roolin sijasta meta-roolia, koska profiilin yleisö koostuu päällekkäisistä yleisöistä. Toinen, ajallisuuden dynamiikka, puolestaan kuvaa identiteettiesityksen luonnetta julkisena henkilökohtaisen elämän narratiivina, johon on pääsy sekä nykyisillä että tulevilla yleisöillä. Kolmas muutos, välittynyt viestintä, kuvastaa sitä kuinka sosiaalisen vuorovaikutuksen ollessa epätasällista ja tilannevihjeiden monitulkintaisia yleisöltä saatava palaute ei tue identiteettiesityksen perinteistä neuvottelutapaa. Näiden muutosten valossa minän esittäminen on suunnattu sellaisen **pitkittyneen identiteettiesityksen** luomiseksi, joka on epätavallinen sekä käyttäjille että sosiaalipsykologialle. Väitöskirjassa esitetyn tutkimuksen perusteella pitkittynyt identiteettiesitys on monella tapaa uhka yksilön minuudelle ja identiteetille. Esimerkiksi, identiteettien yleisökohtaisuus, identiteetin kehittäminen, eheys, vakaus sekä oman toiminnan aitouden kokemus ovat tulilinjalla.

Rakentaen Goffmanin (1959), Giddensin (1991), Gergenin (1991) ja Meadin (1934) identiteettikäsitteiden varaan väitöskirja kehittää käsitteen, joka kuvaa suunnitelmallisen minän esittämisen suuntautumista pitkittyneeseen identiteettiesitykseen yhteisöpalvelussa. Tämä **profiilityön** käsite kuvastaa käyttäjäprofiilin ylläpitämisen kokemusta. Väitöskirja sijoittaa profiilityön sosiaalipsykologian, yhteisöpalvelututkimuksen ja minuuden ja identiteetin tutkimuksen kentille.

Väitöskirja tarkastelee profiilityötä suhteessa aitouden käsitteeseen. Väitöskirjan empiiris-teoreettiset tulokset osoittavat, että profiilityön keskeinen tehtävä on ylläpitää identiteettiesityksen aitoutta – ei pelkästään yhteisöpalvelun sisällä vaan profiiliin yhteydessä ylläpidettävien sosiaalisten

suhteiden määrittämien identiteettien välillä. Näiden tulosten valossa väitöskirja esittää, että yhteisöpalvelun käyttäjäprofiili mahdollistaa sosiaalisesti määritetyn **profiiliminän** konstruoinen. Profiiliminä rakennetaan pitkittyneessä identiteettiesityksessä käytävien julkisten neuvottelujen ja vahvistamisen avulla. Tämä **profiiliminä** on rakennettu ja ylläpidetty yhdessä yhteisöpalvelun ja sen ulkopuolisten kontekstien yhdistävien ihmissuhteiden edessä.

Sosiaalipsykologian alaan kuuluvana väitöskirjana työn keskeisin viesti eri tutkimuskentille ja verkottuneen aikakauden ihmisille on selkeä: Yhteisöpalveluissa jylläävä sosiaalinen voima on omiaan muuttamaan identiteettikäsitystä tavalla, joka näkyy muutoksena ajanhengessä mutta myös yksilön arkipäiväisten valintojen tasolla.

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the following publications:

- I Silfverberg [my maiden name], S., Liikkanen, A. L., and Lampinen, A. (2011). “I’ll press play, but I won’t listen”: Profile work in a music-focused social network service. *CSCW ’11: Proceedings of the ACM 2011 Conference on Computer-supported Cooperative Work*, March 19–23; Hangzhou, China.
- II Uski, S. and Lampinen, A. (2014). Social norms and self-presentation on social network sites: Profile work in action. *New Media & Society*, July 17.
- III Uski, S. (submitted). Profile Work on Social Networking Sites: The Effects of Self-monitoring, Age, and Gender. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*.
- IV Summanen, I. and Uski, S. (2015). Conducting online focus-groups in different cultures. “*In Search of...*” *New Methodological Approaches to Youth Studies*. Eds. Airi-Alina Allaste and Katrin Tiidenberg. Cambridge Scholars Publishing; Cambridge, UK.
- V Uski, S. (submitted). Lost in mediation: Profile work for authenticity in social network services. *M/C Journal*.

The publications are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of this dissertation is rooted in the everyday life of billions, in the maintenance of user profiles in social network services (SNSs). The perspective adopted is at the juncture of personal and social psychology, a position from which one can explore how social media enhance and challenge individuals' identity performance through changed social dynamics.

The scale of the phenomenon is vast: there are more SNS user profiles on Facebook alone than our planet has private cars, and the matter of maintaining an SNS user profile touches everyone who is signed up for an SNS. User profile offers its user a possibility to showcase the self and identity to others in a digital form that is accessible to vast audiences 24/7. People operate with various SNSs (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Last.fm, and many more) while still attached to the realm of face-to-face interactions. Among the most revolutionary aspects of presenting oneself in a user profile is the visible history that accumulates an archive of personal life information. The records may stretch back several years, meanwhile vast audiences comprising several social spheres of a user have access to that history.

Why some are very thrilled about SNSs and others are vocally negative? Why do SNSs and what to share in them engender such emotionally charged responses? Much of the answer lies in the emergent negotiation. The SNSs offer a place to express oneself in ways that challenge the traditional schema of personal disclosure. While SNSs enable multiple features for self-presentation, vigilance is exercised in and by the social realm, with attempts to ensure that the power of these possibilities is put to use in a manner appropriate to the predominant sociocultural context. The dissertation clarifies the negotiation of self-presentation with the social realm of SNSs. It questions whether the intended features to self-presentation in SNSs have actually made self-presentation any easier than the traditional sort depicted by micro sociologist Erving Goffman (1959).

The news is often festooned with evocative headlines indicating that people use Facebook and other SNSs to show off their lives. One reads of people using their working hours to scroll through the Facebook News Feed or posing in a myriad "selfies," acts considered to reflect new everyday practices. Countless items of SNS-related media coverage bear titles with

words indicating self-promotion, fakery, and narcissism.¹ These matters are the topic of corresponding research also: how self-presentation becomes self-promotion (e.g., Van Dijck, 2013), at what point self-promotion can be considered narcissism² (e.g., Mehdizadeh, 2010), and in what sense the presentations are only fake or idealized (e.g., Ellison, Hancock, & Toma, 2012).

An additional trend in research is that of focusing on measuring and estimating users' SNS activities in attempts to explain why certain features of SNSs are better for some users than for others. The latest user statistics, with their high user numbers, seem to paint everyone as "on board." In light of the implied pressure, it may seem difficult to justify discussion of why some people appear more passive and why they do not share more than they do – People might lurk others but hardly post anything themselves. However, user actions in SNSs are not composed only of visually observable traces; a wider spectrum of activities and reasoning is involved, extending also beyond SNSs.

Accordingly, passiveness is problematized in this thesis, with the objective being to take passivity not as an answer but as a question. The work looks in greater depth at why people might be passive even though the technological features encourage them to express their selves. "Likes," comments, "retweets," and such reveal one side of behavior, the one that is visible. However, the decisions of not to give a "like," or generally refraining from posting a thing are worth elaboration, since self-censorship reflects identity and behavior as much as self-expression. Taking a social psychological perspective and considering the core of the agency as built into the user profile enables the attempt to understand both activity and passivity in SNSs.

A few SNS researchers have touched upon the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile. Two of them are leading scholars: danah boyd and Alice Marwick. Their references to the phenomenon speak to the agency the profiles have in the user's actions. In boyd's master's thesis, "profile management" is portrayed as a process involving self-presentation and self-monitoring for purposes of managing information in one's profile (boyd, 2002; 2006; later mentioned in an early article on the state of the art: boyd & Ellison, 2007; boyd, 2008). Later on, in 2010, Marwick, describing the online and offline lives of micro-celebrities, employs the term "emotional labor" by Arlie Hochschild (1983) to refer to the same phenomenon. Although boyd and Marwick's interests and backgrounds lie in other research traditions, their work has crossed paths with this thesis project and provided

¹ The term "narcissism" refers here to the emic notion that is common in the use of press media (as in the following), not to the narcissistic personality disorder. See the online article about "How to spot 1 a narcissist online" at <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/01/how-to-spot-a-narcissist-online/283099/>, published on January 16, 2014 (accessed on October 28, 2015).

² See the work of Laura Buffardi and W. Keith Campbell (2008) and of Soraya Mehdizadeh (2010).

evidence and a stance that can inform approaching the phenomenon from a social psychological standpoint – that is, by looking at the individual in this world as a profoundly social being navigating across contexts in relation not so much to technology as to living, breathing others.

More specifically, the present work employs a powerful lens to study how self-presentation in SNS profiles is attached to self-identity and how self-presentation presents a dialogue between self-identity and the social realm. This position aids in recognizing the social realm in individuals' reasoning behind their contextual behavior in SNSs. The thesis also offers insight into the self-presentation of Finnish young adults in SNSs and in particular considers Finland as a geographical position.

The argument developed in the thesis extends boyd and Marwick's insights by offering a more detailed picture of the phenomenon. I propose that "profile management" and "emotional labor" serve the purposes of the social psychological concept of **profile work**, which I define as the process of strategic self-presentation in SNSs. Distinct from any arena of identity performance known before, SNS user profiles challenge the strategic self-presentation by establishing **a prolonged identity performance**. Furthermore, profile work illustrates the efforts users invest in their strategic self-presentation for a prolonged identity performance in an SNS user profile. The prolonged identity performance sets novel requirements for strategic self-presentation since the social dynamics of the context have altered. The dynamics that induce the prolonged identity performance comprise maintenance of a meta-role, temporality, and mediated communication via an SNS user profile.

The argumentation in this thesis develops altogether three conceptualizations that are needed to encompass the uniqueness of SNSs for individual social psychology. The notion of profile work builds on Goffman's central concepts, self-presentation and social norms, involving the understanding held by an individual who interprets others' behavior and fits his or her own behavior into the picture painted partially by others'. Furthermore, I argue that SNS user profiles enable formation of not a digital self but, rather, **a socially-defined "profile self"** through a prolonged identity performance. The main distinction between the two is that the profile self transcends the digital self in SNSs by being attached to people, not technology. The process of a prolonged identity performance in SNSs is one of the most reflexive³ social tasks of an individual in today's sociocultural context.

In order to illuminate relations between the conceptualizations the dissertation employs a notion of authenticity. Profile work is elaborated upon

³ See Giddens (1991) and Ann Branaman (2010), the latter discussing Zygmunt Bauman's work (2001) on the "new individualism" and "reflexive modernity."

in relation to the concept of authenticity, which emerges as of key importance. Authenticity stands as a moral imperative for the social realm's evaluation of self-presentations in SNS user profiles. Furthermore, authenticity is contested by the prolonged identity performance in an SNS user profile, especially when the social realm for which the identity presentation is aimed at is composed of overlapping audiences.

This dissertation constitutes social psychological recognition of the experience of maintaining an SNS user profile. The sheer magnitude of efforts people invest in creating legitimized personal life identities to fit into the community and to the current sociocultural context benefits from social psychological understanding. The mediation of technology as realized in SNSs induces a significant amount of reflexivity and control over self-presentation, but what is socially expected from that presentation is unclear. For instance, according to the study conducted for the thesis, people want authenticity, which is – in the current sociocultural context – understood in multiple ways. Through a lens of a researcher, the news headlines about self-promotion, narcissism, or inauthenticity in SNSs could represent questions around social interaction and identity, not only about technology. Supported by the theory and empirical findings presented in this thesis, it is evident that SNS user profiles are integrated, consciously or unconsciously, into the construction of “real” and legitimized identities since they are constantly open for social validation and negotiation.

Theorists of self and identity can benefit from the conceptualizations made in this dissertation. The thesis contributes to the ongoing debate on fragmented and unified self-identities (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Burkitt, 2008; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Schwalbe, 1993; Swann & Bosson, 2010; Marwick, 2013b) by arguing that SNS user profiles have a strong influence in cultivation of unified biographical narratives. These biographical narratives converge the fragmented identities or facets of life (Farnham & Churchill, 2011) in ways that challenge the contemporary self-identity theory. For now, these changes in how people are able to present their selves to others depend on the phenomenal self (as in Jones & Gerard, 1967), that describes how the self is subjectively experienced, but inevitably how these socio-structural changes influence the experience of self and identity in broader terms must be evaluated and teased apart carefully. This thesis adopts the social psychological idea that the self reflects society. Social shaping forms an infinite loop from which causalities are hard to extract (see Gergen, 1991; Mead, 1934; Williams & Edge, 1996).

SNSs and the challenges and possibilities they induce are prevalent in the society. By examining SNS user profiles in terms of identity negotiation, we can witness the concreteness of the reflexivity in strategic self-presentation and learn more about the zeitgeist of self and identity. Goffman, for instance,

might well have been delighted to observe and interpret various SNS cultures today. Already in 1959 he noted that people find it hard to accept their selves are performative, instead they see themselves as adjusting to social situations, but now online self-presentations have become visible to the performers themselves. What's more, the social interactions that negotiate the identities behind the presentations have also become visible. With these revelations comes an ever-increasing difficulty in attempting to define what is the self and what signifies its presentation. SNS user profiles are at the core of offering a tangible illustration of the integration of self-presentation and identities, social validation, and negotiation of identities. Evidently, self-presentation remains contested in daily colloquial discourse, perhaps more than ever before.

The contribution of the thesis is threefold. Firstly, the argument is directed to self and identity theorists and social psychology, assisting in recognition of how SNS user profiles leverage identities in ways that challenge identity construction. Secondly, the theoretical-empirical findings contribute to SNS research in general by offering a social psychological perspective for understanding and interpreting the user. Finally, the conceptualization of the phenomenon should benefit "ordinary people" in giving a label to their reflexive efforts to construct an SNS user profile.

Chapter 2 introduces SNSs' context and user profiles, especially how they have been defined in SNS research. Additionally, the theoretical background for the thesis is laid out, including elements from self and identity literature. However, the emphasis has been placed on Goffman's (1959) self-presentation and how it has been understood. The chapter offers an alternative way of reading the metaphor of the "backstage" paving the way for understanding of the dynamics of self-presentation in SNSs.

In Chapter 3, the research problem is drawn together from the theoretical strings described, and the focus is turned to users' experience. The research questions are explicated to give a form to the research problem.

Chapter 4 begins with an introduction to Finnish culture and its characteristics. For a more in-depth look at Finnish culture, the use of SNSs in Finland is compassed via detailed figures. Further contextualization of the thesis project is provided by introduction of the central features of the two main SNSs examined in the thesis: Last.fm and Facebook. The focus is on Last.fm especially, since that service is less commonly known and also has an intriguing feature that created the initial impetus for the line of research addressed in the dissertation. Then, the empirical methods are introduced. Chapter 4 is concluded with ethical considerations and reflections on the path of the research, including insights from attempts to extend the work from the national contexts of the research presented in the thesis.

The research questions are answered in Chapter 5, where the findings have been divided between three sections. The first of these identifies the

contextual challenges to self-presentation, and the second defines the concept of profile work. The third part is centred on the theme of authenticity and why and how it is related to profile work.

Finally, in Chapter 6, the conclusions from the research are presented in summary. The findings are discussed in terms of current views. The future of profile work as a concept and a plan for future directions of research are introduced.

2 CONTEXTUALIZING SNSs: USER PROFILES AND IDENTITY

There are three main sections in this chapter. The first section turns to the SNS context, wherein diverse domains of day-to-day life are being merged into a broad spectrum of connections to form a unique context on its own. Being a user of an SNS, such as Facebook, means that one needs to create a user profile and take various actions by means of that profile to become visible to other users of the service. User profiles offer a vast array of means to express oneself and receive feedback, and together these means and practices create the dynamics of the context.

In the second section of the chapter, the theoretical underpinnings of self and identity in relation to the SNS context are introduced. Long before SNS research, there has been a strong tradition to study different phenomena related to identity online (e.g., Turkle, 1995; Markham, 1998). In the chapter furthermore, the social psychological identity theory is discussed to give a perspective on the questions the SNS context highlights.

The third section of the chapter establishes a strong theoretical position for the thesis by introducing Goffman's ideas of self-presentation and how they have been applied in contemporary research. The section also explains why an alternative reading of Goffman offers a new and perhaps clearer picture of the overall dynamics of self-presentation. In relation to this, the metaphor of the "backstage" is refined to serve in the theory construction of the dissertation but also, to a larger extent, to help understand the uniqueness of SNS user profiles as non-traditional manifestations of the backstage.

2.1 FROM NETWORKED PUBLICS TO THE DEFINITION OF THE SNS CONTEXT

To illustrate the essence of online context in general a set of characteristics outlined by boyd (2008) is useful in establishing a suitable mindset for further conceptualizations. Following from these characteristics, a definition for SNS context by Ellison and boyd (2013) is presented to function as a basis for the conceptual developments presented in this work.

In describing online contexts, boyd (2008) integrates four properties and three dynamics to form the notion of what she refers to as **networked publics**. Networked publics represent at the same time the technological space in which people operate and the imagined community that is being gathered in that space. The properties she describes for digital content aid in

discerning the laws of the context, and the three dynamics for the context are instrumental for the present work (ibid.).

The first property is **persistence**, referring to the idea that once something has been shared online, its removal or deletion is nearly impossible; the content remains there, in digital archives, forever. The second characteristic, **replicability**, refers to a quality inherent to digital content: everything can be copied, without degradation; with the same set of 1s and 0s forming all copies, often it is hard to say which version is the original and what is not. Furthermore, once a photo has been uploaded to the Internet, it can be copied everywhere. The third characteristic, **scalability**, arises from the possibilities of the digital; one status update can be shared with millions of people, broadcast on TV, etc. Something very small can amount to something huge through the power of sharing. The fourth characteristic, **searchability**, means that almost everything on the Internet can be found. For example, if one is interested in learning something about a certain person, there are numerous ways of accessing relevant information deep in that person's history.

The first of the three dynamics of SNS context has to do with various social circles participating in the same "get-together." This is the **collapsing contexts** dynamic, in which many domains of everyday life are present at the same time, within a single context. For roles, context collapse (ibid.; boyd & Marwick, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2013a) means that a person must manage the various roles in accordance with the changes in audience.

The second dynamic in the SNS context involves it being more difficult online to say who the "guests at the wedding" are, an idea I elaborate on later in this work. The idea of an **imagined audience** (Marwick & boyd, 2011) is frequently used to describe the audience of one's profile. The main idea is that the performer does not know who belongs to the audience. The imagined-audience effect is in part, of course, related to the lack of psychological cognitive capacity to consider so many social contacts at the same time. Even in the wedding it can be hard to bear in mind the full extent of who is or might be "in the room."

The third dynamic, **blurring of public and private** (boyd, 2008), reflects lack of control over contexts. The borders between the public and the private are not at all clear. Content that is shared via "private" means in an SNS can leak into many "publics" and can be viewed by individuals and entities of numerous sorts. The boundaries between personal and private are continuously negotiated and are hard to distinguish in indefinable contexts. These properties and dynamics together form a picture of the scene of networked publics at the macro level of a community. The connections in this picture can still be viewed in several ways: boyd's view emphasizes the fluidity of publics crossing a given service, while Marwick (2013b) operates

from the idea of **networked audiences**, audiences that move across services. The idea is that people are interconnected between services but also offline. In this connection, I take Facebook as an example of an SNS. On Facebook, profile's audience typically includes contacts from many social circles of the user. Work colleagues, friends, family members, past comrades, acquaintances, and others compose the class "Facebook friends" (see, e.g., Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; 2011). This multiplicity of domains clashing under one's profile affects the user's actions and experience (see boyd, 2008; Marwick, 2010). In order to scrutinize the critical elements of personal and social psychology and SNS user profiles in this dissertation, the notions thus presented are rich in their descriptive value.

SNSs differ from the wider spectrum of social media, and, therefore, it is important to clarify why they are special as a context and, thereby, for individual social psychology. In the field of Internet research there is a relatively long history of literature focusing on the preceding or parallel contexts of social media that have altered the ways in which identity and community have been compassed along the way (e.g. Markham, 1998; Baym, 1999; Kendall, 2002; Senft, 2008; 2013). Since the launch of the first SNSs, they have featured few characteristics that make them distinct from other social media. According to the definition of SNSs,⁴ by Ellison and boyd (2013, 158, an update to an earlier version, from 2007), it is

a networked communication platform in which participants

1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system provided data;

2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and

3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site.

To define an SNS user profile, generally, one needs to upload a "profile picture," build a social network of one's friends and acquaintances and start posting status updates and other digital contents that one wishes to share with members of one's network. As Van Dijck (2013) writes, current profiles in SNS support narrativity, that is, the idea that a person can promote oneself in a form of a chronological story. This feature of SNS profiles is of special

⁴ Their definition (in both its 2007 and its 2013 form) is strictly for a "social networking site", but within the scope of this thesis I consider the latter phrase interchangeable with "social network services" (following Lampinen, 2014; Van Dijck, 2013).

interest in this thesis, since it sets up one of the key dynamics of self-presentation in SNSs.

The features new media contexts offer and the practices they are designed to support can be characterized from many perspectives. Fundamentally, from a broader angle, the aforementioned qualities of the online context (see boyd, 2008; boyd & Marwick, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2013b) are enabled and limited by the technological features the service offers, including attributes such as profile architecture (i.e., the ways in which a profile can be visualized, modified, and maintained). In some research traditions these features are generally considered as “affordances” or “offerings” of things, where the offerings are relational in terms of who uses them (see, Gibson, 1988; Latour, 2005). However, within the scope of this thesis these discussions are not of special interest. Qualities of the SNS context create and enable the ways people will or even can behave in these contexts (on the associated concept of social shaping see Gergen, 1991; Williams & Edge, 1996). Furthermore, analysis of the factors influencing behavior can be informed by the larger textures of culture – the social practices and norms that prevail in the relevant contexts and beyond them (Mead, 1934).

2.2 SNS PROFILES AT THE CROSSROADS OF CONCEPTIONS OF SELF AND IDENTITY

The structure of identity is subject to debate, and even more so now in the context of SNSs. Ongoing confusion about identity in popular and scholarly understandings alike create a minefield or at least a maze for the researcher, not to mention rendering interpretation by an ordinary individual difficult. Therefore, intentionally, I aim the spotlight of this thesis at the individual's experience of one's identity presentation.

Different lines of identity research employ different concepts when discussing identity: some speak of identity and identities, some role identities, and others roles (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The structures these concepts are meant to represent vary slightly in their description, but overall the interest lies in the same phenomenon, “the idea of who I think I am” (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008, 327; Burkitt, 2008). Within the scope of the thesis, identity is considered in relation to “roles” (Goffman, 1959), describing the most fluid parts of identity – the everyday manifestations of identity.

There are a few conceptual preferences that direct the further developments in the thesis. The higher-level term “self-identity” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, 1168; Giddens, 1991; Burkitt, 2008) is employed to refer to a deeper structure of the self within an individual's psychology. Illustrating especially the ongoing negotiation between self (the

inner structure) and identity (how to define oneself and show the result to others), the term “self-identity” elegantly captures the inner-outer magnitude of the self-construct. Overall, the focus is kept on the dialogue between self, identities, self-presentation, and contexts, specifically on the strategic presentation of self in SNS user profiles. The dialogue can be understood in terms of, for instance, Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1993) description of “I-for-me,” “I-for-others,” and “others-for-me,” but here also dialogue in Mead’s (1934) sense applies. Ian Burkitt’s synthesis shows how the dialogicality of self can be found in most works describing self-identity. Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein’s work (1980) describes the determination of individual’s behavior making a distinction between personal desires and social norms, whereas Sherif (1936) sets the tension between personal needs and social values. From a broader perspective, these presented dialogues illustrate the balancing between the individual and the social.

Laypeople and scholars conceive of the structure of identity differently. In our culture, we are pretty much taught how to tell stories about who we are, and we have learned to tell these stories about ourselves from the leading role (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Giddens, 1991; Burkitt, 2008). Now, SNS user profiles ostensibly foster these self-narratives in the form of chronological stories (Van Dijck, 2013) that present one singular identity. Even though the popular understanding of self and identity has followed the idea of a unified self that remains strongly supported in Western societies and is constituent to the idea of social order, there is room for the structure of the self to be understood differently among scholars. For instance, one can see mainstream social scientists conceptualizing it with reference to multiple and fragmented selves, roles, identities (in flux), and other structures (e.g., Ashforth, 2008; Burkitt, 2008; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Mead, 1934; Swann, Rentfrow & Guinn, 2003; Stone, 1996; Van Zoonen, 2013).

Four streams of thought advance understanding of identity performance in SNS user profiles as foundations for the thesis, with two of them involving descriptions of sociocultural context in dialogue with identity (Giddens, 1991; Gergen, 1991) and two of them being about sociocultural construction of self (Mead, 1934) and self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) in tradition of symbolic interactionism. The views of Anthony Giddens and Kenneth Gergen are especially beneficial for better comprehension of the narrativity of identity and the social saturation of everyday life, both of which seem to complicate the sociocultural process constructing and maintaining self-identity (Mead, 1934). The theory in the thesis builds heavily on Goffman’s worldview, complemented with George Herbert Mead’s meta-level interpretation of how the larger social structures demarcate how individuals operate in them. These theories emphasize the social psychological point made in this thesis, that self-identity is constructed in concert with others, not in a vacuum.

Specifically, this thesis holds the social psychological idea that the self reflects society. According to Mead (1934), we see ourselves as we anticipate others seeing us. Mead's view of "me" existing in continuous reflection on a representation of "me," as if the only visible sign of "me" is represented as an objectification of that "me," is the foundational idea behind the sociality of the self. Additionally, Mead argues that, since "me" reflects society, "me" organizes itself to fit in that society. This meta-level idea of the self can be expanded upon via the micro-level observations of Goffman, which explain how the self is shown to others.

People act differently with different people. As Goffman (1959) might say, the roles we take in everyday life change across the contexts or situations between which we shift. With strangers we behave differently than with our families. Roles are sensitive not only to people but also to the entire context, including our physical settings. The roles are something that we cannot fully decide upon ourselves; instead, we need to receive confirmation of those roles from others present in the given situation.

The role one performs is decided upon by interaction. It is fairly normal for others to try to impose a role on us, whereupon in our own behavior we either accept the suggested role or, by putting forth another role instead, refuse to take it. As Goffman points out, the role is decided upon when the interaction partners have accepted it, at which point the relevant person can start to behave and act in line with that role. It follows from this stance that an identity or role does not exist until it has been verified in interaction (cf. the psychological approach to identity in the work of Pratt, Rockmann & Kauffman, 2006). The following subsection of the thesis is devoted to Goffman's theory, at which juncture self-presentation is elaborated upon in relation to the SNS context at hand.

The views that laypeople have about identity are socially constructed. In addition to symbolic interactionism, ideas about the current sociocultural context (as indicated by Mead, 1934; and Markus & Kitayama, 1991) are important in understanding identity performance in SNS user profiles. As well important are many social psychological theories about identity, including social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which posits that people seek verification for their identities and that those identities gaining the acceptance of others will be the identities that then get maintained. A change in a person's identity requires others' approval until the individual can use that identity without pressure to seek acceptance.

Indeed, this thesis adopts Mead's view of self-identity according to which users' ideas of their identity or real self, the associated entity, and fragmentation of identity stem from common beliefs that are socioculturally constructed. If people are given a single legal identity and their culture repeats the story of one unified self, the ways in which people experience

their selves, roles, and identities are always to be viewed in relation to what people think their identities and selves should be like.

Each sociocultural-historical context presents unique challenges for identity. Giddens (1991) has described (still) prevalent cultural structures for identity construction in society. He argues that when people's everyday actions repeat themselves, the movements result in a social structure and social forces. His approach explains the process of constructing identity in relation to two main conditions. The first condition is described as living in a post-traditional era, following the traditional era. What is most typical of a post-traditional context is eagerness to change and confront the traditional. He states that this post-traditionalism creates a societal atmosphere in which the second condition for identity construction applies, the reflexivity of self. Giddens uses this term to refer to the idea that an individual is responsible for the making of his or her own identity and that the way of constructing the identity is to choose between things.

The reflexivity of self burdens the way identity is experienced. According to Giddens, the post-traditional era encourages choices in one's personal life, and it is by choosing that people claim their identities. With this choosing come difficulties an individual may encounter in trying to make good choices. Freedom to choose increases personal control over the given identity statements; in turn, that fosters or, better, manifests reflexivity. Terming self-identity in the post-traditional era a reflexive project illuminates the burden that has been laid on the individual in the process of building one's identity.

On a more practical level, Giddens refers to the stories that we create to describe us as biographical narratives. Most often, the operational definition of identity is stated in terms of a set of psychological traits or observable characteristics, but Giddens considers identity to consist rather more of a person's reflexive understanding of his or her own biography (1991, 53):

A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing “story” about the self.

The quotation above stresses the importance of continuity in the biographical narrative. By employing narrative as a focal element of the reflexive project, Giddens offers food for thought for analysis of SNS user profiles in this era – whether defined as post-traditional or post-structural.

Profiles are manifestations of reflexivity, with the aim being to represent the user's identity claims in chronological fashion.

The second input to the starting point in the sociocultural context comes from a significant scholar of social psychology; Gergen. He argues (1991) that our culture is so individualistic that sometimes it is hard to recognize how very dependent our actions are on others. In his seminal book *The Saturated Self* (1991), Gergen describes the social realm in post-modern times. Writing 20 years ago but in words that remain current, he claims that the self is becoming significantly more complex than it once was and that the social aspects of day-to-day life are there complicating our selves even more.

Building on Gergen (1991), the current state of identity is challenged by SNSs. The idea of the saturated self and our era of SNSs make it critical to find ways to support identities and selves, along with the people who claim these as their own. The more we understand about the post-modern self, the more we know about the experience of real people and the closer we get to the core of the discipline of social psychology. SNSs have the potential to complicate our identities with excessive sociality. The number of social ties grows, and the maintenance of identity becomes ever more challenging.

Studying identity in various online contexts has an interesting history. According to Stone (1996), there were some futuristic ideas imagining what forms human identities will take when enhanced by technology. She writes, for instance, about being "post-human," that is about being free from one's body and attached to a higher shared consciousness. Turkle (1995) in turn, was interested in how identities could be freed from the social categories people are ascribed with, such as gender. She elaborated on identity in contexts where it was free to operate without social strings attached. Now that the Internet has become a socially more structured place to operate, the research has found that people are not fully freed from their identities (Baym, 2010; Wynn & Katz, 1997).

Instead, on the Internet one is expected to communicate about one's identity. As Papacharissi (2002) notes, the symbolic markers of identity are built online of digital cues such as picture, avatars, or text. In addition, the ways in which people can control the cues they give of their identities have increased enormously (Stern, 2008). Marwick (2013b) concludes in her article on online identity that, "The fantasy of the Internet as disembodied playground is just that, a fantasy." Specifically, in the context of SNS, an identity is portrayed to others. The next section will elaborate more on the presentation of the self offline and on.

2.3 REMARKS ON SELF-PRESENTATION

This section turns to Goffman and his theory of self-presentation. First, the section introduces Goffman's concepts that are most valuable in the scope of this dissertation. The latter part of the section clarifies why an alternative reading of Goffman's concept of the backstage benefits the overall understanding of self-presentation in the context of SNSs.

Self-presentation is a compelling yet complex concept. For the purposes of the thesis, the idea of self-presentation is derived from the theory Goffman presented in 1959 in his *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. A background in sociology and a keen interest in social interaction equipped him to create a solid and powerful theory of how people negotiate and validate identities in face-to-face encounters. Contemporary authors have both admired and criticized Goffman's view of self-presentation (e.g., Lemert & Branaman, 1997; Jacobsen, 2010). While I find his work to make a more positive contribution than not, especially to my own work, there are a few points of departure from which admirers of his work (e.g., Walther, 2007; Hogan, 2010) often go down a different road, and which leads to different conclusions.

Self-presentation is about communication. According to Goffman, in self-presentation an individual communicates emotions, inner feelings, social status, attitudes, and hierarchical positions by expressing the self in interaction with others. Non-verbal behavior modes such as tone of voice, physical presentation, touch, and the use of personal space play a significant role in communication.

According to Goffman self-presentation comprises two types of communication. His work on self-presentation explicates the ways in which an individual engages in strategic activity "to convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey" (1959, 4). Yet impressions are not conveyed only in a specific subset of interactions; they emerge in all encounters in which the performer ends up being involved. These impression management behaviors consist of expressions **given**, those intentionally performed, and expressions **given off**, which include unintended non-verbal cues and other cues that are hard for the performer to control.

Choosing the role to perform to others derives from the context and the social realm. As for the diversity of domains (such as work and home), what is noteworthy about Goffman's ideas is that we have as many potential roles as we do situations. When a certain role has been taken, the line of that role must be maintained through interaction in role **performance**. An individual cannot put a role aside while in front of the same audience. Goffman argues that audience and context are the denominators for the choice of which role to take. Taking roles is not voluntary, in that it is an inherent condition for people belonging to groups and interacting with others. With

some people we behave differently than with others. Additionally, our expressed values and attitudes may vary with the roles we take. In essence, Goffman's idea of self-presentation culminates in the idea of an individual who is presenting a role in every situation, whether with his or her nearest and dearest or with total strangers.

Backstage is the place that allows for the switching of roles and involves no performance. When a person moves to another situation, with a new audience and context, there is, in Goffman's view, a "backstage" space, where the role is set aside before, when entering into a new situation, the person takes on another role, to "dress for" the forthcoming interaction. This idea has been challenged and understood differently by many – discussed by, for example, Ann Branaman (2010) and Michael Jacobsen (2010), and, as the following sections emphasize, the conception of roles is elementary to an understanding of the dynamics of self-presentation. I share Goffman's idea that an individual cannot take a mask off while presenting the self to others. As Michael Schwalbe and Heather Shay (2014) write, "selves, in this view, are not brought to situations; they are created in and by situations" (158). This condition of the theory is closely related to further discussion surrounding how we can understand the metaphor of "backstage."

According to Goffman, we can produce idealized presentations of ourselves but only to a certain extent. Goffman agrees with Charles Horton Cooley that people seem to present their selves always as a bit better than the reality (1959, 44). Cooley (1922) argues that if it were not so, people would not be able to improve on their lives. As for determining what level of idealization is appropriate in self-presentation, there are implicit social rules, social norms that indicate what the expected and appropriate ways of expressing one's self are in each context. Excessively positive presentations are considered inappropriate and fake. Goffman puts forth the charming idea that when one is self-presenting the one's "actual self" approaches his or her ideal self more closely than is otherwise possible.

The presentations of self are part of the self. This view is contested in various lines of identity research in attempts to uncover the real or authentic self (e.g., Vannini & Franzese, 2008). However, if one follows Goffman's thinking to its logical conclusions, the existence of a "real" self presets a conundrum. When presenting a role of self to others and thereby most closely approaching the idealized self, how can a role become even close to a true self if its existence is as an idealization? Goffman found it irrelevant to ask whether an authentic self exists; instead, he emphasized that no presentation is purely controlled by one individual. Each is produced in interaction between performer and audience (e.g., Branaman, 2010). The "magic" of interaction emerges when all performers pursue their own self-presentational goals in synchrony.

According to Goffman, there is one implicit principle guiding each social interaction situation. That key element is that the greatest value in social interaction lies in **saving face**: appreciating the role the other has taken while maintaining one's own role in relation to that of the other (Goffman, 1959, 1967). The idea of saving each other's face imposes the rules and direction for interaction, and, as are roles, it is present in all interaction. Examples of losing face entail embarrassment, shame, guilt, and other social sanctions.

The role must remain consistent to be trusted by audience. This central element of self-presentation is what Goffman calls **expressive coherence** (1959, 63): the presentation of one's self, he explains, must be in line with past and future presentations of the self to the same audience. Thus, expressive coherence delimits the expressions one can employ within the given role. The presentation needs to withstand evaluation by the audience in the long term, and the performer cannot safely "go wild" with all the self-expression possibilities a context happens to offer. Goffman (ibid., 244) says that, since the performance has a purpose (i.e., to induce a character, or a self),

a correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a product of the scene that comes off, and not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.

As illustrated above, Goffman does not actually concentrate on identity in his *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*; instead, he showcases how identities become manifested and verified in social interaction. The way of expressing one's identity, the process of self-presentation, regulates the expressions given and entails analysis of the feedback received from others. In Goffman's thinking, identities become validated, approved, and rejected in social interactions. In academia, Goffman's work has been linked to many traditions, among them semiotics, post-modernism, cognitive phenomenology, and Meadian symbolic interactionism (e.g., Jacobsen, 2010; Lemert & Branaman, 1997; Manning, 2010), even though he did not make an effort to situate himself within any of these (Jacobsen, 2010). For the present research, Goffman's ideas about self-presentation are positioned in a framework of symbolic interactionism with a twist of dramaturgy. When the emphasis is on dramaturgy, one can bear more readily in mind the importance of not only the things that have been said (symbolic

interactionism) but also the normative and procedural rules that guide use of the symbols (as elaborated by Schwalbe & Shay, 2014).

2.3.1 THEORY ON SELF-PRESENTATION AND SNS USER PROFILES

Goffman's theatrical framework as a lens for understanding social interaction has gained in popularity in the field of SNS research (e.g., DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Ellison, Hancock & Toma, 2012; Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Hogan, 2010; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008; Van Dijck, 2013). Various self-expressive behaviors that take place in online contexts have clearly pointed to the pertinence of using the dramaturgical vocabulary to describe the social phenomena witnessed.

From early in the history of the World Wide Web, the Internet has provided a new set of ways to express one's identity publicly: personal websites, blogs, online discussion fora, user profiles, and others (Markham, 1998; baym, 1999; Papacharissi, 2002, Turkle, 1995). These arenas fit perfectly within Goffman's theatrical framework on account of the idea of an audience that is watching and providing feedback to the performer on the success of the performance (e.g., Kendall, 1998; Senft, 2008)

Online contexts differ from those of face-to-face. The lack of immediate interaction with audience being the most distinctive factor. Particularly, it means that in online contexts the "applause" or lack thereof is not present in anywhere near the same sense and the performer has to imagine the audience there (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2013a).

In the scope of more socially structured online contexts such as SNSs, the lack of immediate interaction with the audience is even more accentuated. This is also where the framework draws the interest specifically in the SNS context. The performance of the actor changes when he or she is not able to get instant feedback from the audience (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Furthermore the order of interaction changes when the performer cannot see her- or him self reflected in the faces of the audience members.

The status the performed role holds makes another difference. Radio, newspapers, and other media, digital or not, share the same idea of publicity, yet these media have their editors and decision-makers and they have an established status in society (Turow, 2011). In contrast, the individual online actor has generally not established such a social status: the expressions given to one's audience are under evaluation accordingly. As Goffman (1959) writes, individual needs to have a right to perform the role she or he undertakes. Consequently, audience is key in accepting the role the individual has decided to perform.

Goffman's idea of a performer taking different roles in front of different circles of people is of great interest here. For instance, when one's family members and friends are watching, a different role dominates than when a

customer or employer is part of the audience. In the scenario of a radio silent audience that can be composed of, in essence, everyone or, in the terms introduced earlier in this work, a situation of context collapse and imagined audience in the SNS (as in boyd, 2008; boyd & Marwick, 2011)), the performer might experience great difficulties in determining which role to present and in crafting that role “onstage.”

2.3.2 THE QUEST FOR THE BACKSTAGE: READING GOFFMAN

There is a major parting of ways in the reading of Goffman, leading to two epistemologically and ontologically divergent ways to understand self-presentation. I believe that pointing out this theoretical divide in the understanding of self-presentation advances the development and application of Goffman’s theory. This is especially the case with research into the context of SNSs where these epistemological and ontological differences lead to diverging findings.

The main reason why there are parallel readings of Goffman derives from the debates surrounding identity. At issue is the essence of self – is it a unified construct or, instead, fluid and fragmented (as elaborated in 3.2.)? Another key question points to how authenticity has been socioculturally understood (e.g., Vannini & Williams, 2009).

In the following I introduce two ways of reading Goffman. The first I consider the “mainstream” way and the understanding that I build on in this dissertation I call the “alternative” way. The point made in this section propounds that the alternative way of reading could further expand on the mainstream way, which can have a strong impact on the central questions around self-presentation in the context of SNSs.

The main distinction between the two readings can be found in the concept of the backstage. What did Goffman mean with the backstage? Goffman writes (1959, 114),

A back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to the given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course. [...] It is here that the capacity of a performance to express beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed.

Accordingly, the backstage is tied to the combination of a role and audience in a specific context and can be seen opposite to standing onstage in front of the audience. When discussing team behavior, Goffman depicts some team members taking breaks from being onstage while other cast members maintain appearances, continuing the performance. In this case, being

backstage refers to the state of being absent from the show or the role that one otherwise performs on the relevant stage. For instance, when I am at work, I do not live up to what is expected of a mother; my role is instead to be a good employee. I change costume and switch from the role of mother to that of employee. This mobility between roles enables me to show different “sides” of myself and be accountable in my performances in both shows.

The mainstream reading of the backstage makes a distinction between the backstage and onstage based on the familiarity of the audience. Where I observe that the backstage can be seen as encompassing any other stage apart from that of the show in question I stand at the main point of divergence in opinions on how to read Goffman. A body of SNS research (e.g., Walther, 2007; Hogan, 2010) takes Goffman’s backstage as if it were an opposite of the performance to strangers. In this school of thought, the backstage is reserved for those people who already know the performer well. However, what this view neglects is Goffman’s fundamental idea that each person is always presenting a role in social interaction. That is, in interaction one is always operating in some role. For instance, in one production I am a mother at home with other family members, yet in another moment I am a wife for my husband when the kids go off to play in their room. If my husband goes out with the older child, I am in a slightly different role with the younger one. The point is that the idea of a role is subtler than how it is commonly held.

The alternative reading understands the backstage to be exclusive. Specifically, this reading of Goffman considers the backstage to be definitively private and a space that ultimately excludes even our strongest ties: those to our family and close friends. Every interaction with anyone induces self-presentation. In other words, the audience could be a group of strangers but also any person(s) from any of one’s social circles or outside them can activate a stage. The performer can step backstage from a particular role but is not able to take all masks off when there are other people present.

The common view, instead, (e.g., Walther, 2007; Hogan, 2010) necessitates the idea of a “true self,” since it holds that those closest to the performer have access to the performer’s backstage. This entails an individual being who he or she really is for those people knowing him or her well. In my reading of Goffman, this kind of thinking neglects the key point that self is always presented, and that “true self” does not need to exist. However tempting such a reassuringly simple division between frontstage and backstage within the common view might sound, a close reading, as outlined above, shows it to be misleading.

The mainstream view is deeply rooted in the research of the context of SNSs. The field of Internet research, for instance, has long considered how the Internet “seduces” people into faking identities or how people present their selves online, with varying levels of truthfulness. As an example, much

of SNS research (e.g., DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Ellison, Hancock & Toma, 2012; Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008) addresses users being fully truthful in their self-presentation or about being deceptive in various ways.

For instance the notion of privacy has been explained by leaning on the mainstream way of reading. This largely shared common view that states the backstage is a place for people who are close to “hang around” while strangers are kept outside functions as a justification for examining privacy and reinforcing the research around it. For instance, Hogan’s model (2010) suggests that dividing self-presentation into synchronous performances and asynchronous online exhibitions enables our understanding of self-presentation to capture the artifacts, online content, and past occasions online.

The exhibitions approach states that an individual does not need privacy from his or her strongest ties. While this “exhibitions” approach does offer a framework for understanding what is concretely there representing a person’s self-presentation, this approach does not offer any explanation of the psychological or social mechanisms at play or of the experience of exhibition. The approach interestingly captures the exhibitions with an analogy from the arts and interprets users as artists expressing their various selves in online exhibitions on YouTube, via Facebook, and in other services. Even though the approach is fluent and illustrative, it remains limited in its understanding of the social realm, situating it outside the strongest ties rather than admitting every person as a potential audience.

In the alternative reading, I posit that people need privacy even from the people closest to them. As I see it, self-presentation cannot be completely truthful in any case, to any audience. I base my conclusion on the point that Goffman made about the idea that any person(s) can form an audience, thus privacy is needed from an audience to end or pause the performance.

The alternative reading can extend the insights and conclusions of the mainstream way. Especially while the idea of multiple selves lives strong in SNS research, the ontological expectations of the field should be favorable to the alternative reading of Goffman. Consequently, the “true self” themes, these two separate readings of Goffman induce, might be difficult to study since they represent distinct epistemologies. However, evaluating them from their theoretical premises, I suggest, strengthens the overall understanding of user behavior in the context of SNSs. Within the scope of this thesis the alternative reading forms the basis onto which further conceptualizations are built.

2.3.3 SNS USER PROFILES AND PROFILE MANAGEMENT

The subsection illustrates the individual social-psychological stance SNS user profiles have in the context of SNS research. The main focus is in illustrating the relation between self-identity and an SNS user profile.

SNS user profiles are linked to the identities they represent. In well-known research in the context of SNSs, two authors – again, boyd (2002; boyd & Heer, 2006; boyd & Ellison, 2007; boyd, 2008) and Marwick (2010) – have referred to user profiles as central elements of both identity and online behavior in SNSs by considering “profile management” as a process. Even though these authors’ works do not go into personal or social psychological understanding of the phenomenon in depth, they chart the scene from other disciplines’ perspectives in a manner that suggests the relevance of social psychological analysis.

Profiles have a key function in identifying users in the context of SNSs, and users need to manage their profiles in order to be active in an SNS. In her dissertation, boyd (2008) examines American teenagers’ social media use early in the SNS era, outlining also possible paths for research into self-presentation in the SNS context. She points out that profiles are central to their users’ identification in social space. She describes the users as managing their profiles by conducting identity work. Her approach to embodied interaction enables her to see profiles as digital bodies conversing in SNSs (2008; see also boyd & Heer, 2006). Using ethnography, her dissertation draws a detailed yet extensive picture of various aspects of networked publics, including the negotiations between teenagers and their parents in the face of rapidly changing ways of socializing.

In addition to the fact that profiles need management they also enable self-branding. In a manner consistent with boyd’s ideas, Marwick’s (2010, 2013a) work focuses on online micro-celebrities and how they build and maintain their brand. An additional focus is on startup companies and media personalities, she looks especially at views of the technology industry in Silicon Valley. Describing the manner in which some people become successful in self-branding through social media, she elaborates on how the branding is carried out with strategic activities. She writes of how “life-streamers” write themselves into digital being and refers to profile management as requiring ongoing **emotional labor** (2013b, 211). The concept of emotional labor dates back to Arlie Hochschild (1983) who coined the term to describe the emotional regulation that an individual needs when adjusting him or herself to the situation.

Various online contexts and the context of SNSs have induced illustrative interpretations in relation to the presentations of identities. In an end result or other outcome of successful profile management, boyd (2008) suggests, the user **writes him- or herself into being** in a **digital body**, following the terminology of Sunden (2003). Marwick, in turn, speaks of the **digital**

self or an **edited self** (2013b; 2010). They are not the only researchers who have indicated that SNSs enable the creation of a digital self (e.g., Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008; also the “selfing” of Turkle, 2011).

Maintenance of a digital body requires efforts. Annette Markham (2013) states that digital media increase the need to write oneself into being. To give a more pertinent description for the SNS context, Marwick’s notion of edited self is illustrative in terms of considering the self being adjusted to suit overlapping audiences, such as friends and family. Furthermore, Davis (2014) analyzes three factors complicating the selfing process in the context of SNSs: Fluidity between online and offline, accuracy, and overlapping social networks. These Davis’ conceptualizations are elaborated with two distinct logics. The first one, networked logic, describes interconnections between individuals and multiple media. And second, the preemptive logic that is “the purposive performative decision to engage in some act within one arena primarily as a means to support performances in other arenas,” completes the first one. Many of these factors are intertwined with collapsing contexts and imagined audiences (as in boyd, 2008; boyd & Marwick, 2011). I later extend these ideas by offering detailed conceptualizations to describe both the significance and magnitude of the phenomenon.

One of the many commonalities between the writings of boyd (2008) and Marwick (2010) is the pioneering work to understand how people socialize and live their lives in SNS contexts. The added perspective of the profile being a central unit of agency not only should advance personal and social psychological research into SNSs but also increase the chances of understanding the zeitgeist of self-presentation and self-identity in social psychology.

3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The first part of this chapter introducing the research problem describes the form of an SNS user profile as a social psychological setting. The middle part sets out the main interest of the dissertation, and the last part of the chapter explicates the research questions.

The form of SNS user profiles has morphed from a personal database to a narrative (Van Dijck, 2013). When one looks at an SNS user profile, one sees a name, a picture, and various other content items in somewhat chronological order that can be scrolled back through to the day when the person joined the SNS. This chronology represents the self as a unified story from the date of joining to the current moment (Van Dijk, 2013). The storyline resembles what is often called a narrative in social sciences, taking a narrative approach to viewing identity (Giddens, 1991; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).⁵ While that narrative history may cover only a brief time, it extends with the length of use and may take on greater effects. This popular approach seen in the field of identity research proper and also, for instance, in marketing and service design (everything holds a story) is appealing. A narrative-form presentation of a user supports the formation of a unified self, a one-identity – one-story – solution.

Profiles are long lasting, yet they require consistency. Specifically, what this narrative form of profile enforces upon a self-presentation is to extend the burden of the user to ensure coherence (as in expressive coherence by Goffman (1959, 63) with his or her previous behavior. People seem to behave in line with their past, and that is most often socially the soundest way of behaving (Baumeister, 1982; Goffman, 1959; Swann et al., 2003). What this presentation of one's personal history puts forth calls for rather complex psychological elaboration for the users. For instance, if one joins Facebook at age 13 and is using the service still eight years later, the personal history on the resulting profile page may show the most delicate years of identity formation in the form of role plays and unique, sometimes hurtful experiences related to youth (see Arnett, 2007).

Profiles tend to be rigid. A user whose narrative history is visible online to all "friends" (and, accordingly, beyond) might feel a great burden and is urged to match his or her self and identity with that shown in the profile or otherwise reconcile the two. In some services, "restarting" one's profile is made relatively easy; however, users seem very attached to their histories. Something very personal seems to have been lost if these histories are deleted. Also, even if the profile history is cleared, those who have seen that history might not forget it and the same personal information might

⁵ In addition to the view of Giddens presented here, one can consult Burkitt (2008) for evocative description of how a narrative approach of identity dates back to ancient Greco-Roman society.

otherwise continue its existence in the digital arena. Furthermore, viewers might get suspicious if they can detect that history has been deleted, which is hardly the best starting point when one wants to begin afresh. These autobiographies are meaningful, yet they have a great deal of power over the user's self-identity.

Drawing these aspects together, SNS user profiles present challenges on many levels of sociality to self-identity. An SNS user profile is a representation of a self-narrative: the profile has a history that is visible to others. An SNS user profile is an escalator for identity work (boyd, 2008; boyd & Heer, 2006), and it is definitely a stage for managing impressions. The profile implies a strategic self-presentation and enables a novel way to perform identity to others. While offering affordances, it also ushers in its own challenges as described for instance in the notions of collapsing contexts or imagined audiences. As Giddens (1991) and Gergen (1991) point out, the construction of an identity is a complex process in the current sociocultural context. If one is to understand the interplay of SNSs and the social realm in which one operates, the zeitgeist of self and identity must be considered.

Furthermore, to approach the dialogicality of the self-identity from a self-presentational perspective, I aim to look at the experience of managing personal desires and social norms. To be able to analyze the experience of maintaining an SNS user profile in greater depth and thereby find answers as to how something is experienced, one needs to ask the performer and not rely only on outsiders' observations of the performer's actions.

Self-presentation, understood from the perspective of the alternative reading of Goffman, requires sensitive research methods. The primary challenge in research into self-presentation in the context of SNSs has been the one-sided view of self-presentation as perceived by others, the idea that self-presentation can be studied only by observing. Since only observable actions are recorded and measured, a large proportion of reasoning and external activities are left unnoticed. My argument is that focusing on the experience of self-presentation from an individual social psychological perspective can be an efficient and insightful approach to understand connections between self-identity, self-presentation and SNS user profiles.

Self-presentation is to a large extent a concept that necessitates the understanding of the social, even if the perspective is that of an individual. Self-presentation, similar to any other social psychological process of an individual, neither emerges nor exists in a social vacuum. In the spirit of symbolic interactionism, I take every claim of a person's identity to be negotiated and validated with others through social interaction. Extending research from the observable to the unobservable (i.e., reasoning, sense-making) allows us to learn more about the overall mechanisms of self-presentation and to understand deeper structures affecting social interaction in the current sociocultural context.

The SNS research field offers a portrayal of the phenomenon at hand. Specifically, SNS research points to a nontraditional challenge that SNSs pose for self-presentation, one that demands careful study. This stems from the differing aims between self-presentation in SNS user profiles and traditional face-to-face encounters, and especially from integration of the contexts of online and off. Furthermore, boyd (2008, 125) writes,

I see profiles as “digital bodies” in that they both uniquely identify a person and are the product of self-reflexive identity production. To me, profiles locate and are the combination of controlled self-descriptions in the context of social connections. As teens struggle with the ways they are seen and how they mark themselves in relation to those around them, I see identity work that combines the complex ways in which social norms, context, and people complicate acts of self-presentation and identity management. I see their work as introducing an entirely new set of identity politics by pointing out the ways in which the collapse of context can increase the challenges of those whose identities are framed by systems of power.

Building on boyd’s account of identity and sociality in the context of SNSs, I focus my research on the maintenance of SNS user profiles. It is evident that SNS user profiles have become a part of the dialogue between self-presentation and self-identity. Since that dialogue is not wholly explicit, closer examination of the performer’s perspective should cast useful light on the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile. In addition, the vast number of individuals experiencing this specific phenomenon leads us to ask whether it might be relevant to consider if there is a more accurate concept than self-presentation to describe the mechanism for maintaining an SNS user profile.

Systematic disentangling of the social dynamics around self-presentation in SNS user profiles is needed before one can analyze SNS user profiles’ implications for social psychological constructs such as self-presentation or self-identity. Furthermore, since SNS user profiles are exceptional as arenas for social validation and negotiation, they need to be evaluated and examined in this social connection.

In this thesis, I address three main research questions in attempts to understand the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile from the perspective of self-presentation and self-identity.

To consider the first research question, I investigate SNS user profiles and their contextual relevance:

- (1) To what extent is the notion of self-presentation relevant for describing identity performance in an SNS user profile?

The research problem

- 1.1) What are the differences in self-presentation of identity performance between an SNS user profile and other contexts?
- 1.2) What are the consequences of the changed social dynamics for identity performance?

The second main research question is aimed at describing and conceptualizing the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile in terms of self-presentation:

- (2) How does the concept of profile work increase the understanding of identity performance in an SNS user profile?

Finally, the third research question is formulated for discernment of profile work through the pursuit of authenticity:

- (3) Why and how is profile work involved in performing authenticity between an SNS user profile and other contexts?

4 MATERIAL AND METHODS

The thesis employs an explorative qualitative mixed method approach. The research strategy employed in the thesis project has evolved over time, and the research questions stated at the end of the previous chapter are fruit of cumulative development building on previous findings. Documenting the work to answer the three main research questions, five articles have been prepared and are presented in the dissertation. This overview presents one abstraction level higher theoretical analysis of the five articles. Three of the papers describe empirical studies (Articles I–III), one is a methodological piece (Article IV), and one is theoretical in nature (Article V).

In the following section, the research context of this thesis is defined to reflect the empirical material. The context is described in detail, especially in relation to the sociocultural environment and SNS use.

Furthermore, the chapter illustrates the two SNSs that have been involved in the empirical process. A music community, Last.fm gets a more exhaustive description than Facebook since its use is less common. More specifically, Last.fm integrates an interesting feature that has played a significant role in this research.

One section is devoted to my research philosophy in which I chart my views and understandings to the extent that they illuminate and explain the empirical choices of this dissertation. On a more detailed level, I introduce the empirical material employed in the articles and move on to illustrating the articles and the specific methodologies used in therein. The chapter concludes with my reflections and evaluations of the methodological process in this dissertation.

4.1 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The main research context of this thesis is that of the SNSs, however the informants and participants are from a specific sociocultural context. In order to understand the experience of the maintenance of an SNS user profile, I consider it important to understand the sociocultural origins of these experiences. Thus, I find it legitimate to also contextualize the geographical community to gain a richer understanding.

This geographical location that plays a significant role in the lived life of the participants in this research is Finland. Furthermore, the two case SNSs, Facebook and Last.fm, are introduced, so that the reader is equipped with details on the technological features of these services.

4.1.1 CONTEXTUALIZING FINLAND

Empirically, the thesis concentrates on data gathered in 2009–2010 on and from Finnish people⁶ integrated into the culture and society of Finland. Finnish culture is in the heart of the interpretation within this thesis. The experience of self and the experience of self-presentation should be considered very much as sociocultural constructs (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mead, 1934) that require contextualization. As the “Findings” chapter reveals, the phenomenon described in this thesis is interpreted in the context of Finland and the evidence should be viewed as from Finland.

Some peculiarities of Finnish culture are somewhat difficult for a Finn to problematize and explain, but I consider all attempts to do so valuable for purposes of this thesis.

Firstly, Finland has a small population: there are 5.5 million Finns in Finland,⁷ a country belonging to the Nordic region, where its western neighbor is Sweden and its eastern neighbor is Russia. In the very north, Finland meets the border of Norway. Finland is a part of the European Union, and the euro is its currency. Fairly recent history, from the last century, features wars with neighboring countries and Germany but also a civil war that is not often discussed.⁸ Finland has been seen as earning credit in Europe by successfully defending its honor against Russia in World War II; however, interestingly, Finns’ dominant discourse seems to consider Finland a loser rather than a winner in that war. According to my understanding, this mentality stems from how the Finns experienced the losses: in the war that many Europeans considered a victory for the Finns, Finland lost Karelia, the easternmost part of the country, and had to cede it to Russia. That has been a bitter pill for Finns to swallow. Finns consider the Swedes their “favorite” neighbors, and, for instance, there are annual sports events in terms of a friendly rivalry between the two countries.

In contrast, things that raise the national esteem of Finns include Nokia cell phones and other technological innovations born in Finland. Technology education is of high quality in Finland, and education in general is accorded high value in Finnish society. The education system in Finland has also received international attention⁹ (for instance, Finland was listed as the best

⁶ Article IV discusses the methodology of an attempt to gather online-focus-group data from Finland and Chile in 2013. However, these data have not been included (or yet analyzed) in the empirical material encompassed by the thesis.

⁷ From Population Register Centre data as of October 28, 2015, at <http://www.vrk.fi/>.

⁸ See the Wikipedia article “Military history of Finland,” retrieved on October 28, 2015, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_Finland, and an article “Dark lands: The grim truth behind the ‘Scandinavian miracle.’” *Guardian* (of January 27, 2010), retrieved on October 28, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/27/scandinavian-miracle-brutal-truth-denmark-norway-sweden>.

⁹ “The World’s Best Countries: A Newsweek study of health, education, economy, and politics ranks the globe’s top nations, *Newsweek*, August 2010,” from August 16, 2010. Retrieved on October 28, 2015, from <http://www.newsweek.com/best-countries-world-71817>.

country in the world in this respect by *Newsweek*, on August 16, 2010). It has no tuition costs, even for international students, and excellence in learning assessments (shown by PISA scores, for example)¹⁰ is often praised. The college/university system shows a great departure from the model applied in, for instance, the USA.¹¹ In Finland, the only way to enter higher education is to pass entrance exams. In Finland, money cannot buy enrolment; only prior academic achievements or other proof of skill will count. Positions at Finnish universities are highly sought after, and only some applicants are admitted. Once one is accepted as a student in the university system, degree studies are free of tuition charges.

Many observers characterize Finns as honest, modest, and sincere.¹² Stereotypes describe them as silence-loving and even laconic but generous.¹³ Often associated with the North Pole or Arctic conditions, Finns have two main seasons, a snowy and icy, cold winter and a summer with sunny and relatively hot days, while spring and fall offer “soft landings” between these extremes.

In international comparison, the informants for this dissertation may seem to be a quite homogenous group of young people. Nevertheless, within the context of Finland, the participants can be seen as relatively varied in, for instance, their education, employment, and age, along with other subtle attributes within society. It is also worth noting that equality is among the main values in the Finnish discourse, in officialdom and informal contexts alike, so discussions approaching class or other inequalities are not to be emphasized.

4.1.2 FINNS AND SNS USE

For further contextualization, setting the research phenomenon in its Finnish context is in order. The trends in SNS use by the population at national level aid in characterizing the landscape for my research. The latest statistics¹⁴ show that use of SNSs is common in Finland: over half of the population engages with them. Almost all young people and adults and nearly half of Finns in the 45–54 age group keep company with SNSs (Table 1). Those in

¹⁰ World Economic Forum. “The Global Competitiveness Report 2013–2014,” p. 36. Retrieved on October 28, 2015, from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2013-14.pdf.

¹¹ A clarifying blog post by Valerie Strauss explains the two models of education. The piece was retrieved on October 28, 2015, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/what-the-us-cant-learn-from-finland-about-ed-reform/2012/04/16/gIQAGivVMT_blog.html.

¹² “5 bad American habits I kicked in Finland,” published on February 4, 2015, and retrieved on October 28, 2015, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/five-bad-american-habits-i-kicked-in-finland/385140/>.

¹³ See <http://www.worldbusinessculture.com/Finnish-Business-Communication-Style.html>.

¹⁴ Presented in the latest report on SNS use in Finland, from 2014, which also describes the change from the previous year. Statistics Finland material retrieved on December 11, 2014, from http://www.stat.fi/til/sutivi/2014/sutivi_2014_2014-11-06_kat_004_fi.html.

older age groups are not that active in the SNS sphere, although a steady increase is seen in those groups too.

Overall, the increase in use in every age group has been significant in recent years. Figure 1 illustrates not only the latter trend of steady increase but also how strongly age affects the trend. Interestingly all age groups are at a distinct level in their engagement with SNSs (reflected by the figure’s separate, non-overlapping lines). There is a noticeable gap between those 35–44 and those 45–54 that points to younger age groups being more involved with SNSs than older ones are. Since the youngest group is approaching saturation (100%) in prevalence of SNS use, a future version of this graph is going to look different. Presumably, other age groups’ SNS use levels will reach the levels of younger age groups. With a US time series, Pew Internet shows similar patterns between age groups.¹⁵

Table 1. *A time series representing the use of SNSs in various age groups in Finland in 2011–2014 (the figures, expressed as percentages of people in the relevant age group, are derived from annual reports on ICT use in Finland produced by Statistics Finland)*

Age Year	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75–89	Average
2011	86	78	58	29	15	6		45
2012	86	80	58	39	22	10		49
2013	87	78	67	41	26	14	3	47
2014	93	82	72	46	31	15	3	51

¹⁵ The Pew Internet also provides a reconstructed history of SNS use going back to 2005. See <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/social-networking-fact-sheet/> (accessed on December 14, 2014).

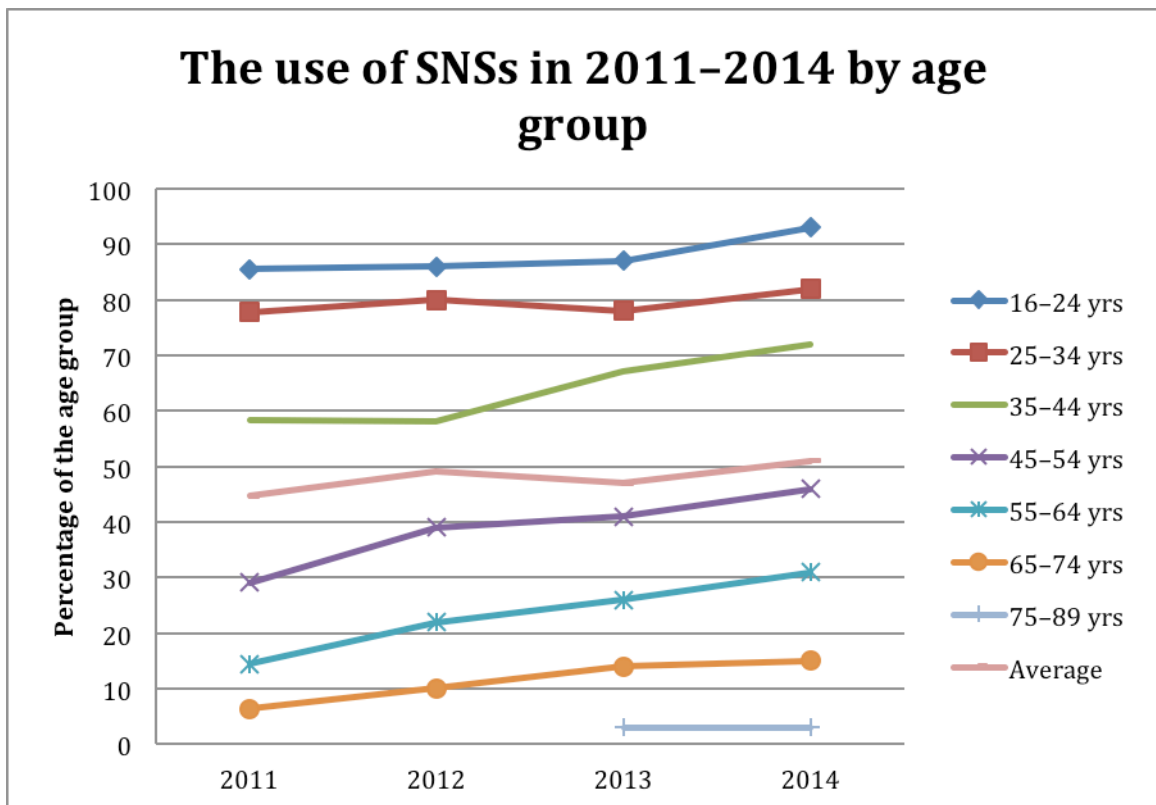


Figure 1 SNS use by age group over time, a graph illustrating the time series from Table 1. The line in peach color represents the overall average for Finns. The author has produced the table and figure by compiling various materials collected by Statistics Finland.

4.1.3 THE SNSs EXPLORED IN THE RESEARCH

In the following the two SNS of this thesis, Last.fm and Facebook, are introduced to offer background information of the services the participants of this thesis were using. Of the two, Last.fm is described in more detail, since it is not that well known and understanding its functionality of behavior tracking is essential if one is to see why it is special for its users.

As described in Articles I–III, Last.fm has offered a jumping-off point to exploring a phenomenon that is otherwise very hard to grasp: the experience of self-presentation. In particular, the “scrobbler” feature of Last.fm, which makes a user’s private music listening visible to others, is life-changing in terms of the individual’s social privacy. As Article I shows, the lack of social privacy in terms of private music listening has a huge impact on the individual’s experience. Against the backdrop of the understanding gained with users of Last.fm, studying Facebook users too has been possible. Both of these contexts, introduced in the following sub-sections, offer an interesting entry point for considering what kinds of technological affordances SNSs offer their users.

4.1.3.1 Last.fm

Last.fm is a social network service (www.last.fm) that provides users with playlists and music recommendations based on algorithms using statistics from the actual online listening times of its users that are pseudonymous. The service's features enable users to find other users who listen to similar music and then browse their online profiles.

The Last.fm Web-based service was launched for the public in 2002, and by March 2009 it had over 30 million users, in 200 countries. At the time of this writing, the Last.fm website refers to there being over 40 million users. The estimated number of users in Finland was 57,053 in April 2009 (Sandström & Liikkanen, 2009; official statistics are not public); no later data exist from public sources. The biggest recent news related to Last.fm was of its incorporation with Spotify in 2014,¹⁶ which practically meant a fusion between the two largest online music related services.

Every user of Last.fm creates a profile (see Figure 2) to which he or she can upload a profile picture and add personal information. The core of the profile, referred to as the avatar, consists of a pseudonym and an optional picture. Users of Last.fm use pseudonyms instead of their real names, and most often their location, such as the country, is presented below the pseudonym. Some users may include a link to a website or blog they run, and some announce their real name below the pseudonym in the avatar.

It is especially noteworthy that a Last.fm profile can be linked to other services, such as Facebook or Twitter, so the shared content fairly directly reaches audiences within a very wide range of social networks, not just the Last.fm community. The layout of Last.fm user profiles has undergone some developments in 2009–2014, but the main functions (which are presented below) have remained the same.

In a similarity to several other SNSs, Last.fm allows its users to “make friends with” other users. One may add a friend by sending a friendship request to a user and waiting for him or her to take the requested action (one may simply ignore the “friending” request if a friendship with the other party is not desired). Once the friendship is published in the service, the Friend Panel, at the right margin, shows the avatar of the new friend. Not every user adds friends, while some add several hundred.

¹⁶ See <http://blog.last.fm/2014/01/29/did-someone-say-on-demand> (accessed on October 28, 2015).

The screenshot shows the Last.fm profile for user 'jupep'. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'lost.fm', a search bar, and menu items: Music, Listen, Events, Charts, Originals. The user's profile information includes a profile picture, age (21), gender (Female), and location (Finland). It also shows '65097 plays since 19 Jun 2006 (reset on 15 Nov 2008)', '31 Loved Tracks', '0 Posts', '0 Playlists', and '0 shouts'. Below this is a 'Friend Edit' section with a compatibility bar for 'MEDIUM' and a list of common music artists: Louis Armstrong, Chris Brown, Cheek, Gossip, and Frank Sinatra. The 'Recently Listened Tracks' section lists ten tracks with their respective album covers and timestamps. On the right side, there is a large promotional image for 'Stormfall: Age of War' with a 'PLAY NOW!' button, and a 'Recent Activity' section showing social interactions.

jupep Library Friends Tracks Albums Charts Neighbours More...

21, Female, Finland
Last seen: August 2014
65097 plays since 19 Jun 2006 (reset on 15 Nov 2008)
31 Loved Tracks | 0 Posts | 0 Playlists | 0 shouts

Friend Edit
Send a message
Leave a shout

Your musical compatibility with jupep is MEDIUM
Music you have in common includes Louis Armstrong, Chris Brown, Cheek, Gossip and Frank Sinatra.

Recently Listened Tracks

Mila J - Smoke, Drink, Break-Up	17 Sep 4:08am
Kube - Chevy flow	17 Sep 4:02am
Sonny Boy Williamson II - Don't Start Me to Talkin'	17 Sep 3:56am
Disclosure - Latch (feat. Sam Smith) *	17 Sep 3:52am
Fugees - Ready Or Not (Clark Kent/Django Remix) *	17 Sep 3:26am
Lana Del Rey - Once Upon a Dream	17 Sep 3:23am
G-Eazy - Been On	17 Sep 3:20am
Charon Don and DJ Huggy (Hands Down) - Just Wanna Know (Feat. Reef The Lost Cauze)	16 Sep 7:18pm
Juju - Yks Lisää	16 Sep 6:58pm
Nicki Minaj - Anaconda	16 Sep 6:48pm

Recent Activity

- jupep and clintchapman are now friends, May 2014
- jupep loved Melanie Fiona - Bones, The Pussycat Dolls - Hush Hush, Hush Hush, Beyoncé - Listen - from the motion picture Dreamgirls and 6 other tracks, February 2013

Figure 2 The Last.fm user profile of a user called “Jupep.”

This is a close-up view of the 'Recently Listened Tracks' section from the profile page. It displays a list of ten tracks with their album covers and timestamps. The track 'Lana Del Rey - Once Upon a Dream' is circled in red, highlighting its timestamp of '17 Sep 3:23am'.

Recently Listened Tracks

Mila J - Smoke, Drink, Break-Up	17 Sep 4:08am
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Juju - Yks Lisää	16 Sep 6:58pm
Nicki Minaj - Anaconda	16 Sep 6:48pm

Figure 3 The list of tracks recently listened to is found on the profile page.

It can take some time to incorporate existing friendships into the service: because the users are identified by pseudonyms, not real names, one must uncover the pseudonym of an existing acquaintance before being able to send a connection request. It is, however, possible to search for people by means of a function that filters users by keywords, the set of artists listened to (for similarity to that of the searcher), group memberships, age, sex, country, and other characteristics.

There is also a Shoutbox (a public “wall”) on the profile’s front page, on which other users can leave comments. When a comment is left on someone’s Shoutbox, he or she is notified of the comment by e-mail. If judging the comment to be inappropriate, the user can delete it from the Shoutbox. The Shoutbox enables public conversation between users, and users who are not friends with each other in Last.fm can leave and read comments freely. Another way to communicate directly with someone from his or her profile is to send a private message to that user’s inbox.

Scrobbling is the keyword that has played a major role in bringing about this dissertation. It could be considered as spying on the actual music listening behavior of a user, although it can be switched off when needed. The main difference from earlier and other online music services’ corresponding elements is that scrobbling does not create only polished and selectively gathered playlists. It reveals, overall, what music a person is actually playing on a device. The Last.fm’ Web site gives the service’s “dictionary definition”¹⁷:

scrobble: skrob·bul (‘skrɒbəl)

[verb] To automatically add the tracks you play to your Last.fm profile with a piece of software called a Scrobber

1. If I'm not scrobbling the music I hear, it doesn't count.

As Figure 2 shows, the profile on Last.fm consists of music listening information, which is produced with the scrobber, and optional personal information that are gathered on the front page for each user (Figures 2 and 3). The metadata of listening used for this information consists of the name of the artist and track played and also the date and time of listening. These data are transferred from the user’s music player (installed on the user’s computer or cellular phone) to Last.fm in real time. The red circle points to the exact date and time when Lana Del Rey’s “Once Upon a Dream” was played.

The initial listening information is produced when a user listens to music via programs such as Windows Media Player, iTunes, foobar2000, Spotify, and related software. Sending of metadata occurs in real time unless the

¹⁷ See <http://www.last.fm/community> (accessed on October 28, 2015).

listening is carried out with a portable device such as a standalone MP3 player, in which case the metadata will be added to the profile as soon as the portable device is synchronized with a computer that has an Internet connection.

The metadata gathered can be viewed in various styles, as in Figures 4 and 5. A user's favorite artist is denoted in a special-form record, shown in Figure 4, in which the listening history is displayed in a bar chart as plays of individual artists' work. Additionally, a list of all-time "top tracks" for the user is presented in the upper-right corner. This represents the user's overall listening statistics (Figure 5).

Since the profile is based more on listening times than on personally produced reviews or opinions, users can supplement the information by "tagging" the songs they love with a small pink heart image, thereby emphasizing their special liking for it.

All users (and everyone with an access to the Internet) are able to see the other users' metadata on listening in various forms, with several varieties of listings and charts. Examples of possible charts are recently played tracks (see Figure 2), an overall chart (see Figure 4), a chart for the last 12 months, and weekly snapshots. Each of these can be presented for artists, tracks, or albums. In addition, users can apply personal preferences in various ways for the charts. For instance, some users want to show the recently played tracks on the front page, and some wish to have the overall charts as the most prominent element of the profile.

Overall charts encapsulate history particularly strongly: the metadata are available for the time the user created the profile through to the present moment, with the metadata able to extend back, in practice, to 2005, when the Audioscrobbler extension was created. The listening information can cover hundreds of thousands of plays of tracks.

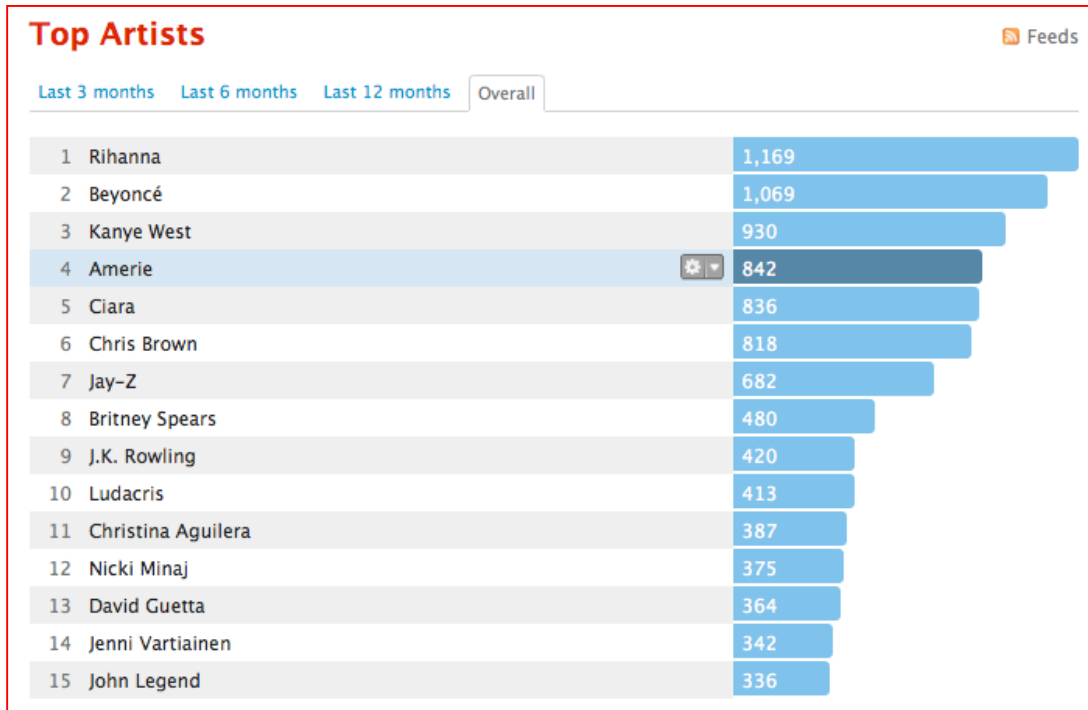


Figure 4 The artists listened to most often by “Jupep



Figure 5 “Top Tracks” shows the number of plays of the tracks listened to most by “Jupep.”

Last.fm offers groups of various kinds for users interested in certain topics, the most obvious points of commonality being liking for a specific artist and being of a particular nationality. Users are allowed to create their own groups and also manage the people who can take part in these. Participating in a group grants access to a group-specific discussion board and members' private information. Group membership is noted on the main page of the user profile, and there is a member listing on the homepage of the group itself.

In addition to the group membership visible in the user profile, concerts that the user has attended or is planning to attend may be presented in the right margin of the user profile's main page. Also, since each concert has its own page, there is a list of users attending or planning to attend, on that specific Web page.

A user who wants to go to a concert might want to add that information to his or her profile by following a link specific to that concert on Last.fm. From the view in a user's personal profile, it is easy to follow all the concerts that the user has attended in the past and will attend in the future, as long as the user indicates all of these, correctly. Also, a user who is going to attend a concert can review the list of attendees of the specific concert and see whether friends in Last.fm will be going. Because the content in Last.fm is mostly user-generated, it is largely the users themselves who bring the concert information to the audience. In particular, artists who are new or unheard of by the audience can announce their concerts on Last.fm, or their fans or other associated users might do so.

The main draw of Last.fm has been its inbuilt "radio" system, which produces a radio-style music stream (i.e., an online stream rather than one using a traditional radio transmitter) on the basis of various filtering options selected by the user. A user who visits another user's profile even has the option of listening to music from the radio playlist generated personally for that user. The initial input for this radio play is derived from the artists that the user in question listens to and artists similar to those whose tracks he or she has listened to before.

One of the interesting features of Last.fm is its musical neighbors meter, which shows similarities in music preferences between users. A user's "musical neighbors" are users who listen to artists similar to those he or she him- or herself plays. Each user is provided with a listing of his or her musical neighbors under the bar on the left-hand side of the page and need only click to view the neighbor's profile. Having found a user who is listening to the same music, one can also browse through unfamiliar artists in that neighbor's profile and see whether they are in any way interesting. A related feature of the site is Last.fm's "Taste-O-Meter": when a user enters another user's profile, a horizontal bar is presented that shows the overlap of the two

users' musical taste as a percentage. If they have very similar musical tastes, the percentage is near 100.

4.1.3.2 Facebook

So far, Facebook is the biggest SNS, apparently having more than 1,49 billion active monthly users.¹⁸ It has gained steadily in popularity since its breakthrough in 2007. There are more than two million user profiles linked to Finland alone (see Finns and SNS use). However, it is noteworthy that a user might have more than one user account. Facebook, on account of its popularity among all major demographics, is the SNS that most clearly brings together a user's many social circles "under one roof."

Facebook has evolved since the data presented in this thesis were collected. For example, the name of the user profile on Facebook has moved over from a "user page" to what is now called a "timeline" or "profile."¹⁹ However, the main functions and the overall layout of the user profile have remained steady (see Figure 6). The power of Facebook – that it, its panoply of features – renders it difficult to definition concisely, but the most general understanding is encapsulated by the following collaboratively generated definition of Facebook, offered by Wikipedia²⁰:

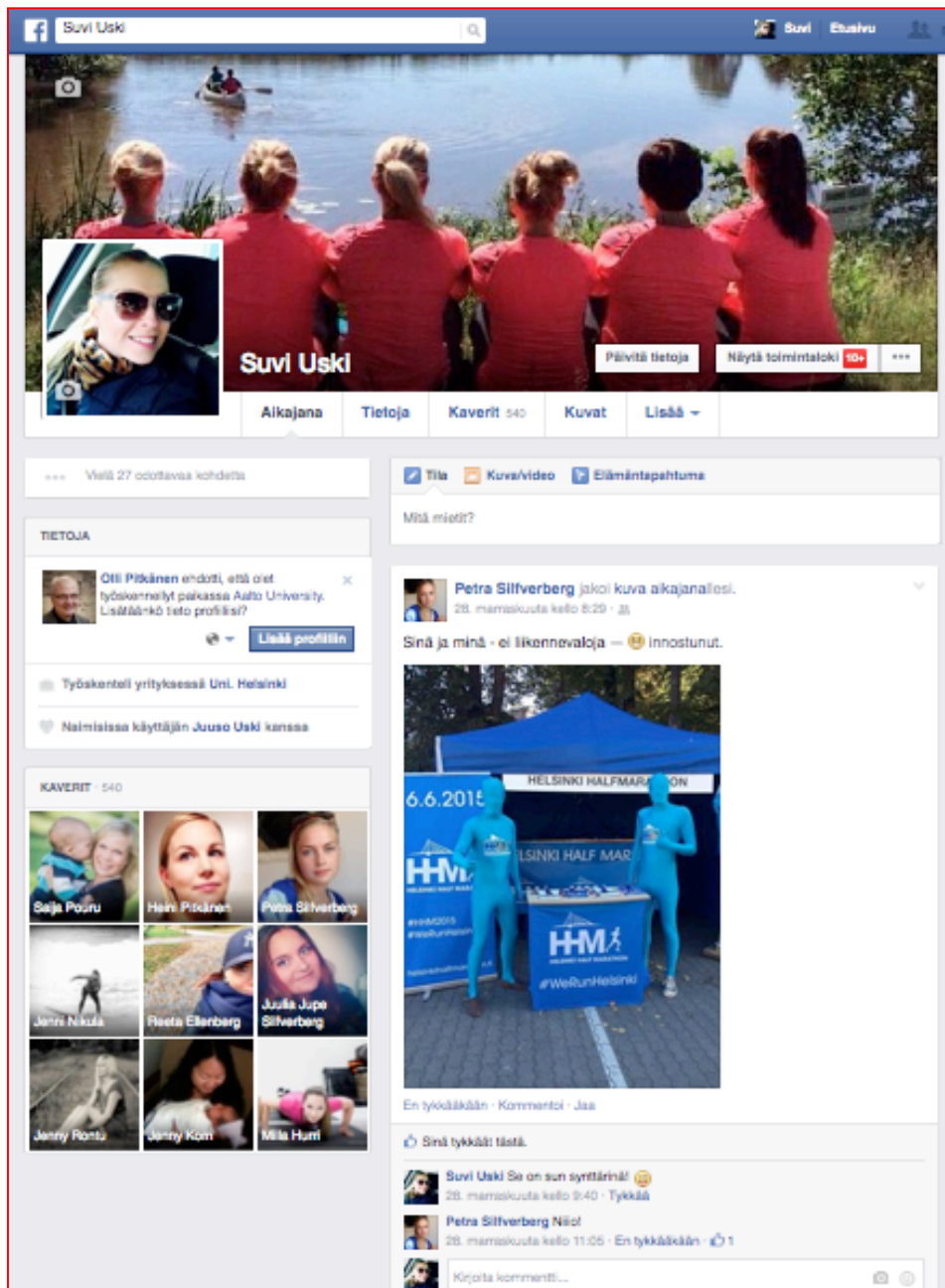
Users can create profiles with photos and images, lists of personal interests, contact information, memorable life events, and other personal information, such as employment status. Users can communicate with friends and other users through private or public messages, as well as a chat feature, and share content that includes website URLs, images, and video content.

For a person who has no access to the Internet, let alone an SNS, Facebook might take on the aspect of an invisible social system, in which people interact and operate in a fashion that not only replaces face-to-face interaction but extends the horizons of a person's social interaction from the traditional reach.

¹⁸ According to an announcement by Facebook from June 30, 2015, retrieved on October 28, 2015, from <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>.

¹⁹ Retrieved on December 11, 2014. Figures from 2014 are available at <http://mashable.com/2011/12/15/facebook-timeline-how-to/>.

²⁰ as of December 14, 2014 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook>



Statistics

- 968 million daily active users on average for June 2015
- 844 million mobile daily active users on average for June 2015
- 1.49 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2015
- 1.31 billion mobile monthly active users as of June 30, 2015

Figure 6 The researcher's Facebook user profile in 2014. To the right are statistics on the site's popularity offered by Facebook News Room (accessed on October 28, 2015).

4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND PHILOSOPHY

The research phenomenon has been at the center of attention throughout the project, and I have approached it from multiple perspectives in order to gain as rich an understanding of it as possible within the limits of one dissertation project. Various methods have been exploited, to broaden the understanding gained, and reflections upon these attempts are extended in the discussion in Article IV.

More specifically, the thesis is grounded in an exploratory interpretivist research paradigm that recognizes hermeneutics and phenomenology as starting points (e.g., Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2004). If research is divided into three positions, foundationalist, quasi-foundationalist and non-foundationalist, defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2009), this thesis employs the spot between the quasi-foundationalist and the non-foundationalist perspective. The aim is rather to understand than predict. One could describe the design of this project as a mixed-method project (e.g., Bergman, 2010; 2011). Specifically, I consider this as a project of explorative qualitative mixed methods approach.

The dominating methodological approach in this thesis has been interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), an approach focused on personal experience, especially in novel environments and life transitions (Smith et al., 2009). Experience, meaning making, sense making, and the understanding of the informant are at the core. Furthermore the approach has employed three key philosophical perspectives – phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. According to Smith and colleagues (2009, 187), people are constantly trying to make sense of things that they are involved with, and these cognitive or mental processes are central to the interpretation.

Theory of interpretation, hermeneutics, has its origins in the ancient interpretation of biblical texts. It has been developed to cover various topics, such as historical writings and literary works (Smith et al., 2009, 21). The main points of interest in hermeneutics comprise the methods and purpose of interpretation and the possibility of discovering the intentions and original meanings of an author. Smith and colleagues (2009) build on Schleiermacher's view of hermeneutics as a craft or art by emphasizing the need for multiple skills and intuition instead of following mechanical rules.

Schleiermacher considered an interpretation to consist actually of two interpretations: grammatical and psychological. The assumption is that the grammatical covers the precise, objective meaning while the latter element refers to the individuality of the participant (ibid., 22–23; Schleiermacher & Bowie, 1998, 8–9). Meaning making is at the core of the analysis, and it is recognized that the researcher brings his or her own contribution to the analysis as an interpreter. The consequent loop of interpretation, called the

double hermeneutics, is considered as a natural part of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2004; Smith & Dunworth, 2003).

The “phenomenological” in the approach, in turn, refers to emphasis on personal experience: the research has been interested not in a specific action but in the reasoning behind that action (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2004). In the tradition of phenomenology, the question of experience is the core concept. The approach, which emphasizes the experiential in one’s consciousness, is seen as a philosophical window to the study of human experience.

Edmund Husserl has contributed to this phenomenology an attempt to identify essential qualities that make or form individual experiences. His concept of “phenomenological gaze” refers to an approach in which the researcher moves his or her gaze from objects to the perception of objects in order to be able to examine our everyday experience. In that sense, an experience is considered as a phenomenon; it is something that we are conscious of. Any kind of reflecting – seeing, thinking, wishing, remembering – is phenomenological in that sense (Husserl, 1927). Wanting to get to the core of an experience, Husserl suggested that a phenomenon should be viewed from various perspectives if one is to be able to identify the essential.

Martin Heidegger, who was one of Husserl’s students, followed his teacher in phenomenology and emphasized that the individual is always a part of a context and that, accordingly, experiences should not be taken out of their contexts (Smith et al., 2009).

Heidegger (1962, 59) went further, clarifying the case for hermeneutic phenomenology. Among his main foci were lived time and engagement with the world. He claims that access to these is possible only via interpretation. According to Heidegger (1962), appearance has a dual meaning; things have certain visible meanings but probably also have concealed or hidden meanings. Phenomenology from the Heideggerian perspective shows itself as a discipline concerned with how the thing shows itself: the interest is in what may be latent, not merely in things that are highly visible. The integration of the two raises the question of how the surface connects with deeper, latent forms (Smith et al., 2009, 24–25).

Idiography in the analysis, in turn, begins with particular cases and only gradually approaches more general categorizations or other statements. Smith and colleagues (*ibid.*, 35, 99) describe idiography as in contrast to most psychology because the attempt is not to formulate generalizations at group or population level but to concentrate on the personal experience and its richness. Overall, the approach has two commitments that operate on personal levels: one is to the particular, in the sense of the detail that is given to the personal account, which provides remarkable depth for the analysis, and the second is commitment to understanding how partial experiential

phenomena have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (ibid., 2009, 29–30).

The overall research project has been built on this presented approach, although the methods applied in the Articles I–II do not originate from this approach. In the following the research material is introduced in its chronological order.

4.3 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH MATERIAL

In this section, I introduce the articles and the methods used therein. First the overall layout of the research material is illustrated. The latter part of the section offers more specific descriptions of Articles I–V.

The research material of this dissertation is composed of three empirical articles (Articles I–III) and a piece of methodological reflection (Article IV) and a theoretical article (Article V). For each empirical article a data set has been collected, even though the data from Article I has also been a part of the data of Article II. Article IV of methodological reflections on online focus groups have had its own dataset that has not been analyzed nor included for empirical purposes of this thesis. With Article IV the emphasis is on depicting of how the methodological strategy of this project has evolved. Article V is a theoretical piece building a theoretical argument on the prior empirical findings of the project. The piece concludes the project by explaining the background of the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile.

The empirical material that has been analyzed for the purposes of this thesis has been collected in 2009–2010 (Table 2). All the informants for the thesis were Finns. In sum, 46 females and 127 males, in all, participated in the various pieces of research (the data from Article I were exploited also for Article II). The gender divide was not expected: it came as rather a surprise that males represented almost 2/3 of the informants.

Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 56, with the majority of the informant being under 30. While education level was not subjected to scrutiny, discussing education was a natural part of the dialogue in the interviews for Article I. My background as a Finn aided in access and understanding, but that perspective has been augmented with outsider's insights from long stays abroad and strong ties to international friends whose worldviews have offered complementary frames of references, aiding in detailed analysis of the research phenomenon.

Table 2. *Summary of the empirical research material.*

	Research methods	Participants	Material-collection period	Research material
Article I	Qualitative: IPA	Last.fm users (<i>N</i> = 12)	2009-10	Personal in-depth interviews
Article II	Qualitative: Newly developed method (see Article II)	Users of Facebook and Last.fm (<i>N</i> = 30)	2010	Personal in depth interviews and focus groups
Article III	Quantitative: Structural equation modeling	Last.fm users (<i>N</i> = 143)	2010	Survey data

4.3.1 ARTICLE I: EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON

Article I lays the groundwork for the overall research in this thesis and explains its starting points and stance. Initially, the study for Article I was designed to explore and define the phenomenon, especially the experiences of users of Last.fm.

Once the method of analysis was chosen, the data-collection technique (in-depth interviews), the focus of analysis (experience), and the particular focus (on how the users felt about maintaining their profiles) found their form. The research question was formulated to be broad and to leave room for many directions in the early phases of the research. The methods for Article I are presented in more detail below than those for the rest of the studies in the thesis project, since the later work proceeds from findings of this particular study.

Twelve active Last.fm users were interviewed in depth in November 2009 – January 2010, seven of them women and five men. To explore the phenomenon of having a public profile in an SNS, I chose to use provocative statements as interview items instead of regular questions. The statements were used to open a dialogue with the participants. Follow-up questions were then asked to pursue interesting paths of discussion, led by the participants. The interviewees were also asked questions about their personal life, for as deep an understanding as possible of users' meaning-making and reasoning.

The analysis of the interview data followed a combination of the four-steps (Smith & Dunworth, 2003 , 608–613) and the six-steps (Smith et al., 2009) models that are created to support the construction of the themes.

The analysis began with initial coding, proceeded to thematizing, and finally to the interpretation of subordinate and master level themes.

Transcription of the 12 interviews resulted in 226 printed pages, in all. Smith and colleagues' advice was followed, and the laughs, long pauses, imitations, and other non-verbal expressions were transcribed only when they seemed meaningful or were exceptions to the participant's general behavior during the dialogue.

The transitions from initial notes to subordinate themes and to master themes were performed via detailed elaboration on the relationships between the themes and the reasoning at the focus of the analysis. The focus was strictly maintained: it was to remain on the experience of the participants and giving voice to them. While at the same time reaching the meta level of the phenomenon, the research was sensitive to details in an individual's account. As output, a model was created to illustrate the master theme and four subordinate themes. The master theme of "profile work" is considered as a key concept of this thesis.

4.3.2 ARTICLE II: IDENTIFYING SOCIAL NORMS

To deepen understanding of the phenomenon gained in the study described in Article I, attention was next centered on the social realm wherein the phenomenon occurs. There are, of course, many social aspects that could be studied in a social realm, but the first study's strong indication (also e.g., McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012) that social norms play a significant role in explaining the personal experience had made it clear that they were something to learn more of.

Article II reports on a qualitative study, this one too applying a phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective that was aimed at understanding of the social dynamics of self-presentation in an SNS context. The study was designed specifically for the purposes of researching the phenomenon as balancing between personal and social (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

The data from the first study and a dataset that was collected for another study²¹ were analyzed for better comprehension of what the socially accepted ways of sharing were. The method of analysis was designed specifically for the purposes of this study: the aim was to identify social norms in two, quite different SNSs: Facebook and Last.fm.

A method was developed for analyzing social norms. It was designed in a manner that the identification of social norms from both focus groups and individual interviews was made possible. In addition to the logic of IPA a discursive logic (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) was followed. The analysis was divided in two main phases. First, to identify the social norms related to SNS

²¹ The dataset was from a study by Lampinen, Lehtinen, Lehmuskallio and Tamminen (2011).

content sharing. And second, in comparing these two sets of norms in order to understand their similarity and difference.

As a result three social norms related to SNS content sharing in both SNSs were identified. These norms were discerned in relation to the differing sharing mechanisms in the two SNSs. The conclusion of the Article II plays a major role in the findings of this thesis by directing the attention of profile work to the notion of authenticity.

4.3.3 ARTICLE III: LOOKING AT THE CHARACTERISTICS

Article III presents a quantitative study focused on exploring the distribution of the phenomenon. Since the first two studies used very small samples, it was important to know whether the phenomenon might present itself in a different light with a larger sample.

For this study, a small survey was conducted among active Last.fm users who were Finns. In addition to demographic variables, Mark Snyder's self-monitoring scale (1974) and a newly developed "profile work scale" were included. The profile work scale was created by derivation of the items directly from the findings presented in Article I. The items were presented as statements for the participant's consideration. They featured concrete examples of possible actions in Last.fm, related to, for instance, scrobbling behavior, along with items such as "I like to look after my profile" and "My profile is very important to me."

The data were analyzed with SPSS Amos 18.0 for structural equation modeling to characterize the phenomenon within the population of users of Last.fm. The study was designed to explore whether the findings in Article I could be modeled to serve a broader understanding of the phenomenon. For instance, age and gender were considered in relation to the phenomenon, but so was self-monitoring. The idea was to see whether these two phenomena are the same and whether the research phenomenon might be an expression of a psychological trait – a tendency related to certain personas.

The study was expected to reveal the basic prevalence of the phenomenon and contribute to the overall quest, responding to the reason for research surrounding the phenomenon. The interest was in the distribution of the phenomenon and especially in how it could be used to chart further examination of the phenomenon.

4.3.4 ARTICLE IV: REFLECTIONS ON A STUDY OF SOCIAL NORMS

Article IV is a methodological reflection on our novel data-collection technique that we developed of a chat room platform. The idea of the project originally conceived of was to compare social norms related to online content

sharing in Facebook between Finnish and Chilean users, and thereby extend the ideas of Article II.

The original research design was not strong enough. The intended purpose was to see how the social norms might differ and whether a higher abstraction level could be identified than previously found. Furthermore, the exploration of cultural differences was the desired goal of the study. However, the online-focus-group method proved more challenging than we expected, and we faced many fundamental problems in trying to create two distinct sets of data that could withstand any reasonable comparison.

I could point to two layers of challenges: cultural and technological. Interestingly, though, the cultural challenges encompassed contrasting ways in which people use SNSs or technologies in general, along with fundamental differences in how people communicate and what they communicate about. Even though the data have not been analyzed yet for the purposes of that specific study, Article IV reflects the challenges and possibilities of the novel method. It thoroughly and definitely charts the possibilities for the needed future research around the research phenomenon.

Article IV's reflections on methodology delve deep, such that suitable methodological arrangements can be made to fit any given paradigm within qualitative studies. However, this is done in full awareness that a paradigm should not prevent construction of a solid view of the researched object. I agree wholeheartedly with Markham and Nancy Baym (2009) that new methods may need to be created if one is to study new things. Thereby, the challenges mentioned in Article IV represent potential. Also, there is potential anticipated in a study along similar lines or even in the existing dataset. The proposed process of conducting a fruitful study with the envisioned online-focus-group method but a more extensive dataset is elaborated upon in the Discussion.

4.3.5 ARTICLE V: THEORIZING THE LOSS OF AUTHENTICITY

The article develops the arguments built in the Article II. The setting of the article is purely theoretical, focusing on the prior empirical findings and existing theory. By analysing these prior findings to the theoretical setting this article theorizes the background of the phenomenon. The findings from Article I and Article II are elaborated in relation to Goffman's idea of performative authenticity. The aim is to explain why the performer needs to fake to be authentic in SNSs.

The article begins with an idea that the presentations of self are always idealized. Deriving from Goffman's ideas the paper develops an argument of how the control of the performer decreases authenticity. The paper pulls

strings from existing literature and extends the current perspective to understand authenticity in SNSs.

The article furthers the empirical findings by grounding them with a theoretical perspective to authenticity. This piece is the final paper of the dissertation and completes the empirical findings to the problematic of self-presentation in SNSs. Furthermore the conclusions of the article contribute to the overall findings of this thesis as the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile is viewed in relation to performative authenticity.

4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the research project has employed various methods also the ethical considerations have been elaborated respectively. In general the project has followed the guidelines of responsible conduct of research by The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012). More over the guidelines of the Association of Internet Research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012) have been addressed.

The guidelines for Internet research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012) hold six aspects. First, the more vulnerable the informant the more the researcher should protect him or her. Second, it is important to solve ethical problems rather inductively than by applying universal principles. Third, in ethical problems the researcher needs to prioritize the informant even though digital information would be the topic of the research.

Fourth aspect of the guidelines states that the researcher needs to balance between the rights of the informant and benefits of the research, although the rights of the informant are to be prioritized. The fifth aspect suggests the research project to be approached as a process, where ethical questions are answered when emerged. And sixth, triangulation of ethical problems should benefit the process. These six aspects are reflected upon challenges in Internet research (Markham & Buchanan, 2015) especially in relation to private and public, and how these have been negotiated with respect to online digital information.

In the individual interviews and focus groups the informants have been informed in advance about the theme of the interviews. Before the interview each informant signed the form of informed consent. The informants were able to withdraw from the interview at any time. In addition, after the interview the informants were asked if they would like to withdraw their interview from the research data.

Since the interviews in Article I were deep and very personal, the informants were offered a possibility for debriefing. However, not any of the informants used the option. An individual's face is sacred (Goffman, 1967), and a question aimed at the presentation of the self threatens identity. In these interviews confidence between the researcher and the informants was a

prerequisite for inducing a relaxed atmosphere. In focus groups, in order to make the discussions friendly and relaxed, the group moderator facilitated the group to create the atmosphere.

With survey-data the anonymity of the informants was protected throughout the process. The data was analyzed in a manner that no informants were specified. Email-addresses that were voluntarily collected from those who wanted to participate in the lottery were separated from other responses so that the links between the address and the answers were detached.

All empirical material has been dealt with confidence and respect. The data have been archived properly. Informants' experiences have been the core of this project. And in order to explore the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile the greatest emphasis has been given to the informants' voices.

4.5 REFLECTIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The prevalence of ethnographic research is visible within Internet research (e.g., Markham & Baym, 2009; ICS special issues²² of AOIR proceedings for 2012, 2013, and 2014). Methodologically, this thesis represents a line of research that is not far from ethnographic practices and reasoning (e.g., Markham & Baym, 2009); however, the research for this thesis has not used observation or participant observation in the SNS use studied (cf. The work of great interaction observers such as Goffman in the Shetland Islands).

The emphasis of this dissertation has instead been on interview, focus group, and survey data. The nature of the phenomenon – as one within many people's reach and also one in whose construction the researcher participates in day-to-day life – has rendered the researcher very familiar with the real-world practices involved. The methodological setting of this work has followed the reasoning I applied in my attempts to identify and define the phenomenon at hand. The questions came first, and I designed the means to find good enough answers on their basis. The research questions led to methodological solutions ranging from very qualitative to quantitative methods.

The research focus and needed methodologies have been developed during the process. Firstly, Article I sets the stage via its framework, within which the further studies were conducted. Furthermore, in forming a solid base for the rest of the work, the first study sets the spirit for the thesis, an explorative one. The first two studies fall on the qualitative side of the

²² <http://aoir.org/ics-special-issues/> (Accessed on January 20, 2015).

traditional divide in the methods of social sciences. The first study followed the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis, and for Article II a particular method was formulated via a combination of IPA and discourse analysis. Article III describes a quantitative survey-study applying structural equation modeling (SEM). Overall, the chronological order of the five articles illustrates the natural development that Thomas Kuhn (1962), for instance, would take as characteristic of the cumulative nature of knowledge.

Even though basic course books in research methodology (Alasuutari, 1999; Blaikie, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) generally suggest that the researcher proceed step by step to design the research particles to fit with one another, the reality of execution colors these steps interestingly. The thesis is unquestionably a kind of narrative itself, depicting a journey to understanding a phenomenon that affects a great many people. The overall, organic process depicted may be instructive, and the amount of reasoning, sense-making, and meaning-making required for learning the basics and finding the voice of one's own convictions as a researcher and translating them into meanings that can be communicated with wider audiences is impressive.

I am fortunate that the range of methods for gathering data in the social sciences remains broad. Ostensibly, on account of epistemological differences and differences in research purposes, there is great reason for this diversity of methods. At one end of the continuum are methods such as surveys reflecting an interest in measuring variance between individuals (Blaikie, 2003), whereas many methods such as in-depth interviews do not measure individuals as such so much as describe, for example, the individual's meaning-making and thereby illustrate particular phenomena of interest (Alasuutari, 1999; Smith et al., 2009). Once one has developed and benefited from all kinds of methods, one knows that no method, even if applied perfectly, is worth a penny if the other particles of research do not come together in line with every other part.

One of the key challenges in terms of methodology that I faced in preparation of the thesis has been the transition from a qualitative and phenomenological approach to quantitative one, with SEM, and then back to theoretical discussion, a process that has required a switch of researcher's position. This leap has been anything but trivial, and it was sometimes a struggle to ensure that the presumptions I have considered critical for conducting qualitative research remained dominant principles for this work even when some phases did not allow application of these presumptions.

One example presumption is this: in my qualitative work, I hold that even beyond the hermeneutic cycle, whom one tells about one's experiences determines what is told, and from whom the researcher hears it determines how it will be interpreted. Personal chemistry and the interaction situation

are central to the story, and if one is to be able to understand an individual sentence extracted from that story, the whole story should be heard. With a questionnaire-based survey, this part of the interpretation is disregarded, since the respondent does not know who is “listening to” his or her words and the researcher will not know who said them.

Additionally, the survey methodology denies a true voice of a respondent, since the options allowed are reduced to checkboxes that very roughly approximate someone else’s understanding of the phenomena studied. However, the method is not without its uses: it can offer possibilities for better understanding of the experience of a larger number of users, which might be essential in analyzing prior qualitative findings and designing future research.

Another of the major challenges for this work in terms of traditional qualitative research ideals (e.g., evidence-based research and Cochrane Culture) has been the search for the perfect paradigm to apply. Methods have been central to this work, and elaboration on the grounds and purposes for the research has been negotiated throughout the process. As is noted above, IPA has been dominant in the underpinnings for the thesis. In line with this, freedom to choose how to approach further questions has been manifested, along with freedom to follow the researcher’s interests, but at the same time there has been some sense of pressure to be loyal to the anticipated paradigm. In the later phases of the dissertation project, an interesting window opened wherein mixed-methods scholar Bergman (2011) won me over by writing about how old conventions in research might not be the real ideal one needs to strive toward; if anything, they might relegate great findings to silos.

Having reflected on my position in the “paradigm wars,” I have come to support Bergman (2010; 2011) in his writing about “loose” and “strong” paradigms. He argues that research should not be oppressed by blind loyalty to a paradigm and that it should instead be flexible and follow the researcher’s reasoning. He provides brilliant comparison of the world we live in to having things that are socially constructed but also things that are materialistic-realistic.

According to Bergman (2010; 2011), researchers should be free to decide in their research what things are considered socially constructed and, when doing so is necessary, decide what can be taken as materialistic-realistic. Researchers relying wholly on the ethos of social constructionism are left with few options for telling of the world. By acknowledging the limits of a paradigm, the researcher can transcend them. Bergman’s thinking offers a solution to my personal paradigm debate but still is not just tempting but also frustrating. Researchers are tempted to be analytical and aware with respect to their paradigm, but the call for disloyalty to a paradigm can be difficult.

Following Bergman's line of thought, I have let my curiosity push me to my "paradigmatic edge": I have had to take risks, setting some of my prejudice against questionnaires to the side as I tried all possible forms of methods to find the answers needed for better understanding of the phenomenon at hand. In practice, this meant that I applied the structural equation modeling, used not to create generalization at any level but to ascertain the expression and the distribution of the phenomenon, to offer additional information rather than as a competing source, let alone one overriding the presumptions as to the benefits of qualitative research. This is not to say, however, that SEM was not a powerful way of producing knowledge.²³ On the contrary, it complemented the findings from the qualitative work and aided in fleshing out this research.

In the case of Article II, a method has been created to serve both the theory and the relevant level of explanation. With two paradigms used in concert, one drawn from phenomenology and the other from constructionism, both must be seen as "loose" enough to serve the purpose of utilization of concepts that are at a sort of halfway point, situated also within social cognition research. Accordingly, further reflection shows me that Bergman's writing mirrors my convictions rather than changing them. The best possible understanding of the world is more important than my loyalty to a certain paradigm.

The approach has applied a cumulative logic, with incremental increases in understanding of the research phenomenon. Of course, research into the phenomenon at hand need not be limited to the methods I have employed for purposes of this thesis. Quite the opposite is true: the understanding of the phenomenon should benefit from diverse methods.

Overall, the process has been about learning and researching. As the thesis attests, the research expanded from that presented in Article I to directions that could not have been predicted in the early phases of the project. My personal interest in methods has been one of the focal orientations of this work. Additionally, my commitment to serving ordinary people has been dominant in the overall research strategy.

Evaluating the two manuscripts that remain unpublished, I consider them to represent the directions in which research of profile work needs to be extended. Study III requires the support of more recent evidence, better iteration of the items, and a larger sample, to enable comparison of the concepts. Article V, in turn, illustrates that there are theoretical avenues to take in order improve the understanding of the research phenomenon. In addition to the unpublished pieces, the study anticipated in Article IV must be carried out with the lessons of the article in mind.

²³ Discussion of "what knowledge is" will not follow.

5 FINDINGS

These findings present an abstraction level higher theoretical analysis of the five articles. The scene of the findings is set with a brief introduction to the insights obtained from the qualitative studies (see articles I and II), after which the second section examines and identifies the changes in social dynamics for self-presentation brought by an SNS user profile. Following on from this, in Section 5.3, I explicate challenges that the SNS user profile imposes with regard to self-identity. Furthermore, the concept of profile work is introduced both in theory and in practice. The final section of the chapter is devoted to considering profile work in relation to authenticity.

5.1 EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS INTO SELF-PRESENTATION IN SNS

The section outlines the main findings of Article I and II. Article I is focused on the maintenance of Last.fm user profiles, whereas Article II delves into social norms that guide sharing practices on Facebook and Last.fm. These two articles form the empirical core for further theoretical developments in the following sections.

Article I reveals that if one's private personal behavior is made public the behavior changes in nature. Since, even only brief acquaintance with Last.fm reveals a hidden irony in the service, which was pointed out in Chapter 4 (see also Vihavainen et al., 2014): it has automated its content publishing (real-time music listening) to make it as easy as possible for its users to share details of real-life behaviors with others via a profile. However, informants for Article I stated that automation does not necessarily increase the effortlessness of content publishing. For instance, if an embarrassing song or a track by an unwanted artist was played by mistake, the record of that mistake left a blemish on the user's profile.

The informants placed an importance on music in their lives on and off Last.fm. Users found the functions filled by music listening, such as aiding in relaxation, emotional support, and concentration (see North & Hargreaves, 1997; 2008), to change when their listening became public. Logged on Last.fm, they described these functions as supplanted by the idea of an audience watching their profiles and seeing what they were listening to.

The informants expressed that their music listening behavior became a tradeoff. While the users enjoyed having personal music listening records, they suffered on account of the effort it entailed for them. They now felt a need to decide on what could be listened to without fear of unfavorable

judgements. Furthermore, those users who were keen to have Last.fm's records faithfully represent their listening made conscious efforts to have every track played, in whatever form, featured in their profile.

According to the informants, it was common to be afraid of embarrassing one's self. Users described their actions when listening to music that they believed others would consider embarrassing: they tried to find ways to continue listening but avoid being judged. For instance, a user can achieve this end of private listening by turning off the scrobber or listening to enough other tracks to dilute the effect of the embarrassing track in the presentation. Interestingly, however, turning off the scrobber was considered more an act of cheating than an appropriate way of managing one's privacy.

Since one's listening was not generally considered personal enough to justify privacy, other options were chosen for avoiding embarrassment. These were complex and subtle ones. Article I includes characterization of the ways in which users manipulated their presentation – for instance, by boosting some tracks' prominence and diluting others', rather than actually trying to keep some tracks from appearing in their profile.

According to informants, profiles functioned as status symbols. This was the case especially for those users who presented their membership in a group of fans, since the profile functioned ideally as a music résumé, showing the number of plays of the artist in question but also presenting the level of versatility in what is played.

Self-presentation is key in order to understand behavior in public spaces. Among the main conclusions presented in Article I is that real-life music listening was changed to accommodate both limited ability to present the actual behavior and too great an ability to present the behavior warts and all: the user has to find ways to present the self despite the system. The irony speaks to the complexity of the experience of self-presentation in SNS context. When personal information becomes public in an SNS, it is validated and negotiated with audiences and the performer is accountable for it.

In Last.fm, sharing being the default complicates matters, since everything is shared and therefore must be managed by the user. Listening to music, a simple action that, on the face of things, may not seem so sensitive, took a different kind of role in the users' lives than it had had before.

The inner dialogues the informants used to reason were vivid in describing how their self-presentation and music listening behavior needed to be balanced. The borders the informants interpreted between being "real" and cheating were creating a complex dialogue on appropriate vs. unfavorable self-presentations. This dialogue accorded special significance to the profile as a representation of an identity. The presentation of self was regarded not as presenting merely one role in day-to-day life but as representing the person as a whole to vast audiences. Accordingly, every action taken in Last.fm, including the unintentional automatic ones, became

integrated into the individual's identity performance. This was echoed by and manifested in the informants' keen awareness of how others' profiles looked and how their own profiles looked to others.

Article II continues the findings of Article I and delves deeper into the social expectations of the sharing behavior. The article takes a closer look at how the social norms for content sharing on Facebook and Last.fm guided the socially appropriate ways of sharing content and presenting one's self.

Interestingly, the social norms in both SNSs served the pursuit of authenticity in self-presentation, but the expression of the norms differed. For example, the quantity and quality of the personal information shared in Facebook was under scrutiny, as was one's number of friends. The participants reported of the cases in which their Facebook connections had shared multiple posts of uninteresting things. For instance, users who were deemed to post excessively or to produce overly negative or positive posts were considered to make unfavorable self-presentations. Negotiation of appropriate quantities and qualities was ongoing, and there were no definitive guidelines. Interestingly, with the number of Facebook friends, the participants expressed that it is something that needs to be explained whenever someone asks about it. Overall, the negotiations did reveal that expressive behaviors in SNS context are socially regulated to a great extent.

In Last.fm, in contrast, the norms dealt with "truthful" sharing of "real" listening. Truthful sharing meant sharing everything one listens to and not limiting the listening only to music that is considered socially appropriate. Real listening, in turn, referred to listening practices in which a user did not listen to the music that was scrobbled onto Last.fm. For instance, one informant explained how she saw that her friend was scrobbling music even though she wasn't listening to it. Another example given by an informant, described how his friend had been scrobbling music 24 hours in a row. According to the informant, "It is impossible to listen to music that much." Another example describes an informant who felt bad because he had forgotten his music player on play when he was away. He knew that his friends would comment on that. In addition, versatility in one's listening was appreciated. Each informant emphasized how important it was to listen to music from various genres.

From the angle of self-presentation, articles I and II show that the users were struggling with the tensions between personal and social – because of altered social dynamics (that will be presented in the following section). Articles I and II provide rich description of the great effort users invested in presenting their selves in a way that stands up to others' scrutiny. In the following the conceptualizations drawn from these empirical studies in Articles I and II will be employed to support further theorizing.

5.2 CONCEPTUAL LIMITATIONS OF SELF-PRESENTATION

Self-presentation for identity performance is technically supported but socially challenged in SNS user profiles. The SNS profile context represents significant changes in social dynamics from what is seen in, for instance, traditional face-to-face interaction or random and unattached performances (or “exhibitions”) on the Internet.

The technical architecture of profiles and the cultures that emerge on the platforms (see Chapter 2) are tied up with changes in social dynamics, creating a setting in which an individual’s identity performance is complicated. There is illusory simplicity here: profiles represent a single identity as one tangible narrative for all audiences at the same time, as in collapsing contexts or with imagined audiences. From some perspectives, profiles’ architecture may seem convenient, yet this structure complicates the maintenance of an identity as a reflexive project (Giddens, 1991), and induces role overload (Biddle, 1986). In Goffman’s terms (1959), in such a context the self-presentation process grows more difficult, and focus shifts from the situation to the performer and his or her abilities to manage the performance.

In the following, the changed social dynamics are presented. Especially the conceptualization of a prolonged identity performance paves the way for understanding the underpinning dynamics. Then the section proceeds to illustrate the limitations of the concept of self-presentation in describing the phenomenon of maintaining an SNS user profile. In addition, in the last part of this section, I move on to explicate various threats to self and identity emerging in identity performance in an SNS user profile.

5.2.1 CHANGED DYNAMICS IN IDENTITY PERFORMANCE

The process of self-presentation in SNS profiles is targeted at producing an identity performance. Instead of separate strategies for each of several roles, a profile supports one identity, considered here as one role. Strategic identity performance in self-presentation requires significant efforts of the performer relative to unattached/ambiguous role presentations in other contexts. The key here is that self-presentation is aimed at identity performance but to one that is prolonged, that has a trajectory.

In an SNS, identity is performed through a long lasting performance in an SNS user profile. Essentially, these following three changes in social dynamics of self-presentation should coexist in order to understand an SNS user profile as an arena for **a prolonged identity performance**. The trajectory of the prolonged identity performance is defined and refined by users’ activities, such as, “likes” and “comments,” but also by inactivity. As Goffman suggested (1959, 1967) people have a “line” in their presentation, they are consistent. This line must be kept during the prolonged identity

performance. In one example, on Last.fm, one informant stressed that her friends know her so well, that if she listened to something out of her style, the friends would ask her what she is doing.

To discern the process accounting for the prolonged identity performance, the social dynamics of self-presentation are elaborated. The changes in social dynamics in an SNS user profile are shown at least in three senses. Table 3 presents the key differences between self-presentation for identity performance via an SNS user profile and without an SNS user profile as changes in social dynamics. These changes are then introduced in more depth below.

Table 3. *The social dynamic of self-presentation for identity performance in an SNS user profile.*

Self-presentation		
Change in social dynamics	Identity performance without an SNS user profile	Prolonged identity performance in an SNS user profile
ROLE	As many as there are audiences.	A meta-role: One for all audiences.
TEMPORALITY	Each audience carry history and future of the performer's presentation.	History visible to both current and future audiences
COMMUNICATION	Predictable responsiveness of the audience's feedback.	Mediated, non-simultaneous, and miscellaneous feedback.

5.2.1.1 The role dynamic

In the context of an SNS user profile, there is only one meta-role under which one's presentation needs to be established. However, that meta-role needs to be maintained in a way that enables refragmentation into the roles that are needed outside that SNS. Since many of the performer's social circles may well have access to the performance, the role needs to be crafted to suit all of the authorized audiences. Additionally the performer has to take into account that the performance under that unified meta-role needs to withstand the scrutiny also of people in other (e.g., Farnham & Churchill, 2011; Tiidenberg, 2015), separate audiences, even outside SNS venues.

The analogy of the wedding helps (again) to see the social context of a meta-role. Friends, family members, and others in the circles of both bride and groom gather in one place, and the roles that previously were presented

separately to each of these audiences must be integrated under one meta-role that suits the interaction with all of them as a larger group. It might be easier to discard the roles previously shown to these people separately, but this isn't feasible: one must still be the same person the people present know.

It is difficult for people to perform for multiple audiences at the same time. Following Goffman's (1959, 57) description of the basic need for audience segregation: "The individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting." While the performer is urged to convince each audience that it is somehow unique and that this relationship is somehow special (Goffman, 1959), that is impossible when all of the various audiences, which may be very different, are present at the same time.

In the context of SNSs it is difficult to find where audiences and contexts overlap. The efforts to recognize different contexts and audiences in such a climate are partly addressed also by boyd's (2008) term "collapsing context," by which, again, she refers to a situation in which many domains of everyday life are present at the same time and wherein the borders between contexts are hard to delineate. Similarly Davis' (2014) notion of "overlapping social networks" illustrates the context for maintaining a meta-role.

In the analogy, online it is harder even to see who is attending the wedding. One can see why the term "imagined audience" (boyd & Marwick, 2011) is often used to describe the audience of one's SNS profile; the performer seldom can envision everyone by name or face, though it is possible to work out all the connections. In addition, Gibbs, Ellison & Heino (2006) point out, self-presentation is cultivated in ways that support anticipated future interactions. That is, the audience of the future must be considered more in this context.

When contexts collapse and people present their roles to imagined audiences, something very interesting occurs in terms of identity. In order to play a role that simultaneously addresses all the important social circles of one's life, one must be very talented in crafting that role. The challenge involved in handling a single meta-role is elucidated well via the ideas of collapsing context and imagined audiences. These aid greatly in comprehending the difficulty of audience segregation in maintaining an SNS user profile.

The metaphor of backstage (Goffman, 1959), following the alternative reading, offers further perspective on the meta-role. From this standpoint, the role challenge in combination with the profile architecture and SNS culture suggests that the performer is backstage and front at the same time. The performance is maintained by pulling the strings backstage, preparing for future acts and managing impressions carefully. Furthermore, since the audiences are overlapping and parallel it might be difficult to evaluate where the backstage of the user profile is.

5.2.1.2 The temporality dynamic

The profile has a visible history that is accessible to connected “friends” but also to new contacts and newcomers to the SNS. This means that someone who has just entered one’s life has access to all the history laid out in that person’s profile. For instance, the histories shown by people’s Facebook profiles have been accumulated since the latter part of the first decade of the 21st century. On Last.fm, tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of “scrobbles” may illustrate a user’s real-world listening. A performer can modify these public personal trajectories, but, as Article I makes clear, users place a high value on their personal histories as presented in user profiles, even though these are exposed to social evaluation.

Giddens (1991) might say that a profile offers a visual biography that is under social negotiation and validation. Furthermore, according to the description by Van Dijck (2013), the term “narrativity” prevails in the design of SNSs. A profile provides the possibility of the performer looking back and seeing his or her history,²⁴ and the performer can envision others doing so and imagine how the trajectory may be interpreted. Life changes and phases of growth may be brought to the fore directly in the profile, or there might be cues about these, pointing to meaningful events in one’s life. The user profile clusters various identities in one’s social life into a single tangible narrative of one identity.

The history and future follows the user of an SNS. As explained in the “role” dynamic above the meta role that is presented to others in the profile, and how the “temporality” dynamic adds to that is the requirement that the presentation has to stand up to others’ scrutiny in the past, present and future individual encounters as well. The maintained meta-role is worn parallel with other roles in everyday life encounters, and it needs to correspond to each presentation given (off) outside that profile.

As is pointed out in Chapter 2, online self-presentations have been described also as exhibitions. While, on one hand, the public personal trajectory puts personal history on exhibit, this is not a static exhibition: its form and content mean that it is in continuous flux and subject to social negotiation. The user needs to reflect upon the public personal trajectory and possible new audiences etc. as long as the profile functions – and perhaps beyond. Furthermore, this temporality of identity performance describes one property of digital information, persistence, described by boyd (2008) extremely well.

In applying the backstage metaphor, again following the alternative reading, the personal trajectory depicts a continuous identity performance onstage. One could argue that the performer cannot run backstage to escape the meta-role, since the prolonged identity performance in the SNS has no

²⁴ For example, Facebook offers a rolling one-year view of status-update videos (Robards, 2014).

clear beginning or end. This idea of being integrated onstage induces consequences for how self-presentation is experienced.

5.2.1.3 The communication dynamic

Interaction with an SNS user profile is distinct from other arenas of communication. There is a rich body of literature in the field of computer-mediated communication (CMC) exploring and explaining the processes of mediated interaction (e.g., Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Markham, 1998; Walther, 1996, 2007). The possibilities for receiving feedback on one's self-presentation are mediated in ways that are non-simultaneous (a term from Markham, 2013; cf. face-to-face interaction) and miscellaneous (not everyone in the audience participates in giving feedback).

As Turkle (2011) suggests, technology has a major role in how individuals construct their intimacies. Communication in mediated digital environments differs from that in traditional face-to-face interaction in various ways. Markham (1998, 282), for instance, writes pertinently about the nature of mediated communication,

Computer-mediated communication promotes a strong sense of control, or freedom to choose how to fill in missing information for others. This sense of control is aided by the fact that one's choices are made within a non-simultaneous context, in which time is more flexible.

In addition to control mentioned by Markham, Thompson (1995) concretizes the mediation by stating that mediated interaction is stretched across time and space (83).

The range of symbolic cues that are available to the participants is narrowed. The cues of face-to-face interaction remain absent, whereas the symbolic cues (of the mechanism of mediation) are accentuated.

Thompson writes (1995, 84), that “mediated interaction provides participants with fewer symbolic devices for the reduction of ambiguity.” Goffman's explanation for how people reduce ambiguity in face-to-face interaction brilliantly completes Thompson's (1995) illustration by saying of the cues in interaction that “we often give special attention to features of the performance that cannot be readily manipulated, thus enabling ourselves to judge the reliability of the more misrepresentable cues in the performance” (66).

Accordingly, Goffman concludes that pretension will always be discredited. However, the SNS user profile context filters feedback on the performance, since the audience may remain largely imagined and the performer is not able to see others' direct responses to the presentation.

"Like" indications, sharing/forwarding of content, comments, "following," "retweets," "shouts," etc. are not received from all audience members, though they may be anticipated. Consequently, frontstage and backstage are blurred, since the performer might need to wait some time for feedback, because feedback on past actions might result in future encounters, and so forth. The validation and negotiation of self-presentation find an obstacle in mediation by the digital communication and profile architecture.

5.2.2 THREATS TO IDENTITY AND SELF

The altered social dynamics of self-presentation bring forth challenges that are related to self-identity. These challenges can be explicated through elaboration of the backstage metaphor.

Comprising the three conditions of the backstage within an SNS user profile performance, the larger picture is revealed. First, within the meta-role dynamic a condition of the backstage that posits the performer acts as both backstage and onstage creates confusion in the self-presentation. Furthermore, within the temporality dynamic, the condition of the backstage that keeps the performer integrated onstage creates an infinite and ongoing performance. The third dynamic of communication, leading to the condition of the backstage that makes it difficult for a performer to know the border between the backstage and onstage.

This confusion in self-presentation has an impact in self-identity. The relevant social psychological limitations are manifested in identity conflict; issues of identity development, consistency, coherence, and realness of the self; misunderstandings; and failures in presenting oneself in public. The prolonged identity performance that is maintained in SNS user profile is the key factor in inducing these following problems. The concepts I consider next are usually reserved for more personal-psychology-oriented traditions, but they prove useful for explicating the challenges caused by social dynamics and experienced by an individual. Furthermore, they enable anchoring of the phenomenon to recognizable constructs in day-to-day life.

5.2.2.1 Identity conflict

A profile gives an image of its owner. The performer's decision on what kind of image to convey to others might not be easy, partially because one's various roles in life are likely to be difficult to reduce to one meta-role. Role overload (Biddle, 1986) and issues of crafting and maintaining a meta-role require

continuous balancing. Having the personal history of that sole identity on display creates bounds to other possibilities for self-presentation.

One way to approach the matter is by talking about identity conflict (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and the stress related to that conflict (Burke, 1991). Since the meta-role involves so many roles of day-to-day life being rolled into one, the resulting role discrepancies might be difficult to cope with. As Merton (1957) has explained, this kind of conflict can lead to inconsistencies in both action and inaction. Furthermore, in one view, the performer's very sense of self is under threat if identity conflict cannot be reduced (Thoits, 1991).

Recent research on identity conflict (e.g., Kira & Balkin, 2014) suggests that an individual aims to address it by integrating several roles into one. However, this involves not merely presenting the resulting role to all audiences (in a profile) but also living up to the expectations of that unified role (positive identity integration; see Kira & Balkin, 2014). If one follows Goffman's thinking, identity integration is neither an ideal nor even a possible solution to identity conflict. The various facets of life are inherently different, and some people's lives may show huge gulfs between them.

One thing Goffman might add to the discussion of identity conflict is the idea that the meta-role reduces what he calls social mobility (1959), since only one position can be taken and it cannot be readily modified enough to enable access to social strata higher or lower than one's own. Once the presentation of a role has been established in a profile, changing it is a relatively slow process (and one visible to all), as the sections below highlight.

5.2.2.2 Identity development

Profiles are not changing in relation to identities. One observation in Article I is especially significant with respect to young adults' experience. Having listened to their favorite artists through their teen lives, young Last.fm users felt overwhelmed when they entered a more mature stage of identity and, aware of the changes in their musical tastes, found those changes impossible to showcase in their profiles. The profile had accumulated several years of listening history, and it was difficult to display the new tastes in other ways than by "cheating" on the numbers of scrobbles.

Profiles also carry information on the personal development. On Last.fm the profiles' rigidity left the users anxious about producing a presentation of the self that was in line with how they felt about themselves (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Schlenker & Leary, 1982), and they were keen to do so. In Facebook too, long-term histories are visible to other users. Past relationships, past family events, and past identity plays signify a threat to changes in self and identity.

Furthermore, long visible histories in profiles might do harm for users' identities. In early adulthood, when one's identity is developing, the various attendant forms of identity play and experimentation (Arnett, 2007; Eriksson, 1959) visible in SNS user profiles color the prolonged identity performance for the years to come. Especially with young users, identities' development and consequently their negotiation and validation might suffer on account of long, persistent histories that are unable to support changes in future life transitions. Thus self-presentation with a history might become a burden that fails to reflect the experienced identity.

5.2.2.3 Identity coherence and consistency

People observe their own behavior. In terms of self and identity, the notions of self-coherence (Swann et al., 2003), self-continuity, and the enduring self (Swann & Bosson, 2010) are central. These concepts describe psychological attempts to identify oneself as a person distinct from others and retain the traits and habits that one attaches to him- or herself.

Furthermore, people feel the need to account for their actions and behaviors and contrast these to past actions and the reasoning behind them. For instance, one might explain, "I'm not on Facebook and will never join" or "Usually I post quite a lot of stuff there, just because." People reflect on their behavior history to find reasons and to explain their behavior as a reasoned activity (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein 1980; Smith et al., 2009).

With SNS user profiles people are given an ability to remain coherent and consistent in their performance and see whether they have managed to do so. Again, though, persistent histories in user profiles increase the pressures to maintain consistency in one's behavior.

Ostensibly, the profile functions to support self-continuity, but the efforts to maintain that continuity in light of the profile's evidence of prior actions might cause stress to the user. As Article I showcased, SNS user profiles support consistency by visualizing prior activities. However, as in "Identity development" the profiles are rigid and not easy to adjust to the changes in identity.

5.2.2.4 Blurring of motivations of behavior

One of the difficulties due to the change in social dynamics involves the aforementioned reasoning on behavior. This has to do in part with the nature of the behavior and its goals. For instance, informants for Article I, when listening to specific music and scrobbling it simultaneously into their profile, may have found it difficult to qualify the behavior as intrinsic and not instrumental.

After all, the primary goal of intrinsic behavior is not its presentation in a profile but the value of the behavior itself. When the real-world behavior is instrumental (relative to the SNS context), the presentation of it in one's profile is valued more than the behavior itself.

Whether the behavior is objectively intrinsic or instrumental is not central in itself for purposes of the thesis: the most vital element is the experience the performer constructs of the behavior. For instance, if the performer concludes that he or she has listened to a specific song to scrobble it or cooked a meal only to take a photo of it, the behavior was instrumental. The anticipated presentation of it in one's profile was seen as having been the main goal behind the behavior. Even so, the person may not experience mixed feelings about a truly instrumental behavior. To that extent, it does not actually pose a threat, unless it gets socially criticized.

When, however, the reasoning produces anxiety over one's self-presentation and claims of identity, a threat toward one's authenticity is established. Goffman (1959, 69) writes about authenticity being questioned,

Those caught out in the act of telling barefaced lies not only lose face during the interaction but may have their face destroyed, for it is felt by many audiences that if an individual can once bring himself to tell such a lie, he ought never again to be fully trusted.

Since the long-term performance needs to maintain consistency, the self-presentation requires a great deal of managing. In particular, mediation in the communication through one's profile sets the bar even higher.

5.3 DEFINING PROFILE WORK

The changed dynamics of self-presentation seen when SNS user profiles enter the picture do have an impact on the efforts that users invest in managing their presentations. The more a profile functions as a stage for prolonged identity performance, the greater the self-presentational challenges it introduces for the performer. The notion of self-presentation can depict the phenomenon with only a limited amount of clarity in delineation of the dynamics and challenges SNS user profiles induce.

When the three changes in social dynamics are present as outlined, a more accurate concept is required to enhance the understanding of creation and maintenance of an SNS user profile as a prolonged identity performance. I use the concept of **profile work** to describe self-presentation for a prolonged identity performance in an SNS user profile.

5.3.1 PROFILE WORK IN VIEW OF RESEARCH AND THEORY

The aim of profile work is the same as that in self-presentation: presenting a truthful but ideal self to others (Goffman, 1959, 44). SNS user profiles offer their users great opportunities to express themselves. However, not everyone is actively presenting all the time. A great deal of time spent in SNSs is around watching others. The SNS user profile has potential to induce and maintain public self-awareness (Buss, 1980) by offering a concrete image of the performer to audiences to interpret (Fenigstein, 1979).

Consequently public self-awareness increases the attempts to control and monitor the identity images one is conveying to the audience (see Edelman, 1987). When exposed to larger and significant audiences, the performer is likely to feel subjected to social evaluations and observations. In line with Edelman's (1987) thinking, the situations in which one is increasingly self-attentive are those posing the greatest threat to the performer's identity.

In Article I, profile work is interpreted as offering four perspectives for description of a user's experience of self-presentation. The **profile as a product** perspective takes the layout of the profile as a narrative for a single identity that is "out there" for others to see. From another angle, **cycle of interpretation**, refers to the ideas of both Goffman and Mead: the user evaluates his or her own profile in terms of what he or she thinks of how other profile-owners would evaluate it.

Cycle of interpretation occurs on many levels. Various trends and practices in SNSs, which remain in flux, emerge from this watching others and seeing oneself through the assumed eyes of others (e.g, Burke, Marlow & Lento, 2009), then watching others again and imagining how one might look to others. People compare their profiles similarly to how they compare their looks and other characteristics in offline and other contexts (see for social comparison, e.g., Festinger, 1954) Comparison is, of course, necessary if one is to learn to engage and behave in novel environments, such as on online platforms or in exotic funeral rituals of ancient nations.

The third dimension, **conflicting goals**, illustrates the clash between personal and social. Every action of an individual takes place in relation to other people. As Gergen (1991) states, our culture is so individualistic that sometimes it is hard to recognize how much our actions depend on others.

The conflict is perhaps the only thing that enables a distinction between personal desires and social norms. Oftentimes a user would like to post something but decides not to. While we obey unwritten social rules online and in offline life alike, the distribution and power of the social seems still to be unrecognized.

The last dimension of profile work, **profile regulation**, stands out in allowing us to identify concrete ways people "cheat" to make their profiles look better. Ways of cheating vary between services, but the basic idea is the same. The term is a fair one, for users know which things are "not cheating"

and which constitute “cheating” and they do feel guilt when they cheat. While they may cheat, they consider doing so requisite for their being. Many users employ rationalization such as reasoning that, since everyone cheats at least “a little,” their own actions can be deemed justified and in line with the actions of others. For the purposes of the thesis, the four perspectives specified in Article I function best for describing the maintenance of an SNS profile. Thus, the discussion of profile work in this chapter is organized in a manner that better situates the project in line with the theoretical framework applied.

Profile work explains passivity in the context of SNSs. As Study II showed, one way of profile work is to handle the stress caused by the changed dynamics by protecting one's self with passiveness. As some studies (see Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton & Corley, 2013; Merton, 1957) have indicated, passiveness is not a solution aimed at boosting one's well-being. The associated feelings of being excluded and of inability to express oneself correctly do not promote the positive aspects of psychological experience (e.g., Kira & Balkin, 2014). Passiveness adheres to a strategy of protective self-presentation (see Arkin, 1981); the emphasis is on the idea of the performer avoiding possible losses in social approval. If one does not know how to present oneself in such a way as to be judged positively, the tendency to avoid presentation increases. In such a situation, the likelihood for the performer to fail in self-presentation and result in an embarrassment is increased.

Even though it is an individual who engages in profile work the process is social in nature. Furthermore, since profiles cultivate social interaction and are not there only to be seen but to be socially evaluated, negotiated, and confirmed, the exhibition-oriented approach is not of benefit in order to understand the social. In SNS user profiles validation and negotiation are ongoing processes, and the performer crafts the performance continuously based on all levels of social interaction

Refining the definitions of profile work given in articles I–III and with theorizing presented in this dissertation, I consider the following characterization to clarify the core of the phenomenon:

Profile work illustrates the process of strategic self-presentation for a prolonged identity performance in an SNS user profile. Profile work is a continuous, strategic process that is guided by interpretations an individual makes of his or her behavior and that of others. The notion emphasizes that, while possibilities for strategic self-presentation are multifold online, the possibility to choose what to reveal, omit, or underplay forces individuals to make many choices continuously to manage how they are perceived.

As the profile offers only one stage for continuous identity performance, all acts performed (or withdrawn; see Das & Kramer, 2013) within it are part of the performer's prolonged identity performance and profile work.

A person might have profiles in various SNSs. However, profile work should be understood as being conducted for one prolonged identity performance in one SNS profile, unless two or more profiles are closely integrated (for instance, in terms of audience). For instance, Twitter and Instagram can be readily linked to the performer's Facebook account.

The "profile" in profile work is where the prolonged identity performance is anchored. Additionally, in profile work what is considered as an SNS user profile systematically excludes instant or private messaging on SNS platforms. However these instant messaging applications establish contexts for more private performances. The characterization of profile work is designed to reflect the prolonged identity performance in the (semi-) public profile and its contents as seen in the eyes of the audience and in the way it is seen in the various "streams" (depicted by Ellison & boyd, 2013), such as the News Feed of Facebook.

Hypothetically, if an individual operates in an SNS as a fictive person, at least some amount of profile work is necessary for producing a presentation of that fictive person. In that case, naturally, the depth of the profile work might be very different from than with a profile that functions as a representation of the self and identity of that individual. Moreover, the relevance of the profile to the performer's self and identity determines of how strong intensive profile work will be. Since it is the changed social dynamics and the threats toward identity that induce profile work, the conditions for profile work do not exist if the presentation of the fictive person is not relevant to the self and identity of the individual behind said fictive person.

The preliminary research described in Article III shows that the extent of profile work is negatively correlated with age. This observation is supported by the period of intensive identity development (see Arnett, 2007; Eriksson, 1959) and the associated threats to self and identity.

The research on self-presentation would suggest that self-attentive practices might not be dependent only on audience and context; they may be linked to the personality of the performer (Edelmann, 1987). However, the preliminary research described in Article III indicates that people who are high in self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) do not show similar patterns in profile work. At least, profile work cannot be explained by the personality trait of self-monitoring. For example, Edelmann (1987) names various aspects of personality that may be tied in with public self-awareness and protective self-presentation. These include the need for social approval, fear of disapproval, and self-consciousness. Furthermore, the results may indicate that the tendency to control one's presence in face-to-face interaction does not apply

in an SNS context, where the non-verbal cues of interaction are suppressed (see Baker & Oswald, 2010; Stritzke, Nguyen & Durkin, 2004).

5.3.2 PRACTICES OF PROFILE WORK

Profile work is about self-regulation of one's presence through an SNS user profile. Every act of publishing in one's profile involves profile work; however, the concept extends further, to the mental effort that may or may not result in observable updates or other publications. Thinking about publishing but then not going through with it would count as profile work.

It is worth reiterating that profile work need not leave any traces. An interesting study of users' self-censorship on Facebook has found that people often censor their initial ideas about what to publish (Das & Kramer, 2013). In addition, thoughts, feelings, and reasoning related to one's profile are profile work and are part of the overall process of self-presentation in one's life. The visible acts or marks in the profile are only to be considered the tip of the iceberg.

As a concept, profile work draws together the performer's experience and visible actions (see Appendix I for list of signs indicating profile work). Profile work is about control and access, though the users engage in profile work also when they do not have control. They might worry about their SNS presence in many ways, a fact highlighting that this is not a lightweight matter for the individual.

Becoming a celebrity is not the dominant aim in profile work. Some people say, "I post almost nothing on my Facebook page" or "Facebook is not that important to me" (Article II), while opposite claims can be heard just as often. Self-branding in SNSs has been researched with respect to the making of "micro-celebrities," people who become stars through their self-expression online (see Marwick, 2010; 2013b). Bloggers, vloggers, and others in vast numbers have shown special talent in moderating their online presence. Profile work has to do instead with people wishing others to see who they are by looking at their profile (Article I). Micro-celebrities perform profile work, but the emphasis with the concept is on ordinary people and how they experience creation and maintenance of SNS user profile in order to perform identity.

In keeping with prior studies in SNS context (Lampinen, 2014; Ellison et al., 2007; Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012), it is necessary to explicate that profiles function as platforms for social interaction and that one's profile content is accumulated in a manner encompassing collaborative practices. When an audience member posts to a performer's profile, the performer conducts profile work in evaluation of whether the content posted supports the identity performance. If it does not, profile work is undertaken for judging how to cope with the unsuitable content.

Furthermore, recent research shows that people do groom each other (Ellison, Vitak, Grey & Lampe, 2014) in order to maintain relationships and also that people mind the privacy of their connections (Lampinen, 2014). However, the scope of the dissertation is limited to profile work from the perspective of an individual. Group-level practices in mutually supportive identity performances are not considered here.

5.3.3 RELATED CONCEPTS

If one is to situate the concept of profile work in a manner that adequately describes the phenomenon, it is important to view profile work in light of related concepts, other than self-presentation, employed in personal and social psychology. How is profile work different? And what does it explain better than the existing vocabulary? Closely related concepts, impression management, self-monitoring, face-work and identity work are introduced and elaborated in terms of profile work in the following.

Impression management (Schlenker, 1980; Leary & Kowalski, 1990), when considered different than the notion of self-presentation, it refers to the control the individual intentionally applies over his or her self-presentation. Impression management is situational and has usually a definable aim. In short term encounters an individual has more control than in longer ones. In online contexts, it has been argued (Stern, 2008), individuals have more control than in face-to-face encounters. Impression management should be considered as an essential part of self-presentation and profile work.

Self-monitoring describes a tendency to adapt behavior to fit in different contexts (Snyder, 1974). It can be also viewed as a tendency to manage impressions. Some people are considered high in-need for approval whereas other people are not sensitive to social contexts. Snyder developed a scale (1974) for measuring self-monitoring that has been criticized in many ways (Briggs, Cheek & Buss, 1980; Lennox & Wolfe, 1984). However, as other studies in the field (e.g., boyd, 2002; Hall, Park, Song & Cody, 2010; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), also the research into profile work has approached the scale in attempts to find out whether profile work and self-monitoring illustrate the same phenomenon (Article III). The preliminary results suggest that these concepts are not overlapping, and that profile work for an SNS user profile derives from different attributes.

Profile work and **face-work** are similar in their phrasing and may seem to resemble each other in meaning. Goffman (1967) described face-work as the main principle for action in social interaction. One's face is sacred, and its maintenance is the ultimate prerequisite for any interaction situation. Whatever the goal of a social interaction situation, it can be reached only if the face has been maintained.

Goffman evaluated face as important no matter which party's face it is. There are equal demands on two actors participating in an interaction situation to save their own and the other's face. Even though profile work is a process as face-work is, the two concepts describe distinct phenomena. Profile work refers to an individual's efforts at self-presentation, whereas face-work is a requirement for anyone participating in interaction. The two concepts do not overlap *per se*, but certainly profile work is conducted under the conditions of face-work.

Profile work and **identity work** (e.g., Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; cf. social identity work Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996) describe partly the same phenomenon – that is, the maintenance of the self in relation to the sociocultural environment. Profile work is specific to the context of SNSs, whereas identity work concentrates on identity maintenance and construction in all contexts.

An important question arises here: Why is the concept of profile work needed if identity work describes the same phenomenon? The dissertation answers this question by depicting the SNS context as an environment that brings about a specific set of requirements and possibilities for identity work in relation to prolonged identity performance. Furthermore, also the resources individuals possess for their “work” and to maintain their identities in SNS contexts are distinct.

Significantly, identity work (e.g., Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) encompasses twisting, tweaking, and modifying one's identity intentionally while profile work is about twisting and tweaking the representation of that identity – the side of the self that is intentionally shown to others. Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock's (1996) differing idea of identity work as collective practices in maintaining social identities takes a group perspective to the identity work and thus illustrates another angle of the identity related processes.

5.4 PROFILE WORK FOR AUTHENTICITY: KEEPING IT REAL

The ways in which profile work, authenticity, and the self are intertwined form the deep core of the dissertation. This section describes the equivocal understandings of authenticity and how these approaches contribute to the understanding of profile work, and profile work emerges as an important social psychological mechanism to guard the authenticity of self.

The history of authenticity is colored by existentialism that is presented here only to the extent that it is valuable for explaining profile work. The main idea in the existentialists' individualistic approach emphasize how authenticity can be found in a person, and that a person should strive for

authenticity. For instance, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, and others have exhibited authenticity as a central notion in their descriptions of the state of being. Their views reflect and are reflexive to the ideal of autonomy that dominated during the Enlightenment. For instance, against the expectations of the Enlightenment, Kierkegaard, wrote how there is no objective truth to be found, and that the only truths there are subjective. Kierkegaard's (1846, edited by Hong & Hong, 1992) idea of the locus of truth motivated also Heidegger.

In continuing to tackle the philosophy of authenticity, Heidegger's (1962) idea of human life centered on the "Dasein," that stands for a state of being. In Heidegger's view, authenticity is not only the most desirable but also the most natural mode of being. He explains that the death is the defining feature of a person's life; this recognition of one's mortality drives a person to search for authenticity.

One of the common denominators to these existentialist views is the resistance towards collective, the idea that the collective harms the being of a person by diluting its authenticity. This individual or subject oriented approach entails ontological paradoxes that have driven the philosophers to extend their horizons. One of the central problems has been the dilemma that authenticity can never be achieved if it cannot be consciously appraised. That leaves authenticity unattainable, and, to great extent, a useless notion to describe any mode of being.

The strong tradition of existentialist ideas of authenticity was followed by a collective approach to authenticity that is present in Sartre's later work (1960, edited by Rée & Sheridan-Smith, 2004) and in writing of De Beauvoire (1948). Their accounts recognize a need to acknowledge the social realm. For Sartre this need derives from the very Marxist ideas of how an individual is shaped by his or her social surroundings. In turn, De Beauvoire finds that groups comprise individuals and these individuals create their own value structures.

Essentially, the collective idea moves the locus of authenticity from an individual to the group, underlining that the group entails the minds of many and that individuals belong to groups via their identity. Essentially, moving the gaze from inside to outside remarks a great leap in the theorizing of authenticity and a necessary step in order to understand how the individual and the collective are manifested in the experience of authenticity.

One of the central works, by Erickson (1995), into authenticity offers a useful piece of theory on how authenticity can succeed in regaining its applicability and value. She writes that authenticity whether subjective, collective, or cultural should be examined as a subjective feeling. This view posits, that despite authenticity is an existentialist notion it emerges in a social world with others. This idea that authenticity should be treated as a subjective feeling has been extended by a contemporary philosopher, Pierce

(2015), who claims that authenticity should be viewed as a relational inter-subjective understanding that considers individual and collective structures creating authenticity synchronously. By stating that individuals contribute to groups with their own values he argues that the individual and the collective are not opposed but rather co-operative. Interestingly, he explains that this relational model is built on ethical theory by way of presupposing that authenticity relies inherently on trust. Pierce considers it important that trust is the underlying principle since it helps this model of authenticity to avoid the pitfalls, such as its unattainable nature, that are present in existentialist understandings of the concept.

The relational inter-subjective understanding of authenticity (Pierce, 2015) is grounded on social theory that underlines this dissertation as well; the tenet holds that the individual reflects the society and the society reflects the individual. Similarly, Williams (2006) develops ideas of individual and collective authenticity by giving definitions for actions toward each. Accordingly, the collective or social refers to “how individuals claim insider status in a social category”, and the individual or personal refers to “how individuals articulate a personal commitment to a subcultural value structure or lifestyle” (Williams, 2006). Recently, Williams and Goh (2015) have developed these ideas further and explicated parallel ideas to Pierce’s relational inter-subjective understanding of authenticity by stating that existential authenticity is not only a psychological but also an interpersonal process since it is, in part, interactional. A great deal of recent literature points to the direction of interpersonal or relational understanding of authenticity. Therefore in order to contextualize these ideas it is also useful to turn to a somewhat forgotten idea of performative authenticity (Goffman, 1959).

In the following sections I will employ Goffman’s (1959) conclusions and build on them to illustrate how the interpersonal meets the inter-subjective in profile work and conclude by showing why these points of reference are valuable to the self. The distinction of how authenticity is treated in this dissertation has three divergent categories. The first includes the informant’s subjective feelings of their self-authenticities (Erickson, 1995; Williams, 2006), the second describes how authenticity is presented to others (Williams, 2006; Goffman, 1959). The third category discerns authenticity as relational and inter-subjective by connecting the other two categories (Pierce, 2015).

5.4.1 SUBJECTIVE FEELING OF AUTHENTICITY

As Articles I and II show, people tend to self-censor and present only socially favorable sides of the self when it comes to presenting oneself in an SNS.

Even though one is, in reality, paying a great deal to gain others' acceptance, what is socially favorable benefits the self as well.

The accounts of how authenticity of identity is understood among scholars and ordinary people experiencing it establish distinct views. The theorizing around authenticity has evolved since the early periods of existentialism, still, the ethos of existentialist ideas about authenticity as an authentic or true self pervades (Vannini & Williams, 2009). This early idea of authenticity is considered remarkably important among the informants studied for the Articles I and II. The informants had strong convictions to strive for personal authenticity without compromising their social identities. Erickson's (1995) understanding of authenticity as a subjective feeling reveals why it is important to view the experience of authenticity. According to Erickson, what counts is (1995; 135) "individuals' subjective sense of their feeling of their own authenticity." Erickson accentuates that these feelings do emerge in relation to interaction within one's social realm (also Williams, 2006).

Illustrated as a threat toward self and identity (in 5.2.2.), the blurring of intrinsic and instrumental behavior play a significant role in how the subjective experience of authenticity emerges. As stated in Articles I–II the informants were negotiating the appropriate levels of authenticity for their own behaviors. The informants depicted the efforts they invested in evaluating whether their behavior was to be counted as authentic. For example, after listening to music on a CD player one felt the need to play the song again in the computer to keep up with the scrobbling records on Last.fm.

The informants explained that the evaluation felt difficult since they were not sure what is the most authentic way to listen to music and mediate it into one's Last.fm profile. The ultimate reason for why they wanted to scrobble everything they listened to was the goal of having "as truthful as possible" an image of their listening in their profile. One informant reported that she had to change the type of music she was listening since the statistics did not look like what she expected.

The findings in Article II on the expectation of authenticity in one's behavior show that intrinsic motives for behavior are valued more than others. When one's interpretation of the discrepancy between the given image and the actuality of real-life behavior is more than one is ready to accept, anxiety over the given identity performance increases (Goffman, 1962). The core idea here is that the performer has a standard to which she or he reflects upon truthfulness of her or his actions. Negotiation and refinement of that standard is a part of the performer's experience.

Traditionally, this is the point where theoretical work on identity and self diverges: between the idea of an authentic or true self (e.g., Vannini & Franzese, 2008) and that – employed in this dissertation – of authenticity as

experienced by an individual (Erickson, 1995). Rather, here the phenomenon is explained by the users need to balance between giving a truthful image of their identity to their selves but also to others.

5.4.2 PERFORMING AUTHENTICITY TO OTHERS

In Goffman's (1959) conception of performative authenticity, authenticity is performed in social interaction. This authenticity is not solely the presentations "given" and "given off" but instead, the combination between the two as well as the performer's right to offer the presentation, which culminates in the emergence of authenticity. Furthermore, as Goffman says of everyday presentation of self, the self is always presented as idealized, a little better than it "really" is.

Balance is key though. Accordingly, excessive idealization is deemed fakery in the social context. Goffman explains that in interaction situations in which the self is presented to others are the only moments when the idealized self becomes the closest possible to being "real." The performer needs to remain truthful and authentic in the idealization, since that is the point where one can fail. Noteworthy is what follows when people fail to present themselves as authentic, they will be punished and shunned by others (Goffman, 1959). Also, Goffman states that even one minor lie in self-presentation may let the audience be suspicious of all other claims the performer has ever given (also in 5.2.2.4).

In general, online and SNS contexts have generated a new wave of questions about authenticity. Authenticity is a topic that is recognized among Internet scholars (e.g, Davis, 2014; Marwick, 2010; 2013a; 2013b; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Senft, 2008; Van Zoonen, 2013; Williams, 2006; Williams & Goh, 2015). The changed dynamics and contextual properties and features that mediate self-presentations have brought the term authenticity back to the lips of the users as well. What makes this discussion an especially relevant one, from the standpoint of this dissertation, is the informants' emphasis on authenticity of identity.

Authenticity can easily be confused with consistency yet consistency plays a significant role in producing authenticity in self-presentation (Goffman, 1959; Branaman, 2010; Pierce, 2015). In addition to how coherence and consistency have been elaborated as threats towards the self and authenticity in one of the previous sections (5.2.2.), it is noteworthy to understand how the acts of presenting consistency to others are equally meaningful for the self. In the context of SNS the performer sees his or her performance and engages in profile work respectively.

For instance, Marwick (2013b) writes about authenticities in connection with micro-celebrities of social media in her book *Status Update*. She states that authenticity is about consistency in one's behavior. She explains that the

celebrities who she interviewed were describing how they made efforts to remain consistent with their public persona performance in order to give an authentic image to their audiences. Supporting the idea of relational inter-subjective understanding of authenticity, Pierce (2015) explains this by underlining how collective identities that are inherently semi-public contribute to this consistency. His main claim regarding to consistency is that it ultimately enables trust and cooperation in interaction.

Sincerity is another key concept related to authenticity and one that has been competing with it in many contexts (e.g., Goffman, 1959). However, in the scope of this dissertation these two terms are not interchangeable. The strongest difference drawing these two concepts apart, according to Goffman, is that when claims about identity are made the performance is always about authenticity, not mere sincerity (e.g., Branaman, 2010; Goffman, 1959). Also Pierce (2015) explains that sincerity is a necessary condition for authenticity but is not applicable to describe authenticity per se. He tackles the question by addressing sincerity as a product of individual existentialism, in which one can be sincere only when not influenced by others and by being truthful about one's own socially intact feelings. He then concludes his idea, that is appreciated throughout this dissertation, by writing that the inter-subjective understanding of authenticity "allows that some social norms can be authentic expressions of individual values and desires."

In this dissertation, Articles II and V employ Goffman's framework of performative authenticity to describe how authenticity is produced in everyday interactions in SNSs. The main claim is that people need to fake in order to be seen as authentic in their prolonged identity performance in SNS user profiles. That derives from the changed social dynamics of self-presentation in SNS user profiles.

Building on Goffman's idea of performative authenticity, Article V explains the mediation of authenticity in the SNS context. One of the main realities is that SNS user profiles, viewed as prolonged identity performances, are more or less integrated into the offline world. The two contexts, SNS and offline, do operate in the same reality of a user experiencing them. What brings these two contexts together is the shared audience: the social realm. For instance, if one's Facebook connections go beyond Facebook as well, the authenticities must be able to hold in both contexts.

As stated, according to Article V, the "double standard" for authenticity highlights the essence of the social realm rather than the divide between online and offline contexts. However, the context is that which makes it more difficult to respond to the social realm. Article V explains that the social realm of SNS user profiles is reflected back to the performer, and performing authenticity is rendered an impossible task since the traditional way to produce it gets lost in mediation. This is due to the contextual dynamics that are changing the ways of how sociality is expressed. Drawing on Williams

(2006), it seems that the social and personal dimensions of authenticity are incapable of communicating effectively.

As it was discussed in Section 5.2, on the changed dynamics, the need to be able to refragment the meta-role for various audiences complicates the task for the performative audience in relation to SNS user profiles. They need to engage in profile work to balance these two contexts. Published at the same time with Article II, a study by Davis (2014), concludes that in the SNS “the self is the object of triangulation, and self-triangulation is accomplished when online identity performances and offline identity performances point to, and reflect, the same self.” This idea of self-triangulation is a good tool to understand the prolonged identity performance in SNS profile in relation to the social realm where the performer operates. With respect to triangulation of self, profile work draws the attention to the prolonged identity performance that anchors the triangulation to the SNS user profile.

The dynamics of self-presentation in the context of SNSs have an impact on self-presentation in other contexts as well. Since the greatest value in social interaction is inscribed in face and since maintaining one’s face requires authenticity, it is not such a leap to suppose that people need to be able to perform authenticity in SNSs as well. Articles I and II succinctly show that even when the sharing mechanism involves attempts to imitate “real” behaviors (scrobbling on Last.fm), the mediation by technology simply reduces the authenticity that the “real” behavior once had.

The expectations the users believed their networks had in relation to music listening were considered as social norms to which the users tried to adapt their music listening behaviors. However, since there was no absolute definition of truthful listening, the informants invested time and efforts in making their music listening behavior consistent. On the contrary, they also reported on occasions in which they were listening to music at a friend’s place or in a shopping mall without scrobbling. They felt bad for not adding that music to their profiles as well. Some people added music manually after such occasions but felt that keeping authentic music-listening records was still compromised.

Employing the analytical distinction that Williams has used (2006), the informants’ desire to be authentic in their listening (personal authenticity) and in how they showed it to others (social authenticity) was the main dilemma they battled with. Pierce’s (2015) inter-subjective understanding of authenticity, in which some social norms can be authentic expressions of personal desires, completes this line of thought. Applying these ideas, in self-presentation, subjective feeling of authenticity is found where personal desires and social norms converge. Furthermore, employing the distinction made by Williams and Goh (2015), the divide between the existential and interactional authenticity enables more accurate analytical elaboration here as well.

The balancing between personal desires and social norms is continuous. On Last.fm the battle between personal desires and social norms was exceptionally visible. The informants expressed various cases where other users were clearly cheating with their listening behavior. Accordingly, all kinds of twisting of listening records were considered very attempting yet strongly disapproved. Along the lines of the individualist existentialist idea of authenticity, the ethos among the informants stated, “You are what you listen to.” Essentially, that meant that, “If you want to be something, you need to listen to that something and truly like it what you listen to.”

The dilemma between the personal and social authenticity is at the heart of why the social dynamics and self-presentation in SNSs (addressed in Articles I–II) are difficult to analyze in terms of “exhibitions” (Hogan, 2010). The problem lies in the context of an SNS profile where public feedback (despite it is mediated) from the social realm is enabled, and the performance is adapted to that social feedback. The anticipation of public feedback prevents a person from putting on a perfect exhibition, i.e., from making the best possible presentation in the profile (see Article II). Thus, any notion describing self-presentation, at least through a prolonged identity performance, should refer to performance, as explained by Goffman (1959). Performances imitate the realities of social interaction, whereas exhibitions are polished, idealized, and caricatured versions of reality. In self-presentation this imitation results from balancing between two forces: social norms of “truth” and individuals pushing toward an idealized reality (see Article II).

To bring together the views presented here, in an SNS user profile, on a level of subjective experience, engagement in profile work is a process of optimizing the discrepancy between the real and the representation of it. In prolonged identity performance, this optimization is a prerequisite for successful self-presentation. Socio-culturally derived ideas of what is appropriate and anticipated and, at the same time, the social norms and values that dominate in an SNS play a significant role in determining what is to be considered personally authentic and what is not.

5.4.3 TOWARD A SOCIALLY-DEFINED PROFILE SELF

Authenticity can be conceptualized in terms of self-values that transcend situation and identities (Erickson, 1995). Erickson, for instance, describes how symbolic interactionism can understand “self as a motivational force rooted in authenticity” (1995; 134). Her conceptualization is aligned with the findings drawn together here. Considering authenticity as the most central element of self, profile work has extremely significant role in maintaining it.

Profiles are considered real: they are in black and white (see Articles I–II). And since they have their public personal narratives, the definitions or identity claims – whether good or bad – written into being exist there for

everyone to see. Interestingly, as Sundén (2003), boyd (2008), Markham (2013) and others write, on the Internet it is possible “to write self into being.” Markham concludes that writing oneself into being is about embodiment (of self), where boyd (2008) concludes that the process produces “digital bodies.” Marwick’s (2010) notion of “edited self,” in turn, describes how the identity presentation is polished to suit many audiences. Still, identity presentation online is, to a large extent, interactional. Williams and Goh (2015) write “the socially authentic image,” that a person has constructed online, “becomes the ideal upon which individuals modify their self-conceptions.”

Furthermore, building on these notions, I argue, from a very social psychological standpoint that since SNS user profiles open the prolonged identity performance for the social realm – not only to see – but to negotiate identity claims (both given and given off) the quality of self written into being in SNSs is more extensive than the prior notions with respect to wider array of online services suggest.

From the evidence presented in this thesis and through extension of the lines from expressive coherence (Goffman, 1959, 63), authenticity as consistency (Davis, 2014; Marwick, 2013b; Pierce, 2015), and coherence of self (Swann et al. 2003; Schwalbe, 1993), loss of authenticity is the greatest threat to the self and identity when SNS user profiles are maintained. Thus, prolonged identity performances in SNS user profiles increase the vulnerability of the performed authenticity in social interaction across contexts. As a conclusion the main motivation for the self to engage in profile work is authenticity.

In addition to the vulnerability caused by the prolonged identity performance there is yet another side of the coin. Proceeding from my findings, as presented in the previous chapter, and the social psychological stance of the thesis, I argue that prolonged identity performance enables the construction of a **socially-defined profile self**, a representation of self that is socially confirmed by its presentation in public in one’s profile that is open for social negotiation and validation. This profile self is triangulated across on and offline contexts and overlapping social networks. What is essential in a profile self is that it is something a person oneself can objectify (see Article I; on profile as product and the cycle of interpretation; see Mead, 1934; Buss, 1980). One can see who he or she is by looking at one’s own profile, for one knows that everyone else can see the same concrete representation just as well. A profile – and thereby the profile self – is optional, but when writing self into being through one’s profile, one cannot avoid engaging in profile work and constructing a profile self.

Specifically in the process of constructing a profile self, there might be a great discrepancy in one’s sense of self if one does not get any support for the self that she or he considers the most authentic. People might end up feeling

disappointed by others having not recognized the value of the presentation of the self that he or she considered the most authentic (as experienced), and someone who presents the self that he or she evaluates to be less authentic and then gets support from others in the form of “likes” and comments may, caught in the middle, feel distanced from one’s self (e.g., Swann et al 2003). Hence, frustration with perceived superficiality in SNSs comes as no surprise.

With respect to these findings, it seems easier to construct a profile self than to change an existing profile self. The consistency that is a prerequisite for authenticity and rigidity of SNS profiles (in Articles I–II), complicate profile work. The unification of one’s self as a single, coherent narrative requires profound personal and social psychological elaboration if one is to succeed in one’s self-presentation.

6 DISCUSSION

From an individual's perspective, overwhelming and pervasive sociality needs to be managed and one has to be in control of one's presentation to others. Indeed, SNSs enable the validation and negotiation of identity, as considered in symbolic interactionism. Still, ease of access to validation and negotiation does not contribute to a massive flow of identity claims; instead, the access complicates matters via exuberant sociality.

Even though users of an SNS are offered a way to express the self easily to large audiences, the findings presented in this thesis reveal that they are not doing so. That is because of social structures, such as emerging social norms, guiding and evaluating the expressive acts the users perform. SNS user profiles give strong evidence of the mechanism Goffman called self-presentation, of how behavior changes when it becomes public, and as to how the roles presented are negotiated jointly with others.

In the following sections, I give a summary of the main findings and discuss them with respect to research and practice. In addition, I outline my current ideas of the future of SNS user profiles with respect to possible research directions as well as future directions for

6.1 MAIN FINDINGS

This thesis gives a detailed account of what kind of is the experience of maintaining an SNS user profile. The findings deepen boyd's (e.g., 2008) illustration of networked publics and of "digital bodies" by offering an individual social psychological perspective. As a central contribution to the existing SNS research, this thesis offers three conceptualizations with respect to SNS research and self and identity theory.

The first conceptualization is that of a prolonged identity performance that serves a better understanding of the unique motivations for identity performance in SNS user profiles. The requirement of providing a prolonged identity performance is complicating the dynamics of self-presentation not only in the context of SNSs but also across contexts of everyday life.

The second conceptualization, profile work, in turn, illustrates the efforts people make in balancing their personal desires and social norms in order to present their selves in their SNS user profiles. Profile work is to a large extent strategic and intentional, and thereby, burdens the individual. The main aim of profile work is to succeed in a prolonged identity performance.

The third conceptualization illustrates the outcome of a successful prolonged identity performance: the socially-defined profile self. This profile

self is anchored to the prolonged identity performance and is evaluated through existential and interactional authenticity. The profile self is written into being in an SNS user profile, but it pervades across the social realm.

In this thesis, profile work is defined as existing in circumstances of changed social dynamics and maintenance of a prolonged identity performance. These characteristics will change in tandem with technical and service development, and I do not see any reason to attach profile work to any further preconditions that are definitive or exclusive. However, profile work is attached to profiles. If there are no profiles, there is no profile work either.

6.2 DISCUSSION ON THE MAIN FINDINGS

The thesis has introduced an alternative reading of Goffman from which have been constructed the aforementioned conceptualizations. For the research focusing on deceitful self-presentation, that applies the mainstream view on reading Goffman (e.g., Walther, 2007; Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006), this work has turned the gaze from self-presentation to the role that is being presented as self. As this thesis posits, in the context of SNSs the goal of self-presentation is unique: the prolonged identity performance. Subsequently, the anticipated role might declare itself contrived and deceitful but also to be authentic and honest, whereas self-presentation does not compare with these qualities.

Overall, SNS user profiles offer a non-traditional means to construct a socially-defined profile self that is cultivated in validation and negotiation with a multitude of the performer's social circles. This consequence shapes self-identity and the avenues by which it can be approached (e.g., Erickson, 1995; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). SNSs are not merely SNSs; they are also platforms that have potential to change social and sociocultural dynamics and thereby wider personal and social psychological structures in adaptation to them.

The prolonged identity performance is to change the traditional way of maintaining authenticity of self and identity. With this respect, dialogicality of the self stems from the negotiations between authenticity as experienced by the individual (existential) and as of success in performing it to others (interactional). Thereby, building on Giddens' idea of the identity as a reflexive project, this thesis suggests that our present time in the networked era considers the construction of an identity as an "authenticity project" (Giddens, 1991; Erickson, 1995).

Furthermore, authenticity is socially shaping and shaped. Achieving and maintaining the balance between the subjective feeling of authenticity and how it is maintained across contexts is changing. In the context of SNSs the

performative authenticity is challenged in many ways. However, since authenticity is the main value of self-identity it is being pursued through all possible means. The conceptions of authenticity visible today in Finland are being shaped over time, and what is considered authentic in 10 years' time might be different from the many shades seen today.

The socially-defined profile self, constructed in the prolonged identity performance, may dominate all other identities if it is acted out for the most significant overlapping social circles of that individual. The profile self and the self must be in dialogue between the trans-situational and situational selves (as described in Erickson, 1995), the parts of the self that are relatively constant and the parts of the self that are in constant flux.

In order to look at the broader picture, some ideas can be drawn from other fields studying self and identity. Interestingly, for instance, the idea of there being a single identity has been visible in the thesis project as a compulsion by the context rather than a possibility for a more positive identity structure. In viewing the sociocultural possibilities for extending one's self (e.g., Belk, 2013), SNS user profiles have realistic potential. However, as elaborated in this thesis the potential might manifest itself as a consistent one-dimensional presentation of self and identity, which according to the thesis, does not necessarily promote well-being unless one is very talented in crafting self-presentation and the meta-role.

As researchers, we could consider current SNS technology as purely a hindrance to the dialogue between multiple facets of identity (e.g., Farnham & Churchill, 2011). However, there are some paths for promotion of the SNS context as a source for well-being rather than a source of distress and conflict. The view of pros vs. cons and their management is, by all means, a matter of subtle examination of how the connections and linkages between facets of identity can be manifested through the aid of technology (e.g., Turkle, 2011).

The research on positive identity and positive relationships among multiple identities promises well-being and a less anxious life for those who manage their identities well. Recent advances in identity and work research (e.g., Dutton et al., 2010) reveal that individuals may stick with distinct identities, at least in the context of work, although there is another way of producing a more positive identity structure: linking and connecting among various identities (Kira & Balkin, 2014). Interestingly, this kind of complementary structure of identity is forcefully brought to the fore in the context of SNSs on account of context collapse. However, even though the context here strongly supports this complementary approach to identity, the actual integration process does not seem to be any easier for an individual (when compared to a traditional work/home dichotomy).

To promote well-being, another approach might be to practice self-expression through a user profile and learn to do so in a way that can

promote identity integration. A central manner of crafting may be the most obvious, the crafting of the technology. Continuously, SNSs are being developed to serve the goals of self-presentation and identity manifestations, and the developers are keen on finding the best solutions to support positive identity experience.

When one takes a serious look at the technology at hand, that of SNSs, it is fair to ask why the unified narrative user profile seems to be the most popular way of presenting oneself. A good guess might be that societal pressure toward one legitimized identity and citizen obedience walk hand in hand, and after decades of debate on online anonymity and misbehavior, no other solution appears able to promote people behaving themselves on the Internet (e.g, Van Zoonen, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013).

The well-being of self and identity could be promoted by managing the relationships people establish. Gergen (1991), of course, claims that we have too many contacts, that we are saturated with them and that the complexity of the self is disturbing. In line with the ethos he espouses, the suggestion could be either to decrease the number of social spheres (an option only in theory) or to come to a better understanding of who we are and what the recommended form might be in which to think about ourselves (the purpose of self-identity research; Mead, 1934). Whatever researchers' ability to answer the questions related to the pain-bringing change in a prolonged identity performance, the users of those services – with over 1.35 billion profiles on Facebook alone – are living it every day.

The users manage their identities as well as they can, they learn to do so, they fail, they change, and SNSs change. In conclusion, profile work has been a part of users' psychology since the first SNSs were launched, in the earliest years of the 21st century. Today, in 2015, there is no end in sight yet for SNSs. New services take new forms, and profiles wear new clothes.

6.3 THE FUTURE OF PROFILE-WORK RESEARCH

It is clear from the findings presented in this overview that plans will be made and goals set for the future. The line of research studying profile work is only in its beginnings. The first published papers about profile work have succeeded in giving form to the topic, and within the scope of this dissertation I was able only to scratch the surface of profile work.

Creation of an international research network is required if an appropriate global project is to be established to study profile work. A methodologically rigorous approach applied by inspired researchers could produce quality information on profile work in today's changing world. For better understanding of this phenomenon on a larger scale, I see four major

lines of strategy that could contribute to advancing the view of profile work from where it stands today.

The first of these has to do with culture. My theoretical background points to culture as being in the key position when we draw any conclusions or make any predictions related to self-presentation. We should appreciate contexts as rich sources of information, but in the case of SNSs, we need to consider the elaboration of social realms if we are to understand the dynamics played out in the relevant context. I would not wish to take a limited cultural view and study only a few cultures: covering a wide spectrum of cultures that use SNSs could prove most illuminating. As Article IV shows, this is not a simple task; it requires a highly sophisticated methodological understanding and creativity.

There is no valid reason to research only national cultures either, since cultures are defined in more complex terms. I assume that various approaches to understanding cultural differences (e.g., Hofstede's, 1980; Hall's, 1980; or, in relation to the construction of the self, that of Markus & Kitayama, 1991; or Mead, 1934; see also, for inclusion of the online world, Orgad, 2006) could be exploited in modeling of global findings on profile work. The purpose should be to understand our culturally nuanced yet converging ways of engaging in profile work.

The second avenue is the road to understanding profile work in larger populations. For greater clarity as to the characteristics of profile work, the scale (see Article III) needs to be developed further. I see this as important not only for justifying any generalization but for yielding more data for input to sophisticated analysis of the relationships between cultural nuances and profile work.

Indeed, a solid, commensurate, and international scale for measuring and estimating profile work could benefit social scientists but also developers of SNSs. By applying a metric for profile work, researchers could become able to follow the overall cultural position of profile work through time. Beyond such macro-scale analysis, a metric could offer detailed information about how a user's engagement in profile work develops over time. Then, there would be a possibility to ask questions such as "Do people engage in profile work as much after five years of use as they did in early phases of use?" Another thing that needs clarification is the matter of age. As is discussed in previous chapters and was studied for Article III, profile work correlates with age. It is important to analyze whether the age effects on profile work stem from people maturing with age or them having been users longer.

The third strategy entails a call for attention to investigating how to study profile work across contexts and service boundaries. Also, how can future findings be rendered comparable with each other? I recommend an ethnographic approach, to enable the best possible understanding of the SNS contexts in which users navigate. It is important to know how an individual

manages different lines of profile work in order to maintain prolonged identity performances simultaneously in different services and to know how this dialogue is able to increase the overall understanding of profile work.

Finally, the fourth prong and the most important is to explore how to ease the profile work in SNSs. Edelman (1987) lists a few tools for managing embarrassment and fear of it in self-presentation. The first one he discusses, exposure, involves the performer practicing and exposes him- or herself to the risk of failing. Drawing on Edelman, the more practice the performer has in maintenance of an SNS user profile, the easier it gets. Another context-relevant tool is reducing self-attention by intentionally shifting the focus from oneself to others. However, this might not be applicable for profile work, since many of the non-verbal cues seen with shyness or social anxiety do not exist in an SNS context as (see Baker & Oswald, 2010; Stritzke, Nguyen & Durkin, 2004). With the thesis having laid the groundwork for recognizing profile work, we can turn to the necessary practical solutions for decreasing the pressure people face in expressing themselves.

6.4 THE FUTURE OF PROFILE WORK

The ways we evaluate other people's appearances and our own (for example, as fake or not) are evolving. With today's technologies and data-collection techniques, it is possible to archive and collect complex bodies of data for future purposes. As Henry Jenkins (2006) notes, cultures are converging and this could also mean that selves are converging; therefore, also our experiences of our selves are converging, and our struggles to balance personal and social become similar. In a practical sense, viewing profile work can provide a window into understanding how to decrease the pressure people face in expressing themselves. These means, I conclude, need to be personal and social psychological tools that one can use to overcome overwhelming profile work.

The time may come when the idea of user profiles promoting multiple identities is given a chance to shine. However, this should not be considered a decision only for tech developers, since the fame and fortune of any SNS is dependent on the possible users it is able to attract (Van Dijck, 2013). If the potential users are not ready to try a novel kind of user profile, there is little its developers can do.

Researchers speak of social shaping, and indeed it can be very much felt at present. Tech developers, users, and theorists are racing to grab the trophy for representing the prevailing structure of identity. Every instance shapes each other, and it is difficult to grasp any one instance and point to it as a "fix" for the problems of identity conflict (Goffman, 1962). With current SNS

user profiles, the emphasis has been on a single prolonged identity performance; ineluctably. This form has emphasized a public personal narrative even more. For evaluation of how this could affect future trial implementations with fragmented narratives, comprehensive analysis of the zeitgeist needs to follow.

People are more and more involved with social media and SNSs. However, statistics show interesting movements within the scene. Lately, media have given a large amount of attention to trends showing that the popularity of Facebook among the youth has decreased.²⁵ Repeated reports seem to indicate that people are moving from Facebook to other SNSs. The news focuses mostly on Facebook and fails to recognize that the exodus from Facebook is part of a bigger picture of evolution. It is not only Facebook that is losing users. There are many others, and there will continue to be.

One of the reasons behind this “escape” among young people may be the increasing involvement of parents, invading Facebook. In my view and in light of my research presented in the dissertation, this might well be one level of the explanation. The idea of young people escaping from surveillance by their parents can be explained also in terms of profile work. When identity conflict and stress about the prolonged identity performance are greatly increased and the user’s engagement in profile work gets overwhelming, there are few other options for the user than to leave the relevant SNS. Leaving is even easier when one’s significant others and peers too are leaving. This withdrawal does not have to mean removing one’s profile; one need only reduce one’s activities in that particular service, which gives a cue of “absence” to others.

Discussing the future of SNSs, I think individuals’ social psychological capacities are limited with respect to the prolonged identity performance, and that is prompting people of all ages to leap from service to service to dilute their past in others’ eyes. For the short term, I do not see people as disengaging from all SNSs so much as migrating from service to service. Some SNSs will be “trending” heavily, but that popularity does not necessarily last, unless the ways self-presentation can take place in those services end up supported in novel forms.

The SNSs such as Snapchat (www.snapchat.com) are becoming more and more popular, for they do not portray visible histories in the same sense as Facebook or Instagram. With respect to Instagram, however, there are visible cues of people engaging in profile work by regulating the length of their visual histories. For instance, based on my recent observations, in groups of young users, there is an emerging norm of presenting only a maximum of five pictures on the user profile. This, I consider, as a tangible sign of how people

²⁵ An article discussing people escaping from Facebook, Guardian, from January 22, 2014. Retrieved on October 28, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jan/22/facebook-princeton-researchers-infectious-disease>.

are creative in their profile work with respect to the rigidity of profiles. Since Instagram profiles are designed to support an expanding album of pictures, the users need to regulate the ways they use it in order to minimize their profile work.

As outlined by boyd (2008), persistence, searchability, replicability and scalability of digital content have an impact on how people protect their personal information. Outside of SNSs, with search engines, such as Google, the EU legislation has made a clear decision that people who have stigmatizing personal histories online need to have a right to get that information removed. In terms of legislation, this EU ruling of “Right to be forgotten” from 2014²⁶ defends people’s rights and takes a serious stance in protecting individuals’ legal identities. Having a trail of 10 years of data for others to see places a burden on self-identity, especially if there is pressure for change in one’s self-identity.

I strongly doubt that there is a single recipe by which an SNS can build profile features that would engage users for decades. However, I would like to see SNSs that could promote the self-identity researcher’s predominant conception of self-identity as fragmented and in flux. That supposition would entail technological features that could promote and support a profile for multiple identities of one person and profiles that would address personal histories by maintaining them for only short periods of time (similar to the direction that Snapchat has chosen). And additionally, a sociocultural atmosphere that would support the novel means.

A profile that is able to evolve hand in hand with the user’s self-identity would reduce identity conflict. If future profiles emerge with the aforementioned principles considered, the rest would be up to the users and their societies (in terms of structure, power, norms, and overall culture). Profile work is limited to technological affordances, the psychological capacity of an individual, and the social realm in which the individual operates.

SNSs are a buyer’s market, and the deal for use of an SNS is under continuous negotiation. Throughout the thesis, I have operated in the role of an interpreter of the individuals, not one who introduces best practices. However, I do call for self and identity theorists, SNS researchers, and developers to enter the dialogue this thesis has illustrated in order to create services that do not overwhelm their users with excessive amounts of profile work. What counts is ordinary people’s everyday lives in constructing and performing their identities for their social realms. If they have a problem, we have a problem.

²⁶Retrieved on October 28, 2015. http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/files/factsheets/factsheet_data_protection_en.pdf.

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APPENDIX

Signs of profile work.

- Feeling pressure to publish via one's profile
- Feeling pressure to refrain from publishing
- Being unsatisfied with what the profile presents
- Being satisfied with what the profile presents
- Having difficulty in choosing what to share
- Having difficulty in commenting on a link shared with one
- Feeling that there is a discrepancy between real and online life
- Feeling anxious about other's comments
- Experiencing anxiety over control of one's own profile page
- Deciding not to post something after all
- Browsing one's profile to see how it looks like to others
- Browsing others' profiles and comparing them to one's own
- Wanting to publish something one knows one should not
- Being passive, for any number of reasons
- Being active, for any number of reasons
- Stating a number of reasons for one's passivity/activity
- Wanting to delete content from one's profile
- Deleting content from one's profile
- Adding content to one's profile
- Giving details about style when publishing/sharing
- Admiring one's own profile