"My Reputation in the Web! Self-(re-)presentation and image management of female and male youngsters in Facebook"

Bente Knoll
B-NK GmbH
Schönbrunner Straße 59-61/26, A-1050 Wien
bente.knoll@b-nk.at
+43 676 6461015

Bernadette Fitz
B-NK GmbH
Schönbrunner Straße 59-61/26, A-1050 Wien
fitz@b-nk.at

ABSTRACT

The use of Web 2.0-technologies goes hand-in-hand with a users' public image. Today, youngsters especially have to face the challenge of balancing between protecting their privacy and updating as well as maintaining one's online image. This research paper titled "My Reputation in the Web" focuses on the online-identity management and image repertoire of male and female youngsters using Facebook. An intention of the research was to identify the different requirements, living conditions and living realities of young male and female web-2.0-users. Furthermore, a special aspect of this research is the focus given to acquire knowledge of the target-group concerning their safety and privacy in the social web. The survey, designed as action-orientated workshops, was carried out at five schools in Austria in February and June 2013. Based on the results of this empirical study, concrete tools and guidelines for teachers and trainers, such as a handbook and a train-the-trainer-E-learning course, will be developed by the end of September 2014.

Author Keywords
Study; usage of Facebook; youngsters; conference publication

ACM Classification Keywords
K.4 COMPUTERS AND SOCIETY; K.4.0 General

INTRODUCTION

The study "My Reputation in the Web" is being conducted within the framework of the cooperative research project imaGE 2.0 and focuses on the on-line identity management and image repertoire of male and female youngsters in Austria. An intention of the research was to identify the different requirements, living conditions and living realities of young male and female Web 2.0 users and furthermore the early implementation of this target-group knowledge in awareness raising initiatives concerning safety and privacy in the social web. The project imaGE 2.0 is commissioned

by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency and the Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology.

BACKGROUND

Children and youngsters are already active on the Internet. The European-wide study "EUKidsonline" shows that almost all Austrian children, who go on-line, use the Internet from home (98%). Compared with the European average (34%) Austrian children use the Internet via mobile phones or Smartphones above-average (53%). The average entrance age for the Internet use in Austria is 10 years and that is therefore one year above the European average. 51% of the Austrian children use the Internet daily or almost daily; this value is under the European average of 60% [7].

Almost half of their time, youngsters spend online in the internet, they communicate in social networks, by e-mail or in chat. 79% of the 12- to 19-year-old use social networks at least several times per week. 81% of the youngsters are active in the social network Facebook [8].

An article, published in "Internet-Bildung-Gemeinschaft" from 2007 deals with the variety of gender implications in different networks and with gender identities in online communications. The Internet and its services are not explicitly defined as male or female. The World Wide Web is not seen as a new, non-hierarchical, independent "world", but rather as an expansion of the "reality" and of our areas of interaction. There is a reinforcement as well as a detachment of stereotype roles recognizable. Gender seems to be an important category in the online communication. There is a remarkable willingness among the users to present their gender through pictures or the choice of nicknames [2].

The study "Web 2.0: Nutzung und Nutzertypen" deals with the different usages of Web 2.0- technologies and different types of users. Referring to this research, the three main functions of the Internet are communication, entertainment and information. Communication via Web 2.0 is seen as a part of a user's social life that motivates them using the Internet. Furthermore, there is an overlay of communication and information recognizable. Content from the Internet are fundamental for communication and, vice versa, communication about this web-based content forces people to visit certain web sites. Based on the motivation for the

use, a typology of users were developed, distinguishing between eight different types [3].

There exists a wide range of different social media channels for children and youngsters. According to the report of "shareaholic" (2013) the three most frequented social media channels are Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest (during the period September 2012 – September 2013), whereas Facebook is at the top concerning utilisation and had an increase of 59% during the mentioned period. In comparison, Pinterest had an increase of 67% and Twitter had an increase of 54% [14].

Facebook is a web-based social network, used to communicate with friends. After registration users are able to publish content like pictures, videos, and webpage-links as well as to post (individual) status updates. For real-time communication with other users there is a live chat function available. The website www.socialbakers.com published Facebook- usage data for Austria. The largest user group are people aged between 25 to 34 years, followed by the 18 to 24-year-old. The 13 to 17-year-old are ranked at third place.

Facebook was chosen as a social media channel to be examined because via Facebook it is easy to publish and share pictures and due to the fact that Facebook is quite popular among our target group.

Although data that is processed on a gender-differentiated basis does not exist, there is, nevertheless, a noticeable lack of perspective concerning gender-related online behavior of female and male youngsters. Hardly any results could be found on gender-related requirements of youngsters in relation to digital media and various gender-related activities or youth movements. Some studies mention that girls are more cautious in self-(re-)presentation [5]. Other studies noticed that girls are more active than boys in publishing content like pictures online or to view and comment on pictures in social networks (schülerVZ). Whereas 40% of the interviewed girls, only 22% of the interviewed boys stated that they often publish pictures online [12].

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Proceeding the considerations as set out above, the following research questions have been formulated:

- How do youngsters deal with their profile and with their own image management in digital media and social networks?

- Which gender-related factors of influence can be found?

- Which various image repertoires do youngsters refer when using social networks?

METHODS
The research design is adapted to interpretative, reconstructive methods of empirical social studies and to the theoretical analysis method of Grounded Theory [4].

The survey was designed based on Kurt Lewin's [6] ideas of participatory action research. Action-orientated research claims supporting the participants to understand and reflect their social environment. Throughout the research process the participants should be enabled to recognize social connections and problems and – in a further step – to change practices due to awareness raising [1; 9; 10]. Within action-oriented research, the "objects" of a particular research change into "subjects" of a piece of research. In our case that happened with the youngsters, they turned into participants of the research and finding processes. Within the framework of the workshops youngsters became experts, activated by appropriate discussion questions and exercises. So the students were empowered to reflect their own actions and assessments within social media, especially, through their use of Facebook.

The survey was carried out at five different school-types in Vienna, Lower Austria and Upper Austria in February and in June 2013. For the purpose of a theoretical sampling and to cover up a wide range, the schools haves been chosen by type of area (urban area, suburb and rural area) and public reputation of the school. Overall 46 youngsters, 25 male and 21 female, at the age of 14 to 20 participated in the workshops.

In addition to the workshops in class, an online-survey was conducted in order to find out more about the background and the criteria of youngsters rating other social network users and their profiles. The following task was given to the students: "Fancy, a friend of yours has received two friendship inquiries from unknown people on Facebook. Before he/she confirms the friendship inquiries, he/she looks up the Facebook profiles of these people. Both profiles do not have any information on a public status – except for the name and the profile image. Your friend shows the two profiles to you and would like to know your opinion." After reading that introduction several questions for each of the two Facebook profiles were to be answered. In the end the respondent should state whether he/she would advise the friend to connect with this person (stranger) via Facebook or not.

The output of all workshops was documented in the form of pictures, audio recordings, collages and written material. Based on the aim of action-orientated research, the research results were also discussed and reflected upon by the youngsters themselves who were interviewed during the second workshop. With the aid of these reflecting loops, youngsters were also empowered to find a responsible and self-determined way to use and interact with digital media and social networks.

RESULTS
Facebook fulfils different functions for the youngsters. Students use Facebook for various reasons, including as a communication platform, for pastime, as an individualized

information source as well as for personal relationship management and to establish contacts. However the youngsters criticised their own Facebook usage and expressed security concerns. The majority of the youngsters stated concerning their own Facebook performance that they publish only "a few posts a day", even though the profiles showed the contrary. Results of the study show that the communication on Facebook happens primarily within their own peer groups but not exclusively.

The youngsters use Facebook to report others about their life and their activities. This kind of self-(re-)presentation is partially understood as purpose of Facebook. For the youngsters, reactions from others set out via "likes" and comments concerning their self-(re-)presentation are very important.

Pictures, especially the profile picture and the cover photo are an important medium of self-(re-)presentation. Both are the first visual message which a Facebook profile provides. And the Facebook profile in turn generates the first impression of a user. Therefore, pictures can be seen as the main self-presentation tool and rating criterion of youngsters in social networks. Youngsters want to be seen as "authentic" and "genuine" – but only in a happy sense. The principle is *"Be yourself – but only in a positive manner. "*

In social networks, male youngsters have to confront societal norms that offer fewer opportunities for self-expression than for female youngsters. This is especially true for expressing feelings, such as sadness and melancholy, and does not appear as appropriate for males to express themselves on the social web. "The internet isn't so open for boys who are depressed to show self-expression." There is a lack of social forum in social networks, concerning self-presentation for male youngsters.

Similar to societal norms, people are also affected by gender stereotypes and, as our research shows, males seem to be affected more restrictively. So the youngsters associated a "real" man with muscles and physical strength. According to some statements the youngsters assume that boys wearing tight pants drag down their masculinity.

Regarding the risks of social networks youngsters seem to be well informed – theoretically. But in practice they consciously ignore risks and safety precautions. This phenomenon is known as "Privacy Paradox" and has been discussed by several authors. [13]

In social networks, the acceptor is no longer jointly responsible for a functional information exchange and communication. The sender puts information pieces online, e. g. in a Facebook group, and the acceptor is responsible to get the information. This shifting of information responsibilities forces youngsters to be online anywhere and anytime.

To highlight some of our results, the results of the online-survey mentioned above can be described as follows:

According to the respondents the two girls, pictured on the figure 1, have a party life and want to be "cool" and "freaky" and were also described "as a little bit rebelliously". Their style was described as "Emo" or "Gothic". The picture showed self-confidence and was associated mostly with positive characteristics. The picture does not provides enough information for a well-grounded evaluation of the characters of the two girls. Ratings concerning the picture of the two girls like "self-conscious" or "cool" varied up to "arrogant" and "braggy". Despite the partly positive evaluation of figure 1, the scepticism towards the strangers still predominated, and, as a result, most of the youngsters would not accept the friendship request of the two girls via Facebook.

Figure 1: Profile picture "Girlfriends" used in the online-survey [15]

Figure 2: Profile picture "Man with Hood" used in the online-survey [16]

The young man, pictured on the figure 2, appeared to the respondents as "self-confident" and "mysterious". One of the female youngsters described him as "cool, but some kind of dangerous". Apparently, it was difficult for the

youngsters to assess the person only based on the photo. He could be the "shy", "introverted" and "nice" teenager next door, the "self-confident" and "sporty" "model" as well as the rather "shady", "dangerous" and "aggressive" "criminal". Referring to this friendship request, the youngsters were more cautious in comparison to the friend request of the two girls. A friendship request coming from the man would be nearly unanimously refused.

Among the youngsters there are implicit but very precise rules about what is allowed to present via profile pictures and what is not. Profile pictures that de not correspond to this socially constructed rules will not be accepted. Based on the respondents' appraisal the photos should provide positive feelings and openness but at the same time they should not be too permissive or too "party-like". The person on the photo should be well recognisable, hidden faces suggest that the person wants to hide something and accordingly is not reliable at all.

Generally spoken within digital communication, thus also on Facebook gender seems to be an essential category – especially when analysing revealing pictures. It turns out that pictures of male youngsters and their bodies are less connoted as sexually explicit than pictures of female youngsters and their bodies.

OUTLOOK
Based on the finding of the study the following issues are taken into account when developing concrete tools and guidelines for teachers and trainers, such as a handbook and a train-the-trainer-E-learning course, during the following months.

Face-to-face discussions and workshops among the target groups (teachers, trainers, parents, and students) are highly recommended. The learning experience of these discussions and workshops should be on one hand self-reflection of one's own positioning in the web or in social media. And on the other hand these discussions and workshops should help to analyze the one's own Facebook appearance and to build up social media competence and skills among the different target groups – a competence that is often denied to the elderly.

Concrete teaching and training units for students shall be developed and these units should cover various topics, such as privacy settings and security. One unit should e.g. include a comparison of an adult's Facebook profile and its (secure) privacy settings to the Facebook profile and its privacy settings of the youngsters.

Concerning the indication of risks and danger in the social web (e.g. regarding data protection problems, sexting, and grooming) it is highly recommended to develop "danger scenarios" that take the real social environments of youngsters into account. Also self-reflection and group discussions of different approaches towards data protection and "virtual legends", such as how housebreaking happens during vacations should be part of the teaching and training units.

Gender-sensitive peer education and learning by doing is also an important field to be put into practice. Gender-reflected discussions concerning the youngsters' desire for "authenticity" in the social web questioning "What is valid as 'authentic' for girls? What is valid as 'authentic' for boys?" could be a first step towards (more) gender awareness among students. In addition to that gender-reflected discussions and workshops with the scopes of action of youngsters on social networks along the questions "Which emotions 'may' be displaced by girls? Which emotions 'may' be displaced by boys?" and "Which photos are seen as 'revealing' for girls and young women? Which photos are seen as 'revealing' for boys and young men?" should be held.

So, generally spoken, the findings of the study will be put into practice and will contribute to a more reflected use of digital media and social networks by male and female youngsters in Austria.

REFERENCES
1. Atweh, B., Kemmis, S., Weeks, P. Action Research in Practice: Partnership for Social Justice in Education. London, Routledge, 2002.

2. Döring, N. Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit im Netz: Dimensionen des Cyber-Gendering. In Internet - Bildung – Gemeinschaft. Wiesbaden, 2007.

3. Haas, S., Trump, T., Gerhards, M., Klingler, W. Web 2.0: Nutzung und Nutzertypen. In media perspektiven 4 (2007), 215-222.

4. Glaser, B., Strauss, A. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. New York, Aldine Transaction, 1967.

5. Institut für Jugendkulturforschung (Ed..), s.a.: Safer Internet. Ergebnisse der quantitativen Untersuchung. Online available http://jugendkultur.at/wp-content/uploads/Ergebnisse_Safer-Internet_Quantitativ.pdf [12.10.2013].

6. Lewin, K.: Action research and minority problems. In J Soc. Issues 2(4) (1946), 34-46.

7. Livingstone, S; Haddon, L., Görzig A., Ólafsson, K. Risks and safety on the internet. The perspective of European children. Online available http://www.lse.ac.uk/media%40lse/research/EUKidsOn

line/EU%20Kids%20II%20(2009-11)/EUKidsOnlineIIReports/D4FullFindings.pdf [12.10.2013].

8. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (Ed.), JIM-Studie 2012. Jugend, Information, (Multi-) Media. Basisuntersuchung zum Medienumgang 12- bis 19-Jähriger in Deutschland. Online available http://www.mpfs.de/fileadmin/JIM-pdf12/JIM2012_Endversion.pdf [12.10.2013].

9. Reason, P. Participation in Human Inquiry. London, Sage, 1995.

10. Reason, P., Bradbury, H. The Sage Handbook of Actions Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice, London, Sage, 2008.

11. Schmidt, J.-H., Paus-Hasebrink, I., Hasebrink, U. Heranwachsen mit dem Social Web. Zur Rolle von Web 2.0-Angeboten im Alltag von Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen. VISTAS (Schriftenreihe Medienforschung der Landesanstalt für Medien Nordrhein-Westfalen), Berlin, 2011.

12. Schorb, B., Kießling, M., Würfel, M., Keilhauer, J., MeMo_SON10. Medienkonvergenz Monitoring Sozialer Online-Netzwerke-Report 2010. Online available www.uni-leipzig.de/~umfmed/MeMo_SON10.pdf [12.09.2013].

13. Spiekermann, S., Grossklags, J., Berendt, B., E-privacy in 2nd Generation E-Commerce: Privacy Preferences versus actual Behavior. Online available http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=761107 [12.09.2013].

14. Wong, Danny 2013: Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube referrals up 52%+ in past year. Report Oct 15, 2013. Online available https://blog.shareaholic.com/social-media-traffic-trends-10-2013/ [29.09.2013].

15. Figure 1: Profile picture "Girlfriends" used in the online-survey. Online available http://www.flickr.com/photos/self-portrait/1565218436/in/photostream/ [12.04.2013].

16. Figure 2: Profile picture "Man with hood" used in the online-survey. Online available http://www.flickr.com/photos/7933170@N03/2476530207/sizes/z/in/photostream/ [12.04.2013].