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School of Economics and Management

# Producer, Director and Star

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A qualitative study of an older cohort's social  
identity construction on Facebook

By

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# Abstract

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<b>Title</b>	Producer, Director and Star
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<b>Keywords</b>	Facebook, Online Behavior, Social Identity Construction, Self, Older Cohort, User
<b>Purpose</b>	The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding and contribute with knowledge of older people's online behavior, with a particular focus on the process of social identity construction on Facebook.
<b>Theoretical framework</b>	The theoretical framework consists of theories related to self and identity, in both an offline and online context in order to obtain a more complex and nuanced understanding.
<b>Method</b>	This study takes the stance of social constructionism and uses a qualitative strategy. Both focus group discussions and Netnography are used to collect the empirical material. Limitations are highlighted and discussed.
<b>Main findings</b>	The analysis showed that the participants' online social identity on Facebook was viewed as an extension out of the true self, yet without representing every part of the self. Moreover, findings also concerned the challenges that arose due to the clash of different social groups on Facebook, which the participants coped with in different ways. The participants were also shown to be highly aware of an observing mass on Facebook which resulted in that their behavior became both restricted in order to avoid negative social consequences and that they tried to present themselves in a favorable light.

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# 1. Introduction

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*This chapter will begin with introducing the reader to the thesis by providing a background of the topic at hand and discuss its relevance. The purpose and research questions will then be presented, followed by a short explanation of the scope of the study and a list that defines some of its key terms. In order to situate the thesis in a context, previous studies will be presented and discussed.*

## **1.1 Background**

The fact that many people today are becoming slightly obsessed with social networking sites (SNSs) and other life-consuming online activities can no longer be rejected as a passing trend, rather SNSs have become an integrated part of millions of people's day to day lives. SNS in the year of 2015 is no longer just a buzzword used among youngsters and cutting-edge advertising agencies - it is a way of life. The immense engagement for SNSs may be a result of the range of possibilities it has opened up for, not imaginable twenty years back in time. This does not only imply an array of new opportunities for users, it is also interesting for companies looking to engage with customers (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Perhaps the most prominent opportunity that SNSs facilitate is the ability to produce content and get heard, which no longer is limited to a small amount of the world's chosen people, it has rather become a global phenomenon. Moreover, as SNSs make geographical distances vanish, connections can, within seconds, be made between different parts of the world. Along with the changes in the SNS landscape, come changes in people's behavior. Two central themes originating from sociology and social psychology that emerge out of this change are, according to boyd (2011), self-presentation and identity construction. The new opportunities and tools which Internet and SNSs have made available have dramatically changed how individuals construct and manage their self and identity (Davis, 2014; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). New possibilities also mean new rules for companies to adjust to, which further calls for a better understanding of consumers' behavior on SNSs. Champniss, Wilson and Macdonald (2015) express that it is vital for companies to understand social identities as these, at all times,

influence people's behavior. Hence, with a deeper understanding of consumers' behavior on SNSs, companies can utilize the platforms more effectively for marketing purposes. Of all SNS platforms, Facebook continues to be the pioneer (Findahl, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015<sup>(1)</sup>) with over 890 million daily, active users (Facebook, 2015<sup>(1)</sup>). This implies that Facebook serves as a great resource for studying online behavior in a naturalistic setting (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012; Zhao et al., 2008) and the site is particularly good in facilitating the need for self-expression (Dong-Hung, 2010). In addition to this, Facebook can offer a "valuable new perspective" when studying identity construction (Wilson et al., 2012, p. 213) as the site is a nonymous environment which constrains the prevalence of anonymity (Zhao et al., 2008).

When referring to SNS usage in general, it is mostly the younger generation of users that have got the majority of attention from practitioners and academics (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Loureiro & Solnet, 2013). Studies within social identity construction and self-presentation on SNSs are no exception as "youngsters" continue to be the most prominent target in such research (see e.g. Aresta, Pedro, Santos & Moreira, 2015; Cheng & Guo, 2015; Doster, 2013). This generational cohort is, among other things, referred to as Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001) and they are the consumers who grew up in the presence of Internet and computers. Presumably, many view these youngsters as the buildings blocks of the online cosmos and also the one's who knows what is hot, and what is not. However, what is even more intriguing is that a different cohort, one that did not grow up with Internet and SNSs but that has developed a newfound interest in these platforms later in life, is challenging these "youngsters". 'Baby boomers' is the term most often used to refer to the cohort born around 1945-1960 (Lehtinen, Näsänen & Sarvas, 2009; McLeod, 2009). Prensky (2001) invented the term Digital Immigrants to describe the group of people who adopted technology later in life, opposed to Digital Natives, and this is the fastest growing group to adopt the Internet (Chakraborty, Vishik & Rao, 2013). In Sweden, the overall Internet usage in the age cohort of 56-75 years has shown considerable growth in the last five years (Findahl, 2014) and the American generation of users, 65 years and older, have increased their presence on Facebook from 35 percent in 2012 to 56 percent in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2015<sup>(2)</sup>). At the same time, data indicate that the younger populations of Facebook users have decreased



(Findahl, 2014; Matthews, 2014). Hence, it might be time to reconsider the typical image of a SNS user and acknowledge the older cohort's presence in the online world.

Several authors have pointed to the importance of acknowledging this growing group (Cohen, 2014; McLeod, 2009; Pfeil, Arjan & Zaphiris, 2009; Stuth & Mancuso, 2010; Rahman & Hussain, 2014) as this older cohort is not only healthier and will live longer than previous generations (Cohen, 2014), they also have a stronger purchasing power than the younger generations (Cohen, 2014; Rahman & Hussain, 2014). The immense growth of an older population on Facebook in relation to that the platform is the most frequently used social media platform for marketing purposes (Statista, 2015), could indicate that companies now have the possibility to reach a new, profitable consumer group. Moreover, as SNSs open up for new possibilities concerning social identity construction, an interesting opportunity emerges; in which valuable knowledge could be gained by studying how an older cohort manage this process. In order to fully understand the process of social identity construction, it is important to both grasp how the users perceive social identity in an online setting and how this identity is constructed on Facebook. To gain this knowledge, theories related to sociology and social psychology serves as valuable resources in order to better understand such online behavior. This may have implications for researchers within sociology, social psychology and marketing who are interested in the behavior of this group where social identity is the central theme. Furthermore, this knowledge could also be valuable for practitioners interested in developing marketing communication targeting an older segment.

## **1.2 Purpose and Research question**

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding and contribute with knowledge of older people's online behavior, with a particular focus on the process of social identity construction on Facebook. In order to address the research aim of this study, the following research questions have been developed to guide the research process:

How do older people perceive social identity on Facebook, and how do they construct their social identity on Facebook?

### **1.3 Research scope**

The framework, which defines the scope of this study, will shortly be explained and motivated in the following paragraphs. First, this study has limited its scope by focusing on one particular social networking site, namely Facebook. The reasoning behind this decision will be further elaborated upon in the methodological chapter in section 3.2 Choice of SNS.

As mentioned earlier, this study has identified that an older cohort of users are increasing their presence on social networking sites (Findahl, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015<sup>(2)</sup>), however, it does not exist any pre-set age for when individuals are to be perceived as “old” (Rahman & Hussain, 2014). Previous literature studying older people and online behavior have varied when defining old, although a majority of studies have focused on the cohort aged  $\geq 55$  (Chakraborty et al., 2013; Gibson, Moncur, Forbes, Arnott, Martin & Bhachu, 2010; Karimi & Neustaedter, 2011; Lehtinen et al. 2009, McLeod, 2009; Pfeil et al., 2009). Hence, this age span has formed the basis for this study’s decision to focus on the age cohort approximately 55 and above and will not take any other demographic differences in consideration. The focal point is thus to explore social identity construction on Facebook of this older cohort.

### **1.4 Definitions and Terminology**

#### *Social Media*

The concept of social media can be understood as an umbrella term, of “Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Hence, social media involves content creation and social exchange between parties in an online media setting.

#### *Social Networking sites*

Social networking sites are a certain type of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and should, according to Boyd and Ellison (2007), allow individuals to create a public profile, formulate a list of users that they are related to and give an overview of their relations within the web-based arena. Four features that help

emphasize the collective entity that defines SNSs are profiles, lists of friends, public commenting (the wall) and status updates (boyd, 2011).

### *Facebook*

Facebook was founded in 2004 (Facebook, 2015<sup>(2)</sup>) and the platform is the largest social networking site today (Pew Research Center, 2015<sup>(1)</sup>). Through Facebook, people can stay connected with others and express their own thoughts (Facebook, 2015<sup>(2)</sup>). Also, a unique aspect of this particular site is that users are portraying a representation of themselves and are using their real names (Ellis, 2010). The relation between Facebook and identity construction will be elaborated on in section 3.2 Choice of SNS.

### *Post*

When communication on a SNS like Facebook, one way of expressing an opinion is by publishing or ‘posting’ a message. To ‘post’ is described by the Free Dictionary (2015, nr 6) as an “electronic message sent to and displayed on an online forum”. The message is thereby not limited to textual content; it can also consist of for example images and audio.

### *User*

For this paper, user is defined as an individual who has his or her own account on Facebook and uses the site, however, the frequency of the users’ Facebook activity may vary.

### *Baby Boomers*

This term refers to an older generational cohort born between the years 1945-1960 (Lehtinen et al., 2009; McLeod, 2009). These are often seen as ‘technophobic’ (McLeod, 2009) and are generally referred to as ‘Digital Immigrants’, as they have learned to cope with the new technological environment, but without ever letting go of their digital ‘accent’ (Prensky, 2001). These terms are merely explained in order to provide the reader with a short background of the cohort but will not be used in this study.

## **1.5 Literature review**

Previous research within the area of online usage and behavior, and more specifically research on SNSs, has focused mostly on the younger generation of users (Pfeil et al., 2009). As this group grew up with the Internet, they have long been of great interest for managers as well as academics and researchers (Bolton et al., 2013). However, as the older cohort is expanding their presence online, a growing interest in them as a target group emerges (Cohen, 2014; McLeod 2009; Pfeil et al., 2009; Rahman & Hussain, 2014; Stuth & Mancuso, 2010). Despite the immense growth of older adults on SNSs, Barker (2012, p. 165) states that, “there is a dearth of scholarly research examining SNS use among older cohorts”.

The existing research amongst older users often involves adoption of technology (see e.g. Braun, 2013; Leung, 2013; McLeod, 2009; Volkom, Stapley & Amaturro, 2014), categorization based on use (see e.g. Karimi & Neustaedter, 2011; McMellon, Schiffman & Sherman, 1997), motivations for SNS usage (see e.g. Ancu, 2012; Erickson, 2011; Hilsen & Helvik, 2012) and motivations for content creation (see e.g. Karahasanovic, Brandtzaeg, Heim, Lüders, Vermeir, Pierson, Lievens, Vanattenhoven & Jans, 2009; Leung, 2013).

### ***1.5.1 Identity and Self-presentation on SNSs***

Wilson et al. (2012), conclude that there are five primary areas that have gained interest in research on Facebook within the social sciences, namely “descriptive analysis of users, motivations for using Facebook, identity presentation, the role of Facebook in social interactions, and privacy and information disclosure” (p. 203). This study will take an identity approach within SNSs, which is why the following section will provide a deeper understanding of the various research that has been devoted to the area. Some general themes within identity research on SNSs are social capital (see e.g. Maghrabi, Oakley & Nemati, 2014; Pfeil et al., 2009), profile pictures (see e.g. Hum, Chamberlin, Hambright, Portwood, Schat & Bevan, 2011; Siibak 2009; Strano, 2008), self-presentation (see e.g. Aresta et al., 2015; boyd, 2011; Davis, 2014; Enli & Thumim, 2012; Hogan, 2010; Zhao et al., 2008) and social identities (see e.g. Barker, 2012; Cheng & Guo 2015; Schmalz, 2015).

Although the scope of research within identity and self-presentation on SNSs is quite immense, the general focus has been towards a younger population of users (see Abiala & Hernwall, 2013; Aresta et al., 2015; Cheng & Guo, 2015; Doster, 2013; Matic, 2011; Zhao et al., 2008). The focus of this study is towards an older cohort, however, to fully grasp how the concept of identity has been approached in previous literature, research targeting a younger generation serves as a valuable resource. Zhao et al. (2008) found that young users' Facebook-identities were socially desirable versions of themselves that the respondents had not yet achieved in the offline world. The authors (2008) found three different modes of identity construction ranging from implicit to explicit identity formations. The forms varied from (1) visually expressing one's identity in wall posts and pictures, (2) communicating by showing one's preference/taste or by (3) verbally expressing oneself when providing a narrative self-description in the profile section 'About Me' (Zhao et al., 2008). It should however be emphasized that the study was conducted seven years ago, and that the result might be different if it were to be reproduced today. Moreover, the study by Siibak (2009) also investigated self-presentation on a SNS but with a certain focus on profile pictures, and found that the 'ideal self' was especially emphasized among girls. The qualities and characteristics connected to the ideal self in the study were often those that symbolized a traditional female role, particularly "self-beliefs, norms and values" (Siibak, 2009, p. 5).

Furthermore, research by Aresta et al. (2015), focused on online self-presentation of students between the ages of 21 – 40. The results pointed towards two main types of SNS users, context- and user-driven. The latter (user-driven) was expressed as users who are "building an identity free from contextual constraints, a mirror of their real offline self" (Aresta et al., 2015, p. 82). The context-driven user was instead much affected by the situational context of the SNS when building their online identity (Aresta et al., 2015). However, as the findings were based on a convenience sample of 13 participants, it is important to be careful when interpreting the results.

In addition to the above-mentioned studies, research has also included older cohorts. In Pfeil et al.'s (2009) study, the two generational cohorts, teenagers (age 13-19) and older people (60+), were compared in terms of online behavior. The participants were all users of the social networking site MySpace and the results

implied that “older people tend to represent themselves in a more formal and official way compared to teenagers” (Pfeil et al., 2009, p. 653). The study used web crawlers to obtain data and analyzed it with the use of content analysis. Hence, the findings are merely a representation of the actual behavior of the users in the study and thus, do not say anything about the user's own view of, or experience with, the site within the particular context.

An additional study including older people on SNSs was performed by Barker (2012) with the focus on generational differences regarding the usage and behavior on SNSs by Millennials (18-29) and Baby Boomers (41-64), through an online survey. An interesting conclusion was that SNSs were shown to strengthen social identity and group belonging for both cohorts, both important aspects of the self (Barker, 2012). A criticism related to the research, emphasized by Barker (2012), is the use of convenience sample along with a much skewed gender distribution, where females were overly represented. In similarity, thus only using a sample of older individuals, Ito, O'Day, Adler, Linde and Mynatt (2001) observed the behavior of ‘seniors’ in an online community called SeniorNet with a certain focus on social identities. The authors (2001) found that the site is a tool for a senior identity construction, where users both challenge the meanings of the senior identity and immerse or ‘perform’ in the collective behavior of being a senior.

Another study by Davis (2014) concerning identity negotiation on Facebook implied that users of such sites make use of self-triangulation to maintain a cohesive image of themselves, both offline and online, that are both ideal and authentic. The sample of the research had a mean age of 30 and the age span ranged up to 65 years of age, thus not solely targeting an older segment (Davis, 2014).

### ***1.5.2 The Study and its Context***

As can be concluded from the presented literature review, some areas have gained greater attention than others in research. First and foremost, the younger generation of people that grew up with the Internet has been of persistent interest for both researchers and marketers in regard to SNS use and behavior. When attention has been given to the older generation, research has primarily focused on older people's ability to adapt to new technology, categorization based on use and motivations for use and content creation. With regards to the growing presence and influence of the older cohort on Facebook, researchers have argued for an expand-

ing need of knowledge about how this target behaves and makes use of SNSs. This implies that there could be a discrepancy between what is known of this segment, and their newfound influence. Furthermore, the understanding of online behavior on SNSs in general has been expressed as a vital step towards improving various organizations utilization of SNS platforms (Alarcón-del-Amo, Lorenzo-Romero & Gómez-Borja, 2011; Lu & Yang, 2013). Hence, the aim of this study is to deepen the understanding of this age group and help minimize the knowledge gap. By examining identity construction with a triangulation technique, deep and rich knowledge can be obtained and used to present a broader understanding of how older people construct their identity on a SNS, thus contributing to the previously stated need of knowledge.

## **1.6 Thesis outline**

This thesis has been divided into six chapters whereas the first already has been covered as the Introduction. The second chapter, namely Theoretical framework will present the chosen theories and concepts related to the process of social identity construction, which will form the basis for the analysis. The next chapter is called Methodology, in which the main focus is to explain the reason for the chosen methods as well describing the overall data collection process. Furthermore, the chapter will identify and discuss limitations with the methodological choices. The fourth chapter, Analysis, will illustrate the main findings extracted from the empirical material, which will be further elaborated upon with the use of relevant theories. Moreover, the findings and its implications will be discussed and placed in a larger context in the chapter Results and Discussion, which will also include recommendations for future research. The last chapter is comprised of the reference list.

## 2. Theoretical framework

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*This chapter consists of the theoretical framework for this study and provides an overview of the chosen theories. Hence, this chapter will present theories related to self, identity and social identity as well as theories concerning the online world and social networking sites. Lastly, the key concepts from the theoretical framework will be identified and discussed, as these will be particularly useful in the analysis of the empirical material.*

The aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of older people's online behavior with a special focus on identity construction in an online context. In this theoretical framework, theories and concepts will be presented and explained which will guide the understanding towards online behavior. The theoretical framework mainly consists of theories originating from sociology and social psychology, as these have proved useful in order to better understand social identity construction. By using concepts and theories related to self and identity in an offline context, a better understanding has been gained concerning the shifts that have affected the online context. Moreover, the concepts will be placed in relation to time in order to explain how the view of identity has changed over the years. By combining theories developed for real life interactions, thus without Internet in mind, with online identity theories, a more complex and nuanced understanding can be obtained, and used as a valuable resource for the purpose of this study.

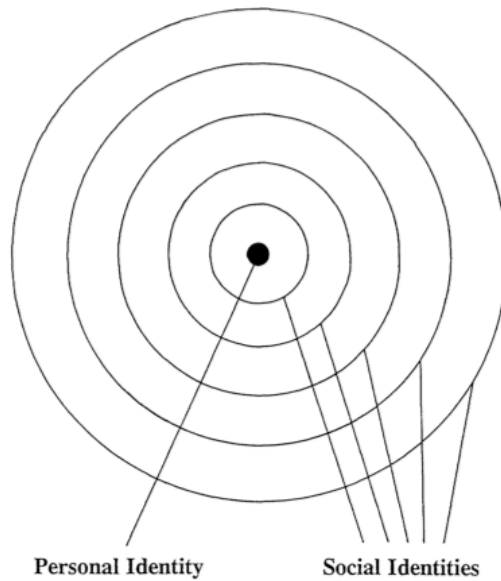
### **2.1 Understanding Self, Identity & Social identity**

The terms self and identity holds a variety of definitions and explanations, which are intertwined to a complex array of meanings. Higgins (1987) propose that the self consist of three general parts called the actual-, ideal- and ought self. The first, actual self, refers to how one is perceived by others or oneself, the ideal self is how others or oneself would like one to be and the ought self is how one should be (Higgins, 1987). Bruner (1991, p. 146) contends that the "self is an odd mix of the 'outer' and the 'inner'" and therefore also related to a more public arena. This is in line with the formulation of Altheide (2000), where the self is one's total per-



sona, and identity is the part of the self, which one is known for by others, i.e. the visible part. This implies that identity is a social production that is created in the context of others; a line of thought much resembling Brewer's (1991) definition of social identity. Hence, the self is often referred to as reflexive, meaning that the self is identified and categorized within different social contexts in which identities are formed (Stets & Burke, 2000). In other words, a person can have different identities in different social contexts. This logic is in line with Giddens (1991) view, where the selfing process is described as active and ever evolving. The identities that a person possess, are a result of that person's self-view that have been derived from reflexive activities (Stets & Burke, 2000) and thus a way of situating oneself in a certain set of norms (Goodings, 2010).

As the previous discussion entails, a person is not limited to one single identity, rather multiple identities that can even occur simultaneously (Kramer, 2006). This is exemplified in Brewer's (1991, p. 476) model (figure 1) where the self is similar to the notion of 'personal identity' in which multiple social identities are withdrawn from the center. Social identities are created in the presence of others "where I becomes we" (Brewer, 1991, p. 476). Moreover, the social identities are a depersonalization of the self, where belonging to a social category is of greater focus than the individual and unique self (Brewer, 1991). Such social identities are actively selected by individuals, not forced, and that are a result from a tension between needs of similarity to others, i.e. in-groups, and needs of distinction from others, called intergroup comparison (Brewer, 1991). In relation to this, Ferguson (2009) distinguishes amongst these social identities and express a certain form by the name 'emphatic identities'. These are according to Ferguson (2009) based upon an aspiration to belong to a group or individual, however one's similarity with the object is not really there, in which the bond is referred to as imaginative.



**Figure 1: Personal and Social Identities by Brewer (1991, p. 476)**

## **2.2 The Dramaturgical perspective**

Goffman (1959) is a prominent scholar focusing on self-presentation and identity, which is why the work can be argued as relevant for this study. As the previous discussion entails, identity is a contextual and social construction, thus implying that self-presentation becomes a vital part of individuals social identity process. Goffman (1959) argues that in everyday life, individuals will, in the presence of other people, be likely to control their behavior in certain manners in order to achieve various objectives. Thus, individuals are striving to present an idealized image of themselves through impression management. This is part of the socialization process, where individuals are aspired to reach higher up the ladder of what is socially desirable (Goffman, 1959). ‘Social mobility’ refers to such aspirations for individuals to proceed closer to the ideal values of society (Goffman, 1959). Through idealized performances, individuals have the opportunity to climb higher up the social strata and avoid falling further down (Goffman, 1959).

Through self-presentation individuals will express themselves and others will form their impression based on these expressions (Goffman, 1959). The individual’s behavior and thus, the individual’s expressiveness, can be divided as either a behavior one ‘gives’, or a behavior one ‘gives off’. Goffman (1959) argues that the behavior an individual ‘gives’ is concerned with traditional means of communication, such as verbal communication. On the other hand, the behavior

the individual 'gives off', is usually nonverbal and unconscious. Goffman (1959) uses the theater metaphor of 'performance' to refer to an individual's actions aimed at managing impressions. The performance takes place in regions, which, are "bounded to some degree by barriers to perception" (Goffman, 1959, p. 109). The front region, or the front stage, is where the performance takes place in front of an audience. In the back region, i.e. back stage, the actor is protected from the eyes of the audience and can therefore prepare and rehearse the performance undisturbed. The actor can thus "drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 155). On stage, the actor may shift his performance depending on who the audience is, a tool termed 'audience segregation' (Goffman, 1959). Furthermore, how much the individual is convinced by his/hers own performance can be placed on a continuum of belief-disbelief. The individual characterized by a belief in the performance is sincere and thus fully and truly believe in the performance as real. However, on the other side of the continuum can the cynical performer be found, who knows that the act is merely a role one plays in order to achieve for example, private gains or, what one believes are beneficial for others (Goffman, 1959).

A central theme of the performance is that the performer act in accordance with the pre-established intentions of the impression he or she wants to present. Hence, the actor needs to constantly review the performance and exercise control over the information in order to avoid fragments of 'reality' to be apparent (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) term these fragments as destructive information, as they can damage a performance by drawing attention to or revealing parts of the performance that were not intended for the eyes of the audience. If the audience reveals such destructive information and identifies it as incompatible with the performance, the whole act is put at risk (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) argue that a performance consists of three roles that are related to function: the performer, the audience and the outsiders. In addition, there exist three roles on basis of the information available for the actors. Moreover, three roles can be traced to the information accessible and available. In order to avoid a discrepancy to emerge, it is vital to create a balance between the different roles. In a similar way, frictions in communication and social interaction can arise when the audiences misinterprets a performer's actions, thus not perceiving the individuals in-

tentional expression (Goffman, 1959). Thus, a discrepancy emerges between the actor's expression and the audience's perception.

## **2.3 Identity in a Context**

### ***2.3.1 The Modern era***

The development of society has had a great impact on individual's self and identity formations in various ways. The view of the individual as such, and the individual as a unique character, was according to Giddens (1991) not present in time before postmodern societies and cultures. The determinants of what constitutes an individual, was earlier in history rather fixed by entities such as gender, social status and occupation. However, the view of the individual is not, according to Giddens (1991), the most important development, instead it is the ability to choose that has changed the modern view of the individual. The modern age has opened up for the possibility of choice, not existent to the same degree prior in history, as traditional ways of life constrained around rather set boundaries, which were "given". It is not the opportunity of choice that is predominant, it is the range of choices and at the same time the lack of guidance that has formed the modern person (Giddens, 1991). The range of various choices is made visible in different parts of the individual's life. One of these parts is the choice of lifestyle, "we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so - we have no choice but to choose" (Giddens, 1991, p. 81). Hence, a form of reflexivity is created through the day-to-day choices of for example, what food to eat, what clothes to wear, whom to meet and so forth (Giddens, 1991). It is thus, the 'everyday life' that forms the foundation for self- and identity creation (Ferguson, 2009).

### ***2.3.2 The Networked era***

The networked era is characterized by blurred lines between various social spheres and thus, combines private and public spheres to one unified, observing mass (Papacharissi, 2011). The blurred spheres are a result of the lack of physical walls, which, in the offline environment, separates different spaces, hence, different audiences (Papacharissi, 2011). What was mentioned earlier as a divide between the front and back stage (Goffman, 1959) can in an online environment be

said to be utterly difficult to separate. This phenomenon can be described through the use of boyd's (2011) term 'collapsing contexts'. Papacharissi (2011, p. 308) entails that "this rearrangement of boundaries results in a loss of the unique connection of interaction to place". As the connection between interaction and place no longer exists, individuals are not restricted to physical displacement for self-presentation, as were the case in the pre-digital era (Turkle, 2011). Instead, SNSs have undeniably altered how the process of self and identity is established and opened up for new possibilities for such actions (Davis, 2014). Furthermore, Baym (2010) goes as far back as the 1800s and the invention of the telegraph to explain how technology has changed the way communication now is transferred, independent of time and space. This way of communicating, without being physically bounded to a certain place, pose according to Baym (2010, p. 3), several question for individuals "What is a self if it's not in a body? (...) What do private and public mean anymore? What does it even mean to *be* real?" (italics in original). These concerns are grounded in the erosion between virtuality and reality, and the spectrum in between (Baym, 2010; Turkle, 1995). It is the context just explained that lay ground for the fundamental shifts regarding identity construction (Turkle, 1995).

The new Internet environment, and more specifically SNSs, has contributed to a variety of new possibilities. It is now possible, through just a click, to for example create and share content with others and interact with people who share a specific interest, wherever they may live. A prominent development that new media facilitates is that it is now possible to interact on a personal level with a large mass (Baym, 2010), a matter also known as scalability (boyd, 2011). Moreover, the ability to "follow" friends and to display oneself online by producing various types of content, have created an environment that boyd (2011) refers to as 'the attention economy', where attention is the most valuable commodity. Online social networks are commonly used as ways of enacting in "self presentation and identity negotiation" (boyd, 2011, p. 304) in which the users are exposed to numerous audiences (boyd, 2011). In addition to this, Davis (2014) also describes SNSs as being high speed, interactive environments that facilitate textual presentations.

## **2.4 The Networked individual**

### ***2.4.1 Online Social identity***

Different platforms and their tools, as well as personal capabilities, facilitate how people are able to construct their online identities (Baym, 2010). Also, different types of SNSs are profiled in certain ways, where sites like Facebook and MySpace tend to be more personally oriented, and sites such as Twitter have a more professional touch (Gilpin, 2011). Identity within the online world is, argued by Gilpin (2011), as being a combination of acting professional and acting personal, where the particular contexts that the identity is situated in affects the outcome of the identity construction. Furthermore, Aresta et al. (2015) defines online identity as “a continuum process, materialized in the way individuals appropriate technology and use it to explore, communicate, share and express their thoughts and opinions” (p. 73). This approach clearly emphasizes the information or content that is being published and related to the user in an online environment. It is furthermore a way for users to profile themselves within an online context (Aresta et al., 2015), which is much related to the characterization and identification process that was conveyed as an important factor in regular identity formation. In addition, Baym (2010) argues that the links created with others in an online setting contributes to explain who that person is to others, which was also emphasized as a prominent feature within traditional identity construction.

Aresta et al. (2015, p. 75) describes the general, online space as an “open environment where different contexts mingle and intertwine”. Furthermore, online identities can, according to Baym (2010), be numerous and display different roles of oneself. Such logic implies that the various identities that have been constructed to certain social contexts might clash and showcase an uncomfortable discrepancy between identities (Aresta et al., 2015). Hence, a connection can be made to the earlier discussion about role discrepancy by Goffman (1959), in which the same philosophy can be applied to an online context.

### ***2.4.2 Communication and Control***

Communicating with someone face to face, or at least verbally on the phone, facilitates the use of cues, for example facial expression, tone of voice and body language. In an online setting, these cues are replaced with textual and non-verbal

cues, such as emoticons, capitalization of letters and informal words (Baym, 2010). SNSs provide an array of tools that facilitates the process of impression management (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011), and in such identity communication, certain aspects of SNSs become especially fruitful (Baym, 2010). Such aspects are for example name, use of language, choice of pictures, avatars and taste in popular culture (Baym, 2010). Hence, through these tools, the opportunity to exercise greater control over one's behavior emerges, i.e. "what is presented and what is reserved" (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 307). Through a SNS profile, users can control the visibility of content and whom that have access to what (boyd, 2011) which further implies a sense of power regarding how others perceive the users (Maghrabi et al., 2014). However, as profiles usually are relatively "open", and therefore accessible to a rather broad audience comprised of various relational ties, it is difficult to keep full control over one's self-presentation (boyd, 2011). Also, the loss of control is further emphasized by the ability of others to leave comments on one's page, pictures and alike, which also affects how others form an impression of a person (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011).

### ***2.4.3 Idealization***

Users do not only have the opportunity to create an identity through the available tools on SNSs, they can also rewrite and even erase their identities (Turkle, 1995). Turkle (1995) uses the metaphor of a drama, much like Goffman (1959), to capture how individuals take on the roles of producer, director and star, to manage their dramas online. As a result, there does not exist any set boundaries of what constitutes "real" or authentic, as everything is subject to change (boyd, 2011; Turkle, 2011). While enacting these roles, Park (1950) argues that the masks individuals take on, are actually representing what the person's want to become, and in the long run, these impersonations become a true part of ourselves. Within an online context, the matter of presentations have been expressed in a similar manner by Turkle (2011, p. 180), namely as "a statement not only about who you are but who you want to be". Hence, to build an idealized social identity, is not restricted to the offline world, rather it is a characteristic made easily available through online means. Davis (2014) argues that 'networked individuals' can achieve a balance between one's desired ideal self and authenticity by the use of

‘self-triangulation’. This is according to the writer a strategic process in which a cohesive image of the self is expressed both offline and online, in various physical and digital contexts, with the aim of reflecting a consistent representation. Davis (2014, p. 505) quote illustrates how an individual can succeed in creating a balance between ideal and authentic by not revealing the hard work:

*“Achieving an ideal-authentic balance entails accomplishing a particular version of the self, but doing so in a seemingly natural way; it is to engage in identity work, while hiding the labor of doing so”*

Moreover, self-triangulation is divided into two parts “networked logic and preemptive action” (Davis, 2014, p. 500). The first refers to the process of applying the digital in the physical and vice versa, thus the spheres are often bridged, creating a “networked social world” (Davis, 2014, p. 515). The latter, preemptive action is when the user engages in an activity in one context for the sake of being able to apply it in another context, thus a more staged and explicit act than the networked logic (Davis, 2014).

#### ***2.4.4 The Online Identity Analysis Model***

Aresta et al. (2015) developed ‘The Online Identity Analysis Model’ (figure 2) in order to analyze identity construction online. The model takes the view of the users and it is based on the participants’ perception of online identity construction which was shown to revolve around three main categories; digital representation, privacy management and reputation (Aresta, et al., 2015). Digital representation consists of the elements visible when presenting oneself online such as various identification elements, additional information and content (Aresta, et al., 2015). Moreover, privacy management concerns how individuals handle the registration process and how they manage their contacts and information in regard to various online platforms. The third, and last piece of the model is called reputation and represents the individual's intentions when constructing their online presence (Aresta, et al., 2015). The digital representation is thus a result of the reputational intentions in combination with the chosen privacy settings. As seen in the model



below, all three parts are connected and affect each other in various ways. In addition to the model, Aresta et al. (2015) also presented a typology of users: context- and user-driven online identity profile, which was shortly addressed earlier in the Literature review in section 1.5.1. The first can be described as a user that is highly affected by the online environment and shapes its presence accordingly (Aresta, et al., 2015). In contrast, the user-driven is far less restrictive than the context-driven profile and displays a profile that is a true representation of who that person is offline (Aresta, et al., 2015).

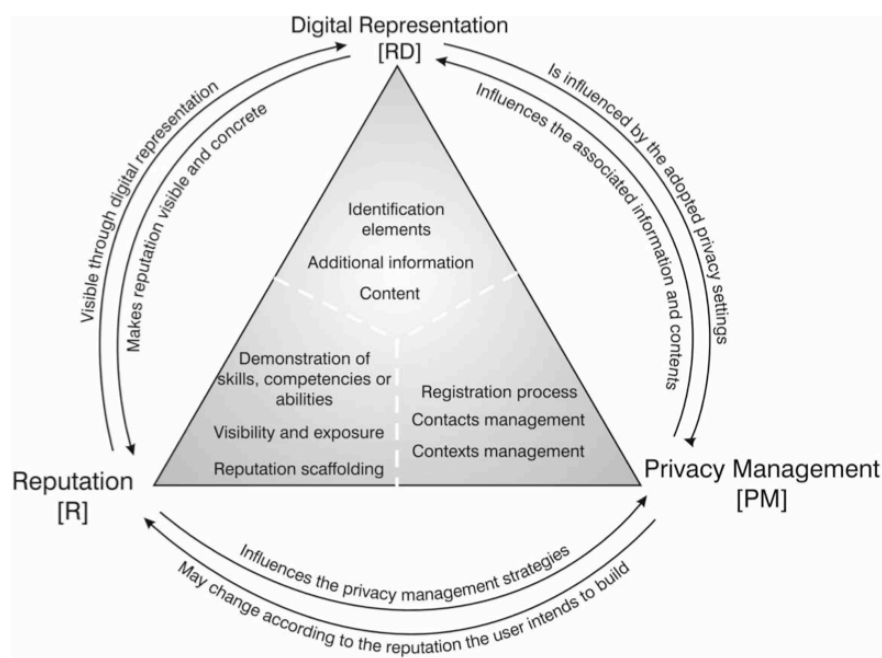


Figure 2: 'The Online Identity Analysis Model' by Aresta et al. (2015, p. 78)

## 2.5 Key concepts

The main purpose of the concept and theories presented in the theoretical framework has been to provide the reader with a deeper understanding about identity and how it is situated in the online context. However, some of its parts will be further discussed in the upcoming analysis and serves as a valuable resource when trying to understand the empirical material from this study. Some of these, such as self, social identity, impression management and online identity, are perceived as key concepts for this study and will therefore be shortly presented in the following section.

In the discussion regarding concepts of self and identity, a range of different interpretations can be made depending on which approach one takes, and as a result, the understanding and view of self and identity will differ. For this thesis, the self is understood as one's total persona, in accordance with Altheide (2000), and a person's social identities are derived from the self and situated in relation to others, corresponding with the definition by Brewer (1991). A further prominent theory that is considered a key concept is Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, where audience, performance and actor are used as metaphors for individuals' social behavior. Furthermore, Aresta et al.'s (2015) 'Online Identity Analysis Model' will also serve as a valuable tool when trying to understand identity construction in an online setting, in this case Facebook.

## 3. Methodology

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*In this chapter, the methodological choices, which form the basis for this study, will be discussed and argued for. The research philosophy, research strategy and choice of SNS platform will be motivated, followed by arguments for the two methods of choice. Throughout the chapter limitations will be highlighted, however, a concluding part in the end of the chapter will acknowledge and further discuss certain limitations of the methodology.*

### **3.1 Research strategy**

The purpose of this study is to contribute with knowledge about an older cohort's online behavior and more specifically, the process of social identity construction on Facebook. Taking the epistemological position of interpretivism, this study emphasizes individual's understanding and interpretation of the social world (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The aim is thus to understand the phenomena of social identity construction by studying how people in their daily life construct meaning and interpret the world, rather than to find external explanations for their behavior. Furthermore, the study takes the stance of social constructionism as the focus is on the individual's language, both verbal and nonverbal, and how feelings, thoughts and experiences are expressed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). The research outline will take on an iterative approach where data will be collected and interpreted with help of predefined theories; however, the theoretical framework may be further developed during the process of analysis. In such ways, a more reflexive outline is achieved which allows the researchers to go back and forth between theory and data (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

This research's object of study is social identity construction, which can be studied by both asking people about their experiences with and perceptions of identity construction on Facebook and through observing the construction where it takes place, in this case on Facebook. Hence, in order to answer the research question, the empirical data needed primarily comes from words, both spoken which can be expressed by individuals and, written which can be observed on Facebook. Qualitative research is the most common research strategy used when interested in

individuals expressions (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Patton, 1980), which is why this research strategy can be argued as appropriate for this study. Moreover, qualitative research aims at providing a deep and detailed understanding of “situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviors” as well as “experiences, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts” (Patton, 1980, p. 22). As the focus of this study lay on individuals and how they interpret and understand the social phenomena of social identity construction, a qualitative approach is suitable. Moreover, qualitative research is, apart from words, also concerned with visual observations of for example, photographs or videos (Bryman & Bell, 2007). One objective is thus to observe older people’s Facebook behavior, where words are accompanied with visual elements. Qualitative research in comparison with quantitative, is focused on what the behavior means, and not just behavior per se (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Hence, it is not the behavior itself that is of most interest, it is what the behavior can reveal about an individual’s social identity construction that is of significance.

By talking to older people about their experiences, attitudes and thoughts about identity construction as well as observing their online behavior, this study aims at developing a deeper understanding of how older people create their social identity on Facebook. Hence, a qualitative research method can be argued as appropriate for the aim of this study, since the researcher is trying to see the world through the eyes of the participants (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It is, however, important to be aware of the risk of ‘going native’, which implies that the researcher, in its attempts to approach the participants, can get too close. This in turn can lead to that some participants’ views are favored over others (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It is therefore important to be aware of this risk in order to minimize its impact on the study.

When conducting qualitative research, it is common to use several methods to collect data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In order to understand the complex phenomena of social identity construction online, this study will employ two methods: focus group discussions and netnography. The two methods will be explained in more detailed below; however, the authors of this study find it important to start by accounting for the choice of mixed-methods. The two methods serve different purposes and will be employed in order to cover the different aspects of social identity construction on Facebook. The focus groups will be used as a tool towards understanding the individual's own explanations, interpretations and per-

ceptions of social identity construction. In addition, the netnography will be used in order to observe the behavior and actions of individuals as well as observe various visible as well as invisible symbols. Hence, the two methods will complement each other and together, create a more nuanced picture of the phenomena. Moreover, the data collection and the theoretical framework in this thesis will consist of both primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data is collected through the empirical material and the majority of the secondary sources used, consist of peer-reviewed articles from the LUSEM Library website, along with books relevant for the subject.

### **3.2 Choice of SNS**

The focus of this study is on one social networking site - Facebook. The reasons behind the choice of Facebook as a single platform are several and will be explained and argued for in the following text. Firstly, Facebook is the largest social networking site by far and its number of users in the age 56-76 has increased in the past five years (Pew Research Center, 2015<sup>(2)</sup>), thus corresponding with the participants and the purpose of this study. Another reason for choosing Facebook is the vast representation of natural, observable data it provides (Wilson et al., 2012). In addition to this, Facebook is also interesting from practitioners' perspectives, as the platform is the most used platform for marketing purposes (Statista, 2015). As Facebook is a nonymous platform, the opposite of anonymous, the site is particularly relevant when studying identity construction as "the nonymous environment places constraints on the freedom of identity claims" (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1818). Furthermore, the choice of a single platform facilitates the objective of obtaining deep knowledge of users behavior, as this study is restricted by a ten-week time frame.

### **3.3 Focus groups**

Focus groups were used for the purpose of this study and the aim of such an approach was to deepen the understanding of how Facebook users aged around 55 and above construct their identity on Facebook. Focus groups, or group depth interviews (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007), can be used to understand a rather

narrow topic or phenomena discussed by a group of people and the focal point is thus on the interaction between the participants and the knowledge that it generates (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The output of focus groups are often both rich and specific, and allows for opinions to be expressed in the participant's own set of words (Stewart et al., 2007), which in turn suits the purpose of this study. Moreover, focus groups facilitate for different opinions to be challenged by other participants, which in turn can generate new interesting knowledge and sometimes a more accurate and truthful picture (Bryman & Bell, 2007). There are however some disadvantages associated with this method and they generally consist of the low generalizability it provides, biased results due to group dynamics, difficulties in analyzing the findings and biased results due to moderator involvement (Stewart et al., 2007). These have been considered throughout the research process and will be accounted for in the upcoming sections of this chapter.

### ***3.3.1 The Interview guide***

In order to ensure that the generated output from the focus groups would be useful for the study's purpose, a set of questions, originating from the research questions at hand, was prepared to guide the discussions. These were, however, only to be seen as guidelines and not codes of conduct, as the aim is rather to set the agenda (Stewart et al., 2007). 11 questions were developed (see Appendix A) and pre-tested with members representative of the partakers of the focus groups in order to ensure consensus. Such an effort can, to some degree, improve the overall quality of the upcoming focus groups (Stewart et al., 2007). Once the feedback had been attained, a few minor adjustments were made to improve the quality of the interview guide. The actual outline of the guide was structured in accordance with Stewart et al.'s (2007) two principles: general to specific and important to less important. Meaning that the discussion should be initiated with questions of a highly essential yet general nature and end with more specific and less important questions. It was however, more difficult than expected to follow the outline of questions during the focus groups in which some matters were touched upon before the reserved question was phrased. This issue could, according to Stewart et al. (2007), be a result of the closeness of topics in the interview guide and it is not an unusual event.

### ***3.3.2 Choice of Participants***

When recruiting participants for the focus groups, it was vital that the participants had to be approximately 55 years of age or above, and be users of Facebook. For this study, a combination of convenience- and snowball sampling was applied to generate participant. Stewart et al. (2007) argue that the most common sampling method for focus groups are convenience sampling and that it is mainly beneficial due to its low necessity in terms of time and money, both restricted in this study. The general disadvantage of convenience sampling is that it is not representative of the population, and thus not generalizable (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, as focus groups are not usually employed to generate results with a high level of generalizability, convenience sampling functions as a suitable method of choice (Stewart et al., 2007). The snowball sampling technique is a form of convenience sample and it often implies that the researcher approaches an available set of people, suitable for the research area, in order to gain access to potential participant (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The recruitment process was thus initiated by asking people in the surroundings if they knew anyone appropriate for the research agenda. This was performed both in person and by posting a request on the authors' Facebook pages. A snowball sampling method was further induced when asking the individuals who had responded to our request to recommend additional prospective participants. In addition to these approaches, a poster with information about the thesis, the focus group and contact information was produced and placed in suitable locations with the aspiration to further attract more partakers to the sessions. The posters were distributed in both Lund and Malmö in places where older people were seen as likely to pass by such as certain cafés, libraries and meeting places for seniors. In addition to this, several Facebook pages relevant for the group were contacted and agreed to publish the poster on their page.

The process of recruiting participants was both time-consuming and difficult. To overcome the challenge, the initial age criteria, which was set to 55 years of age, was slightly altered. This was done to increase the number of participants for the focus groups, which resulted in that three more individuals, 52 - 53 years old, could take part. The combined efforts resulted in a group of 13 participants, 4 men and 9 women (see figure 3), consisting of people with both unfamiliar and familiar relations. By combining participants in such a way, one can avoid the risk that people familiar with each other are opting out of information that they take

for granted (Morgan, 1998). However, by including people with prior relations with each other, a more relaxed setting may be attained. Due to one last minute cancellation, one group consisted of 5 participants and the other of 7 participants. A “good” group size can range from about 6-12 individuals (Morgan, 1998; Stewart et al., 2007) and the effectiveness lies in finding a balance between having enough participants to spawn the conversation while at the same time making room for all partakers in the discussion (Stewart et al., 2007). Since the topic being discussed was based on the participants’ own experiences and thus accessible, the rather small size of the second focus group was not seen as a problem, which was later confirmed in the rich data that the discussions generated. An overview of the participants of the two focus groups can be seen in figure 3 and the names presented are fabricated.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Location</b>
Ingrid	66	Malmö
Liselott	60	Malmö
Göran	62	Malmö
Tina	52	Malmö
Susanne	52	Malmö
Ann-Sofie	53	Malmö
Eva	59	Malmö
Bengt	57	Lund
Elisabeth	64	Lund
Thomas	61	Lund
Helena	61	Lund
Jeanette	56	Lund

**Figure 3: Focus Group Participants**

### ***3.3.3 Conducting the Focus groups***

The two focus groups were held in Malmö and Lund, during two weeknights between 5.30 pm to approximately 7 pm. In an effort to make the experience as comfortable and pleasant as possible, both drinks and food were provided. Such a



small gesture can according to Stewart et al. (2007) have a relaxing effect on the participants, which in turn can promote conversation. The location of the focus groups also play an important role in which notions need to be made about the needs of both the researcher and the participant. In addition to a suitable layout, the location needs to be easy to reach and contribute to a pleasant atmosphere (Morgan, 1998), which is why the meetings were divided into two geographical areas.

The focus groups were initiated by a formal welcoming by the researchers, which were the moderators, and a short presentation of the study was given. The participants were thoroughly informed about the structure and purpose of the focus groups along with their rights during the session. To make sure that the information had been processed and approved, the partakers were asked to read and sign a paper with the same information (see Appendix B), all to ensure informed consent. In an effort to create an open atmosphere (Stewart et al., 2007), the participants were informed that there are no wrong answers and that it is their own perceptions that the study aims to explore. When all formalities were complete, the participants were asked to shortly introduce themselves to the group. In an additional effort to break down barriers and engage the members from the very beginning, the discussion was initiated by asking a general and open question, in accordance with Stewart et al.'s (2007) principles. Both focus groups were talkative and only needed little guidance during the interviews. The prepared questions were useful to manage the discussion and keep the respondents on track, it was however seen as important not to intervene and disrupt the flow too much, thus not missing out on interesting insight. Another useful tool used during the sessions was probes. These are types of questions that are applied after a response, with the aim of extracting additional information about a certain topic (Stewart et al., 2007). When using this technique, the researchers were careful not to lead the respondent to a certain answer, hence only urging the participants to elaborate on the topic, which is highly important according to Stewart et al. (2007). Another important factor induced, linked to the behavior of the moderator, is to behave rather passively (Bryman & Bell, 2007), as the actual discussion should occur between the participants.

### **3.4 Netnography**

In addition to using focus groups as a research method, a complementary method of netnography has been used to enrich the empirical material. Hence, the topic of the study will be addressed and highlighted from two perspectives. Netnography originates from ethnography (Kozinets, 2002), where Bryman and Bell (2007) describes the latter as a method where the researcher is immersed in a group setting and observes the behavior and language of that group. Hence, netnography is a qualitative research method used for studying behavior in online communities (Kozinets, 2002). The method is preferable when interested in studying language, motivations, “symbolism, meanings, and consumption patterns” in online communities (Kozinets, 2002, p. 61). As one of the objectives of this study is to understand identity construction through observing Facebook users’ online behavior, and thus, how users express themselves through language and symbols, a netnographic research method can be argued as suitable. Furthermore, online communities open up and allows for studying behavior unobtrusively and in an environment characterized by naturally existing behavior (Kozinets, 2002). Thus, the netnographic approach in this study is used in order to address the subject of online social identity construction in the context where the actual behavior is evolving and existent.

The netnographic method has limitations that are important to highlight and be aware of. Kozinets (2002, p. 62) emphasize for example “the need for researcher interpretative skill” and that the findings can be problematic to generalize outside the online context. Therefore, these limitations have been taken into consideration by accounting for the interpretative process in a transparent way (see section 3.5 Data analysis), as well as complementing the netnographic findings with the focus group discussions.

#### ***3.4.1 Choice of Profiles***

The first step when conducting the netnography and collecting the empirical material needed is to identify a relevant and suitable online community. Kozinets (2002, p. 63) suggests that communities characterized by the four following criteria should be preferred, “(1) a more focused and research question-relevant segment, topic, or group; (2) higher “traffic” of postings; (3) larger numbers of dis-

crete message posters; (4) more detailed or descriptively rich data; and (5) more between-member interactions of the type required by the research question“. These criteria have formed the foundation for the choice of both SNS platform and profiles. Facebook as a suitable platform for conducting the study was discussed in section 3.2 Choice of SNS. When identifying appropriate Facebook profiles, the above mentioned criteria were considered in combination with this study’s interest of an older segment.

Facebook does not provide a search function for identifying people of certain demographics; instead it is optional for the individual users to add this information to their profile pages. Moreover, it is also optional for users to keep their profiles “open” or “closed”, meaning that the information visible on users profile pages may vary. In regard to the above-mentioned criteria, it was necessary to find profiles that allowed other users with open access to the information. The criteria of both age and “open” access thus formed the basis of the search process, which resulted in a rather time-consuming process, as the both criteria needed to be met. Due to the restrictions, the primary selection of Facebook profiles were identified through the authors’ own network of friends. The friend lists available on these profiles were further used as a springboard to identify new profiles matching the criteria. The sampling method used, thus has similarities with a snowball sampling, as participants were identified through a chain reaction, where one initial contact led the way to new ones. In total, 20 Facebook profiles were identified, with an equal distribution of gender that met the discussed criteria of age and “open” profiles. The number of profiles was chosen in order to analyze the profiles thoroughly and within the given time frame for the thesis. Bryman and Bell (2007, p. 198) stress that a convenience sample is difficult to generalize and as a result, findings will only work as a “springboard for future research”. However, the purpose of the netnographic method is to provide insights about older people’s social identity construction on Facebook together with the findings from the focus groups, thus not to generalize to the entire population.

### ***3.4.2 Collecting the Material***

When conducting the netnography, the researchers of this study took the roles of ‘total researcher’, implying that no participation or involvement occurred with the online setting (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The objective with the netnographic method was to observe Facebook profiles and the information provided, in its natural milieu and thus, not to engage with the participants. The information that was derived from the Facebook profiles pages included: (1) basic information such as age, hometown, relationship status, school and work information, (2) profile picture and cover photo, (3) friends list, (4) wall posts and shares (both text and images), commenting and (5), page likes and group likes. Kozinets (2002) does not suggest any specific number of messages to be derived from a netnography; the material should rather be collected as long as new interesting insights on the topic emerge. Moreover, the author (2002) states that fewer messages might be sufficient as long as they consists of rich information and are analyzed with great carefulness. For this analysis, all of the above-mentioned information, (1) - (5), formed the basis for the thorough analysis of the 20 Facebook profiles.

Bryman and Bell (2011) highlight the potential risk with online interactions as individuals can pretend to be someone they are not, which can negatively affect the study’s result. However, as Facebook is regarded as a nonymous platform where one’s identity should be verified, these concerns are limited. Furthermore, the empirical material was gathered and saved using screenshots to better facilitate the coding process and to allow for the material to be controlled by auditors if necessary.

## **3.5 Data analysis**

The empirical material from both the focus groups and the netnography were analyzed using the qualitative method of grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This method implies that the structure emerge from the data, rather than in the opposite way. The objective of the data analysis is thus to construct concepts, identify patterns and combine these into relevant themes on a higher abstraction level (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) proposes a framework for the analysis process, which includes the following steps: Familiarization - Reflection - Conceptualization - Cataloguing concepts - Re-coding - Linking - Re-

evaluation. This process worked as guidance for the analysis of the empirical material and began with reviewing the transcripts several times in order to “get to know” the data. The focus group transcripts were then coded through ‘open coding’, which implies that the data was examined, conceptualized and labeled with various names (Bryman & Bell, 2007). When coding netnographic data, Kozinets (2002) suggest that a primarily coding could help to decide if the material observed is either on-topic or off-topic. However, as the purpose of this study is to understand social identity construction online, no specific material was identified as on- or off-topic. Rather, all information available was considered helpful in order to create an overall impression of the individual’s social identity construction on Facebook and was therefore coded similarly to the focus group transcripts. The various concepts developed from the material were then interpreted, compared and linked into categories.

The analysis process puts the researcher’s interpretive skills in focus, which leaves much room for subjectivity and bias (Stewart et al., 2007). Thus, the process needs to be characterized by reflexivity, where the researcher should strive to interpret the material in such a way that no particular perspective is favored over another (Alvesson, 2003). This calls for an approach where the researcher is humble in regards to the initial interpretations, as these might not be the “strongest” ones and thus allows for a variety of interpretations to be visible (Alvesson, 2003). Hence, in order to perform a reflexive analysis, the two authors of this study were both engaged in the analysis process from start to end. Through thorough discussions, one’s assumptions could be challenged and questioned, giving an initial interpretation several viewpoints. In the analysis chapter, quotes from the participants have been used in order to “let the data speak for itself” to provide the reader with evidence of the findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012, p. 318). Moreover, the quotes have been translated from Swedish to English, as both the focus group participants and the Facebook profiles were Swedish. An external person was asked to control the initial translations of the quotes in order to provide for accurate translations.

### **3.6 The Quality of the Study**

Qualitative research has, as with all research, faced criticism on various levels. One of the major concerns revolves the researcher's subjectiveness. This issue mostly regards interpretive skills and to what extent the researcher's own personal view influence what is important (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Moreover, these concerns are related to issues with replicating qualitative studies, as the findings are based on the researcher's subjective interpretations of data, the study becomes difficult to recreate (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Furthermore, lack of transparency throughout the research process is highlighted as problematic. Hence, in order to minimize the above-discussed issues with qualitative research, several steps to ensure the study's quality have been taken which will be addressed in the following sections.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) use the criteria of trustworthiness when evaluating qualitative research, which in turn is comprised with four sub-categories: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria have been considered throughout the process of this study and how they have been adopted will be accounted for in detail below.

#### *Credibility*

In order to ensure credibility, the study has used the tool of triangulation, which implies that more than one method have been used to conclude the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The two perspectives used when studying the phenomena of social identity construction on Facebook were; talking to individuals about identity construction on Facebook and by unobtrusively observing Facebook profile pages. The study looks to assure credibility by using the focus group's own thoughts, ideas and experiences in combination with the findings from the observations.

#### *Transferability*

For the study's findings to be transferable to other contexts than where they were produced, it is necessary to keep "thick descriptions" of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 316). Hence, the study has sought to keep close and detailed descriptions

of sampling, data collection and data analysis, in order to facilitate for judgments regarding transferability.

#### *Dependability*

Dependability seeks to ensure trustworthiness, which implies that the entire process of the study should be well documented and accounted for (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Thus, records of the focus group discussions and Facebook profiles will be saved to allow for auditors to control the material if needed. It is however important that the participants' identities remain protected, which has been established through replacing their names and being cautious when storing the material.

#### *Confirmability*

In order to ensure that “the researcher (...) have acted in good faith” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 414) and not valued certain perspective over others, this study has aimed at giving transparent and detailed accounts of the data collection and analysis. Moreover, the analysis of the empirical material has been evaluated throughout the process by the two authors of this study.

### **3.7 Ethical concerns**

A highly essential factor when conducting research is ethics, Diener and Grandall (1978, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 128-138) use a division where four categories of ethical matters have been created: informed consent, privacy, deception and harm. For this study, some of these areas become more relevant than others and the course of action within the categories have differed slightly depending on the two methods of focus groups and netnography. Although the ethical guidelines were developed for regular research methods, without Internet in mind, Bryman and Bell (2011) argues that they are still relevant for Internet research. There has however been critique towards the application of such guidelines to an online environment (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Kozinets, 2002) and it mainly concerns questions of what is to be considered as private/public and informed consent (Kozinets, 2002). Even though the distinction between venues as being private or public is far from easy, Bryman and Bell (2011) states that the more public it is, the less need of securing confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent, exist.

In order to minimize the prevalence of ethical critique in this matter, the netnographic material have been obtained from open profiles and the gathered data used in a highly cautious manner.

For both methods, the matter of anonymity has been taken into great consideration. The focus groups were initiated by informing the participants of their rights and implications of their participation. In an additional effort to underline these factors, a document containing all relevant information was distributed and signed by the participants of the focus groups, thus also securing consent. Regarding the netnography, anonymity have been formalized and treated carefully in the data collection process. The results of the netnography in the analysis have been illustrated without using direct quotations or pictures, hence, the risk of identifying the origin of the findings have been limited. In both methods, the collected data have been securely stored and the names of the participants have been coded during the transcription process. Informed consent have not been accounted for in terms of the profiles used in the netnography and the main reason for this is that it would have been difficult to attain the information if informed consent would have been imposed. Also, as the profiles were all public and the data have been treated carefully during the collection process and the analysis, the risk of exposing any of the individuals in the netnography is significantly low. The use of online observations for this purpose is both seen as a support to the findings from the focus groups but also as a possibility to generate insights that can only be attained by observation of actual behavior, hence a valuable addition to the study as such.

The preservation of privacy was addressed in such a way that the participants of the focus groups were encouraged to only respond and engage in the discussion when they felt appealed. Moreover, the questions in the guide were carefully chosen and pre-tested from representatives from the target group, thus ensuring a high and appropriate standard. For the netnography, the data obtained from the profiles were not exploited in such a way that the privacy of the individuals would be jeopardized. Instead, it is the insight of the profiles as a whole that is of interest. Deception was the fourth ethical category provided by Diener and Grandall (1978, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 128-138) and the matter was mainly accounted for in this study by being transparent with the participants of the focus groups. It was seen as particularly important to be clear with the aim and purpose



of the study from the very beginning, especially since the participants were to share their own personal thoughts and opinions. Lastly, by taking these issues in considerations and actively addressing them in certain ways, the first category that involved harm to the participants, have simultaneously been prevented.

### **3.8 Limitations**

Challenges and limitations with the methodological framework have been addressed throughout the chapter, however, as some parts affect the study as a whole, it is seen as important to further highlight these. One important aspect that could limit the quality of the study revolves around subjectiveness and interpretations made by the researchers of this study, who are influenced by previous experiences and knowledge. These matters have worked as the basis for the study at hand and as a consequence, they will undoubtedly affect the outcome of this study. Moreover, the aim of this study has been to develop a better understanding of a social phenomena and thus, not to generalize the study's findings. Hence, the findings will only work as indicators of the observed and investigated behavior. Further limiting aspect of this study are the restrained resources in terms of both time and money. This influences much of the recruitment and data collection processes used in the two methods, where a greater access could have implied a larger sample and a more extensive research process. Connected to this, is the inability to account for a gender equal sample for the focus groups, which might have contributed with additional insights. It was however seen as more important to account for a larger sample, as gender was not an area of focus in this study. Furthermore, as the profiles obtained on Facebook had to be 'open' for public access, there is a risk that these profiles differ from the persons that choose to have 'closed' profiles.

## 4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

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*This chapter will introduce the empirical material and analyze the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. The findings have been categorized and pared in order to present a logical structure of the analysis. Hence, the following chapter will be structured by two main headings, which in turn consists of subheadings.*

### **4.1 Social identity, Spheres and Clashes**

In this section, the empirical findings will illustrate how the older Facebook users of this study perceive social identity and how this identity is integrated within the self on Facebook. Furthermore, the construction of social identity is seen as challenging due to both online and offline differences as well as the co-existence of multiple social groups on Facebook.

#### ***4.1.1 A Piece of Me***

An interesting topic that arose during the focus group discussions concerned how self and social identity were connected in the online space. This discussion was helpful in understanding how the participants view and construct their social identity on Facebook. A relevant finding from the focus groups was that the participants felt an urge to be themselves on Facebook. This strive was seen in how the participants perceive themselves in relation to Facebook and, also more implicitly, in how they expressed a dislike towards other users who conveyed an online identity that differed from their view of that person offline. The latter is illustrated in the following quote where Thomas talks about the behavior of his daughter's acquaintance from Long Island:

*“Sophia had an au pair father on Long Island, and he changed his profile picture to his dead father's picture, and I was like ‘what the heck, that’s not what you looked like’. Why does he have him there [?], and now he has replaced it so now he has his son's picture there. So sometimes I don’t know who it is (...). One can at least use a picture of oneself”*

It seems as if Thomas dislikes the fact that the person in the quote represents a different identity by having someone else’s picture as his Facebook profile picture. This indicates that the identity one shows off online should be a fair representation of oneself. Furthermore, the participants of the focus groups expressed that who they are on Facebook, should be connected to who they are offline. Thus implying that their social identity on Facebook is, to some extent, authentic. This was further emphasized in how the participants were personal in their communication, which for example was shown in their use of real names and photographs and when expressing their own opinions. One participant, Ann-Sofie, phrased it as:

*“When I write something, and say [something, on Facebook], it is, after all, from me, it is after all personal“*

The quote indicates that online identity is anchored in the self but it also implies that it is difficult to avoid being personal. This was further implied by Thomas who believes that his actions signal something about who he is, whether it is intentional or not. Hence, the participants seem to perceive themselves as personal on Facebook as their behavior originates from an authentic place. Moreover, one of the analyzed Facebook profiles showed a great representation of personal content in which the user displayed an interest in nature by posting self-captured photos with elaborative descriptions. Although the user provided a great amount of personal content, it did not give many indications about his private life. The distinction between personal and private was elaborated upon during the focus groups where the participants perceived personal as something other than private. Hence, some private parts of the self are consciously not made visible on Facebook and therefore excluded from their online social identity. This relates to

Goffman's (1959) metaphor of the front- and backstage, which in this case could imply that the participants give glimpses into the backstage area, but do not invite the public to fully explore who they are. However, the communicated identity should not be mistaken for a lie since the identity that is shown, seem to originate from an authentic center: the self. The following quotes can be interpreted as indicators of this matter:

*“But it is just as you say, of a circle, that I'm here [illustrates a slice with her hands], it's just that piece of me that I have Facebook for, that I show, it's still the same person, but it's only a tiny, tiny fragment of me” - Liselott*

*“It is still me. But it is not the entire me” - Tina*

The model by Brewer (1991, see figure 1, p. 12), in which the social identities are derived from the self, or ‘personal identity’ as Brewer (1991) names it, is therefore applicable when explaining the relation between self and online social identities amongst the participants of this study. Brewer (1991) argues that a person has multiple social identities, whereas Facebook could be interpreted as a social category where one social identity can arise. However, it should be mentioned that it is theoretically feasible to maintain several social identities on Facebook but that the conditions on the site are not constructed for such purposes since a person only get one profile, thus one chance to construct a social identity. Hence, Facebook affects how the social identity is adjusted and adapted to the social scene. These adjustments and adaptations thus result in what Brewer (1991) describes as depersonalization, where fragments of a person's self are lost in the process. This can be seen in how the participants adjust to the social category of Facebook, as they restrict what not to share, thus withholding private bits of themselves. Adjusting to the social setting resembles Goffman's (1959) notion about the performance in the front region, as the participants actively seem to manage their impressions with regards to an observing audience. The participants are thus managing the content with regards to the Facebook audience, a tool known as ‘audience segregation’ (Goffman, 1959).

The former discussion entails that although the participants' social identities are derived from an authentic source, the self; it has also been shown that not every piece of them is being communicated on Facebook. The relation between authenticity and adaption thus becomes both interesting and problematic, since it can be questioned if the social identity portrayed on Facebook is a fair representation of themselves when not every piece of the self is included. Thus, there seem to exist a tension between the need to stay authentic and the need to adapt to the social category. Furthermore, as some parts of the self, such as private matters, are actively being withheld from the audiences, the participants identity on Facebook seem to follow a conscious path of construction, hence, resembling a performance.

#### ***4.1.2 The relation between spheres***

Another theme that was frequently touched upon during the focus group discussions was the distinction as well as the connection between offline and online contexts. Ingrid, one of the participants, revealed that she was not friends with her grown-up children on Facebook. She explained the reason for this as "I think that they should have their own world", where Ingrid did not want to intrude. Another participant Ann-Sofie used a similar way of addressing Facebook, when referring to her profile page, as "this is my little world". The quotes both make use of the word "world", which in this case can be seen as a metaphor for Facebook. The statement by Ingrid could further indicate that she is expecting her children to perform a different act on Facebook than what she is normally exposed to offline. Together, the quotes hint that Facebook could be perceived as something different, something separated from the "real world". Moreover, the distinction between online and offline was further addressed in a different situation, where the participants expressed that their communication on Facebook affected how they were perceived offline. Elisabeth, exemplified the occurrence in a humoristic way:

*"A little anecdote, my partner, entered [on Facebook] that he was 'in a complicated relationship' with me because we were not married at the time. So it was a bit of a joke. Whereof, two peo-*

*ple called me up and asked if we could talk and have some lunch [laughs]. So after that, my husband hasn't used Facebook"*

Elisabeth's story illustrates how a discrepancy emerges between the online and offline world, when others misinterpret her husband's relationship settings. Facebook allows for a person to add information about one's relationship status on the profile page. The choice is made out of a set of predefined alternatives where "in a complicated relationship" is one of them. When using this alternative, Elisabeth's husband was referring to that they were not married to each other, rather than that they had problems in their relationship. However, Elisabeth's friends misinterpreted the information and assumed that the online information was a true representation of reality. When a behavior, intended to be perceived in a certain way, is interpreted differently, a friction within social interaction and communication emerges (Goffman (1959). The quote also entails that Elisabeth's husband even stopped using Facebook after this incident, thus implying that the experience was discouraging for him. The misunderstanding could be a result of how the online setting lacks certain cues, such as facial expression, tone of voice and body language (Baym, 2010), which would have been helpful when interpreting Elisabeth's husband's joke. Although SNSs such as Facebook offers great control of one's profile and the content one chooses to share, it is difficult to keep full control of how one is perceived by others (boyd, 2011). Another participant, Tina, also experienced the complex relation between online and offline, however her story concerned Facebook activity instead of relationship status:

*"I tend to get a bit of like bad conscience if I haven't posted in a long time (...) then I get yelled at by my customers, 'I have not seen you in a long time!'. And it can even be that someone private says that 'you haven't been very active' (...) that's not so good, or, it could be someone that even says like this 'I have noticed that it might not have been so good, haven't you felt well [?], I have not seen so much activity recently [on Facebook]'. Making judgments based on how one acts (...) or especially one can say that someone is watching and (...) drawing good conclusions of how a person is doing"*

Tina's words indicate that she feels as if she is being watched and judged on Facebook and, more importantly, that she does not like when others draw conclusions solely based on her activity on the platform. Hence it can be argued, based on the quotes, that there exists an aversion towards equalizing the offline world with the Facebook world. Instead, it seems as if the participants are more comfortable with separating the two worlds, where disparate realities would be preferred. By not integrating the worlds with each other in such a way, a seamless flow between the two is being prevented, which is related to the concept of 'self-triangulation' by Davis (2014). One of the building blocks of the concept, named 'networked logic', becomes particularly interesting for this matter. It entails that individuals create a flow between offline and online context that goes both ways, and it is one attempt to maintain a cohesive representation of a person (Davis, 2014). As the findings from the focus groups are rather prevalent in terms of distinction and separation between the online world and the offline world, 'networked logic' is not fully achieved in this sense. Furthermore, Eva, who participated in a Facebook group about her local village, further emphasized the preference for a separation between contexts. The group kept her updated with local activities and news, however, when the other group members started to organize social events, Eva did not wish to take part. This further signals a need for distinction between online and offline contexts and thus parallels with the earlier discussion about the phenomena of 'collapsing contexts' (boyd, 2011). The concept is applicable, as it seems as if the participants want offline and online spheres to be separated from each other, rather than integrated. By doing so, the ability to construct one's social identity is affected, as the separation of worlds also facilitate a separation between social identities.

Moreover, a general attitude in one of the focus group discussions was that receiving condolences and greetings on Facebook were not perceived as equally sincere as they would have been offline. Hence, a "happy birthday" at one's Facebook wall felt, according to the participants, as if it lacked of thoughtfulness and meaning in which they would rather have people greeting them in the offline environment. However, in contrast to the other participants, Liselott felt the opposite as she enjoyed receiving greetings on Facebook:

*“I’m just at the beginning of my Facebook career, so I think it’s great that someone has made an effort to write ‘Congratulations Liselott, have a really...’ and put some fun emoticons or so, then they’ve thought about me and spread a little joy, so of course I get happy. But I might get tired of it in a few years time”*

Liselott does not seem to make the same distinction between offline and online as the other participants when it comes to social exchange and is therefore more in line with Davis (2014) formulation in terms of ‘networked logic’. The quote could be interpreted as if Liselott regards Facebook as an extension of her offline world, which serves as a contrast to the other participants who seem to regard Facebook as something separate. Another interesting insight from Liselott is that she makes a connection between her appreciation of being greeted on Facebook and her relatively new presence on the platform. This indicates that her view of Facebook as an extension from the offline world might change in a few years when she is no longer new to the platform. Hence, how one sees Facebook, as a separate world or not, might also be a question of time spent on the platform.

Liselott’s view on Facebook as an extension could also be interpreted from some of the analyzed Facebook profiles. This was made visible as some of the users incorporated notions of their ‘everyday lives’ in their posts, where they treated their Facebook wall almost as a back stage (Goffman, 1959). By doing so, the users invited viewers to take part of their everyday routine, thus making a linkage between the two worlds. Hence, traces of both treating the worlds as separate and as integrated could be found in the empirical material. However, as the participants from the focus groups strongly seemed to favor a distinction between worlds, and as the analyzed profiles contained users of both kinds, the general output can be said to be that Facebook was regarded, by most participants, as something separate and different from the “real world”. Hence, it seems as if most of the participants have not fully embraced the platform as a natural extension of their lives and who they are. This can further be understood as a lack of seamless flow between the participants everyday life, offline and online, and is emphasized by the statement by the participant Jeanette, “it kind of depends on whether one has one’s life there”.



The reason for some of the participants view on Facebook as a disparate reality can be a result of how they were first introduced to Facebook. For many of the participants, the choice to join Facebook was not based on a personal desire; instead they were urged by people in their surroundings to create a profile. One example is Göran, who joined the SNS when he moved into a new building and became part of the housing association that used Facebook for communicative purposes. Another example is Ingrid, who joined Facebook as a result of not wanting to be perceived as old-fashion:

*“Because I joined, it was probably three years ago, and it was my old friend from school whom I’ve kept contact with, and she is a teacher, and she said, ‘God, you are so outdated, you have to be on Facebook,’ and then I joined”*

Based on the previous discussion, it can be argued that the introduction for some of the participants to the platform was more or less forced and not seen as a highly natural step for them to take. This in turn could help explain their view of the site and also, their willingness to keep the two worlds somewhat separated.

Their will to keep the worlds apart, could have implications for identity construction in such a way that the social identity on Facebook is not fully integrated with the social identities presented offline. It can thus be argued that the participant of the focus groups does not seem to enact in a seamless representation of themselves between the two worlds. However, the separation between worlds is not always feasible as could be seen in the case of Tina and implies that there do exist some flow between the two. This goes in line with the findings from section 4.1.1 A Piece of Me, where the participant were creating their social identity by performing on Facebook while at the same time grounding their actions in their authentic self.

#### **4.1.3 Social identity Clashes**

In accordance with the social identity model by Brewer (1991), it is acknowledged that a person has multiple social identities that belong to different social categories. Hence, in the offline world, “physical walls” separate social groups, i.e. the

groups belong to different context and thus, are not necessarily combined (Papacharissi, 2011). Therefore, different social identities can be developed for different social groups, thus allowing for multiple social identities to exist. An interesting aspect of the online environment is ‘collapsing contexts’ (boyd (2011) whereas Facebook is an example of such an environment where social groups can mingle and intertwine. Co-workers, relatives and childhood friends are all examples of social groups that in theory can co-exist on Facebook and become one, unified, large mass. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to manage one’s social identities on Facebook since many social groups can co-exist at once. As Facebook solely provides users with a single profile, the user is “forced” to provide the audience with one representation of oneself, which can impose certain challenges. Such challenges were emphasized during the focus group discussions as it created both confusion and anxiety for the users. Many felt particularly troubled with the fact that people other than their closest friends, wanted to be “friends” with them on Facebook. As Eva expressed it:

*“But then I noticed quite quickly, this, that I’ve moved around quite a lot so I have old friends in so many different places, and then you get different feelings when you see that they begin to reach out and then I felt like, no I don’t want to be friends with them (...) so I’ve been extremely introvert, so I’m just friends with those that I feel are my dearest friends (...). At my job, I’ve got lots of friend requests [on Facebook] and I have maybe two or three, because those are people that I feel are allowed to peek into my closet”*

Eva implies that she sees a need to control who can access her profile on Facebook as she does not feel comfortable with sharing this space with whoever. The quote also entails that she is experiencing mixed feelings when being approached in this setting by more distant friends. Eva gives of the impression of being very restrictive when allowing others to be “friends” with her on Facebook and as a result, she has excluded certain social groups. In the ‘Online Identity Analysis Model’ by Aresta et al. (2015), one of three sections that together signify online identity is dedicated to privacy management in various forms. Eva’s restrictive behavior

is an example of what Aresta et al. (2015) names ‘contact management’ which implies that Eva is segregating her friend list in regard to the Facebook environment. Eva is thus managing the challenges with separating online social identities when only allowing few social groups to access her profile. One participant, Susanne, also expressed feelings of hardship in deciding which of her acquaintances should be allowed to access her Facebook account. As she used to work within a large company, she found it hard to set boundaries when co-workers sent her friend requests. The main problem seemed to be that Susanne, at the one hand, did not want to offend anyone by declining their request, while at the same time not feeling comfortable mixing her identity with her social identity on Facebook. Tina also struggled with the tension between professional and private which is exemplified by the following statement:

*“I started using Facebook when I was alone for a while and then it was more like social (...) I don’t know. I get a little schizophrenic because (...) I see it like this, based on my personal situation, one can look, you can get a little, you can be amused, watching videos and I have a firm, a company where I share images and then I’m more on the basis of professional and then I become confused, should I have an another account then? So I opened an additional account, and now I don’t know on which account I have posted the picture”*

Just like Eva, Tina is experiencing difficulties with the collapsing of social spheres. However, the focal point in this case, revolves more around her social identities and how they are clashing on Facebook. She handles the conflict in a different way than Eva, by creating two profiles where she can manage the two social identities, professional versus private, separately. When doing so, Tina is exemplifying what Aresta et al. (2015) calls ‘registration process’ which indicates that she is strategically trying to manage her social identities by creating two accounts. Tina has thus overcome the limitations of being restricted to only one profile on Facebook, however as the quote indicates, it is not without confusion. Perhaps, her struggles are a result of that Facebook is more personally oriented (Gilpin, 2011), which creates problems when including professional aspects to the

platform. Another participant, Bengt, is able to make a distinction between his social identities on Facebook, but without having to create an additional account as Tina. Instead, he makes use of the more advanced privacy settings available on Facebook, where he can control which “friends” who will get access to particular content. In accordance to Aresta et al.’s (2015) model, Bengt’s privacy management influence the digital representation of himself, as the published content only will be available to certain people in his “friend list”. Thus, both Bengt and Tina have found ways of managing multiple social identities at once and are thus not as restricted as for example Eva who “only” shows off one social identity on the site. A more implicit way of dealing with the clash between different social groups and identities was proposed by Ann-Sofie who adapted her content to fit a range of social groups on Facebook:

*“The information I share, I adopt to them, my group of friends that I have. So, this is what I feel I can share“.*

By adapting the content it is possible that Ann-Sofie is restraining herself in terms of Facebook presence, to suit the expectations of various social groups.

The previous discussion entails that the participants perceive the clashes of social groups and social identities on Facebook as problematic. It was displayed that they have different ways of coping with the challenges, which indicates that they have a need to control their social identities on Facebook. Goffman’s (1959) notion about ‘discrepant roles’ proves helpful in understanding the participants’ behavior. Regardless of how the participants take on the challenges, for example by being restrictive with friends, or by adapting one’s content, the main objective seems to be to prevent ‘destructive information’ (Goffman, 1959) from becoming visible. When multiple social groups have access to a user’s Facebook, it becomes important to properly manage expressions and separate between social groups. By doing so, the user can avoid that social groups experience discrepancy between the user’s social identities when preventing such information from being leaked.

## 4.2 Online Social identity communication

In this section, the knowledge of an observing Facebook audience is shown to affect the participants in different ways, which in turn, influence their behavior. The ways of handling and responding to these occurrences had various effects on their self-presentation and thus, how they socially construct themselves on Facebook.

### 4.2.1 Influence of an Audience

The participants of this study seemed to be highly aware of the fact that Facebook is a public platform where the content that is being shared can reach a potentially large audience. The ability to reach out to others, can be seen as one of the great advantages of new media (Baym, 2010), however, it also has consequences. In this case, the awareness of an observing audience posed great concern for many of the participants, and Elisabeth illustrated this matter in the following quote:

*“But yeah, well, I might not know Facebook well enough. I have always been terrified that everyone, at all times, will see everything, so I still go for mail. Maybe it's because I don't know how to do it. But I retain myself, I am careful with Facebook one can say”*

Elisabeth uses a strong word, “terrifying”, when explaining her uncertainty with the large audience who she feels can observe her actions at all times. Using Goffman's (1959) theater metaphor, it seems as if Elisabeth regards Facebook as a stage, where a large audience is observing every move. Elisabeth's concerns seem to be based on the fact that her backstage behavior will seep through to the front stage, and thus, be visible for people who were not intended to receive the information. As a consequence, she rather sends someone an e-mail than risk sending a message on Facebook which could end up somewhere unexpected. The reasons for her feelings of uncertainty can be understood by her lacking knowledge of how to appropriately work Facebook. Several of the other participants expressed similar feelings, and Göran formulated it as follows:

*“Because sometimes things are sent off, that shouldn’t be sent. I notice this when I push the wrong button, then half the message is sent, and everything else you’ve heard. There is no function to stop, where one can read properly before anything is sent off. It’s very easy to send something that is wrong”*

The participants’ unease with working the platform in combination with their awareness of the large audience had further effects on how they presented themselves on Facebook. As a result, the discussions entailed that many became restricted in their behavior and with the content they shared on Facebook. SNSs as a whole, facilitates a range of tools (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011) and by for example choosing who to add as Facebook friends, what content to share, like and comment, the participant can, to some extent, exercise control (boyd, 2011; Papacharissi, 2011). The following quotes emphasize the participants’ restrictive and somewhat controlling behavior on Facebook:

*“I very much hold back”* - Thomas

*“I think about where I want this to end. So [I am] a bit thoughtful”* - Tina

The quotes imply awareness when it comes to the participants’ Facebook behavior and it seems as if they are not spontaneously posting content, rather their behavior is characterized by thoughtfulness. By staying in control of what content that is being shared, the participants are able to affect how they are being perceived by others (Maghrabi et al., 2014), thus, controlling the behavior one ‘gives’ (Goffman, 1959). It seems as if their behavior is based on a desire to avoid negative social consequences, rather than solely trying to be perceived as something “better” than they actually are. This was something that was made visible during the focus group discussions and is portrayed in the following statements:

*“When one writes comments and alike, one wants to think twice so that no one will have to be ashamed of you“* - Liselott

*“You don’t want to be perceived in any worse manner” - Ingrid*

*“Auntie makes a fool of herself on Facebook” [laughter] - Tina*

The participants’ thoughts on the subject can therefore be understood as a type of impression management, where the focus is on limiting the risk of acting embarrassing. These feelings are in line with Goffman’s (1959) term ‘social mobility’ where the participants want to adapt and behave in accordance with apparent norms on Facebook. The focus in this situation is thus to avoid falling further down the ladder of what is perceived as socially acceptable (Goffman, 1959). The participants’ need for fitting in and behaving “correctly” on Facebook seem to be a result of the previously mentioned factors; insecurity in usage and awareness of a public audience. The reasons for this could be that the participants strive to belong to a certain group, called in-group, and strive not to be associated with groups that they do not wish to belong to (Brewer, 1991). In this context, the in-group could be Facebook users that are characterized by being technologically savvy and accustomed to the online environment. In contrast, the group that they want to distance themselves from could be known for being unfamiliar with, and somewhat uncomfortable on Facebook. As the participants are experiencing insecurity and unease in their Facebook use, it could be interpreted as that they are not “real” members of the in-group. Hence, the constructed social identity on Facebook might be what Ferguson (2009) names ‘emphatic identity’, where the similarities to the in-group are not fully integrated within the user.

The previous analysis argues that the participants are experiencing an array of mixed negative emotions when using Facebook. This in turn, affected their behavior, which became restrictive and controlling with the aim of avoiding negative social consequences, such as unintentionally sharing private information with unauthorized individuals and to embarrass oneself. It can also be concluded that there seem to be a desire to construct an identity similar to the in-group; however, such attempts are not always feasible.

#### ***4.2.2 Impression management***

The impact of Facebook as a public platform was shown to influence the participants' behavior in the previous section. SNSs, such as Facebook, offers many ways for users to construct themselves with the use of impression management (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011) where the focus is often to present a favorable version of oneself (Goffman, 1959). By controlling what content that is being published, users can help define how others perceive them (Baym, 2010). On Facebook, users can showcase a range of interests, skills and symbols, and Aresta et al. (2015), argues that the content presented on one's profile, is what defines a person's online digital representation. Hence, by addressing certain topics, the user can create a link, which in turn affects how others perceive them. The analyzed profiles for this study illustrated that certain topics were frequently addressed, which could indicate that these were areas that the users wanted to be associated with. In accordance with Aresta et al. (2015), the nature of the content in one's profile stems from the user's intentions of how the user wants to be perceived. Several of the analyzed Facebook profiles illustrated a linkage to civic engagement by sharing posts, liking groups and pages with a focus towards for example help-organizations concerning both humans and animals, the police forces in different regions and various community involvements. This behavior could be interpreted as if the users want to be perceived as unselfish, caring members of the community. Hence, the published content could be seen as pieces of the identity puzzle, which contribute to creating a complete picture of participants' online identity.

Engagement for help-organizations and alike was also present in one focus groups discussion where Elisabeth expressed her deep commitment to multiple human aid organizations where she frequently shared their posts on her page. Elisabeth explained the behavior as being a result of the need for standing up for other people's rights in these tough times and that she "likes to share what is happening in the world". Hence, the intentions for publishing such content are not explicitly connected to enhancing her digital representation, however, as the content she posts does affect how others perceive her, it can be argued that there can exist additional intentions than the one's that she is aware of. This goes in line with Goffman's (1959) discussion about belief in one's performance, which can



indicate that Elisabeth is convinced that her behavior is sincere and that she is not intentionally doing it for personal gains.

When asked what content the focus group participants usually shared on Facebook, Ann-Sofie contributed with saying that she often post moments from special occasions rather than pictures and posts about her everyday life; “I don’t share that I had sausage for dinner or something like that”. Moreover, she continues with the explanations “well, it’s a bit what you choose to share, well, that might also be why one chooses to give out the best little things”. This implies that Ann-Sofie is rather selective when choosing what parts of her life to share with others on Facebook and thus, view Facebook more in terms of Goffman’s (1959) front stage, where she manages her performance, and thus how she presents herself. Tina further illustrates how the participants’ behavior can be understood as a performance when saying “you play yourself when you’re at your best”.

The matter of selecting certain aspect or improving certain parts of one’s life was further elaborated on during the discussions, which the following dialogue between some of the participants exemplifies:

Eva: *“Then you create an image of your life, that you might wish you had”*

Ingrid: *“Right”*

Tina: *“Or as one has sometimes, in short little moments, but it’s not the whole life”*

Eva: *“‘Now, it is how I want it to be’”*

The participants are, in the dialogue, trying to understand the reasons one can have for creating an improved version of oneself on Facebook. The discussion is related to Turkle’s (2011) notion about idealized identity, in which the writer argues that one’s presentation not only reveal who an individual is, but also who that person wants to be. Hence, by displaying an idealized version of oneself, users can create an online social identity that is “better” than the offline versions. However, even though many of the participants enacted in the behavior them-

selves, their attitude towards others who idealized themselves on Facebook was not as positive. As expressed by the participants, sharing pictures with “perfect family constellations” and various “golden moments”, were generally not appreciated. Thomas gives an example about an acquaintance that he perceived as more sympathetic when meeting face to face than on Facebook, where the person created an improved image of herself with the aspiration of gaining acknowledgement. Overall, there seem to exist opinions and ways of behaving amongst the participants that do not always go hand-in-hand. When acting too differently on Facebook, the discrepancy from one’s offline identities becomes too large and Ann-Sofie, expressed the matter in the following way:

*“I have worked for such a long time and lost my job. Then I was a bit like this that I have to like, it has to be only me here [on Facebook], because I know that employers today go in and peek. And very often I can think of the young people that I know that just throw out ‘pjuuh’ [makes noise]. ‘Oh god this is you all the time, do you think about that when you are...’ [Gets interrupted]”*

The quote entails that it is important for Ann-Sofie that her Facebook identity is a fair representation of herself, thus ensuring some form of authenticity, but also that the representation is “good enough” for an employer. Hence, pieces that do not correspond with the identity Ann-Sofie wants to present, needs to be carefully disguised. Moreover, it seems as Ann-Sofie is surprised by the behavior of the younger people she knows, as they posts and shares content on their Facebook which have not been carefully thought through. Hence, it seems as if Ann-Sofie is convinced that others will interpret a person on the basis of their Facebook profile and that a person therefore should construct a social identity on Facebook that offers a fair, but also favorable, representation of oneself. Ann-Sofie’s thoughts cohere with Turkle’s (2011) metaphor of a star, producer and director where it is not sufficient to only play the part of the star, since the other two roles are needed in order to ensure guidance and structure to one’s performance. However, Davis (2014) argues that it is important to disguise the efforts put into the final performance in order for it to be perceived as authentic by the audience. The previous

discussion indicates that the participants are trying, to some extent, to construct an identity that is well balanced between authenticity and idealization, where the aim is to create and maintain a cohesive identity in various spheres (Davis, 2014).

## 5. Results and Discussion

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*This final chapter will start by concluding and discussing the findings from the analysis and further relate these to previous studies within the field. Moreover, this study's theoretical contributions and practical implications will be discussed. Finally, the study's limitations will be highlighted and possible future research proposed.*

### 5.1 Discussion of the Findings

With the purpose of attaining a greater understanding of the process of older people's social identity construction on Facebook, this study has identified five main findings related to perception and construction of social identity. These will now be summarized and elaborated upon separately in order to clarify how these answer to the aim and the research questions of this study.

The first finding addressed from the empirical material, revolved around the users' own perceptions of social identity and the self in relation to Facebook. It was concluded that the participants' online social identity on Facebook was viewed as an extension but not a replica of the self, since not every part of the self was being represented. The excluded pieces were often seen as too private or inappropriate due to the Facebook context, and therefore "hidden" for the audiences. Hence, the participants displayed an urge to be and act authentic on the platform while at the same time being aware of the fact that their own representation is adjusted and not fully righteous, implying a form of performance. This particular relation was found to be the most interesting in this part, where it becomes a matter of combining the notions of being both authentic yet at the same time adjusting to the social category. Finding that balance is not a simple task and such a need can imply that it might be important for the participants of the study to feel like they are sincere on the platform, rather than fake. Thus, they are not straight out lying; they are merely not showing the Facebook audience all the pieces of their identity puzzle.

The second finding from the analysis involved the participants' perceptions of Facebook as something separate than the "real world". This seemed to be the

general opinion in the empirical material and it indicated that Facebook was not seen as a complete extension from the offline context and vice versa. By separating the worlds, the users are also allowing for a greater distinction between the social identity on Facebook and the social identities offline, thus increasing the ability to construct a social identity on Facebook that is different from other social identities. However, as the analysis illustrated, keeping the worlds apart is not a simple task as the worlds are connected in many ways. Such separation between worlds is very interesting as it, to some extent, becomes a matter of choice for each user and it surely seems as if the older users of this study did not want the worlds to intertwine. Perhaps the reason for this is related to the previously discussed finding, in which it would no longer be as feasible to hide some of the parts of one's identity if the worlds were combined into one. Thus, it might be so that the users would be more uncomfortable if this were the case, since it would more or less force the participants to add certain pieces to their Facebook identity that were not meant for the online world. By actively separating between the offline and online worlds, they are maintaining a sense of control and if the worlds would be as one, this control could be reduced, or even lost.

A third empirical finding that arose from the material was the notion of social clashes. This was described as a collision between the social identities created for different social groups, which arose as the different groups gathered in the same place, Facebook. Hence, it became challenging for the participants when the social identities that had been created for various groups were forced to meet. Ways of coping with the issue were many but something that could be concluded for all was however that the users felt an urge to gain control of the situation. This was achieved by either managing multiple separate social identities on Facebook at once, or by maintaining one social identity on Facebook that was representable for all social groups accessing the profile. By doing so, it could be acknowledged that for most of the times, the social identity on Facebook was quite restricted since it had to be compatible with multiple social groups. The difficulties with one's private and professional identity was a matter that was particularly addressed during the focus groups and the discussions entailed that these two identities were in great need for distinction. This could indicate that there exists a discrepancy between the two identities that is especially large, or even larger than be-

tween other social identities. In general, the clash helps illustrate how Facebook as a platform is limiting its users in maintaining several social identities at once.

The fourth category was grounded in the effects of an observing Facebook audience where it was shown that the participants were both uncomfortable and confused in their Facebook use. This in turn, established an urge to act restrictive on the platform with the purpose of avoiding negative social consequences. This finding was striking in that it partly went against what was expected of this group in the minds of the authors. Instead of being urged on by a wish to create an improved social identity, the participants showed a greater urge to act in certain ways in order to avoid being ridiculed. The knowledge of being observed on Facebook thus had a great effect on their social identity construction and it posed as a determining factor for the participants' behavior on the platform. This particular insight could be one of the reasons for the behavior presented in the previous findings, such as separating the worlds and actively withholding aspects of one's identity on the platform. Perhaps the behavior is further strengthened by an inability to properly work the platform, in which it becomes more important to gain control and avoid negative social consequences rather than to use the platform as a chance to be outgoing and expressive.

The fifth and last finding displayed in the analysis was related to the previous finding in such a way that it too was connected to the notion of an audience. However, in this particular section, the desire was rather to create an online social identity that was favorable in different ways, while also being fair. Such strives involved finding a balance between authenticity and idealization, where certain parts of the self are being disguised, and others highlighted. This goes much in line with the statements presented in the first finding, where some parts are actively chosen and some hidden. What was interesting was also how the participants showed dislike towards others who acted the same way. In general, it was not appreciated to portray a social identity on Facebook that showed great discrepancy with how that person is perceived in other contexts. Another similarity with the first finding is the need for keeping the identity somewhat authentic, which could be interpreted as if the identity, even though idealized in certain ways, need to be extracted from the self. The fourth and the fifth finding are very similar to each other in the way that they both seem to be a result of being observed, however, the

ways of responding to this matter has taken two different directions, one restrictive and one improving one.

The overall conclusion of the findings is that the users do not fully integrate Facebook into their lives. This seem to be a result of that the participants perceive Facebook as an insecure place, where they do not feel comfortable enough to fully be themselves. This observation is especially interesting due to the fact that the group is currently growing on SNSs, and Facebook in particular, which gives the impression that they want to be active users of these sites. Thus, it seems as if this group is intrigued by Facebook, but when actually using the site, the initial romance fades due to feelings of insecurity. This may have several implications whereas one could be a decrease of use of the site or that they will remain as members but stay rather inactive. It could also be a case of time, where the initial stage is characterized by insecurity in use that will pass with time. This could further imply that the way the users of this study perceive and construct social identity on the site is ever evolving. Thus, it can be of interest to track the development of this cohort since their online behavior may be different in the future.

## **5.2 Theoretical contributions**

During the research process, this study has been guided by the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the online behavior of an older cohort, with a certain focus on the process of social identity construction on Facebook. This study has provided insights of the participants' perceptions of social identity and the construction of this process on Facebook. Moreover, the participants' perceptions have contributed to a better understanding for why certain behavior occur, thus creating a more integrated picture of their online behavior. When placing the concept of social identity in the context of an older cohort and their presence on Facebook, this study has contributed with knowledge to both sociology and social psychology. However, it is vital to understand that the results of this study are not generalizable to the population, but can give indications regarding this cohort's behavior.

As the majority of the chosen theories, related to the two fields, were created before the rampage of Internet, useful insight have emerged when placing the

theories in an online context. Goffman's (1959) metaphor of a front and back stage served as valuable when placed in an online setting, in which certain behavior of the participants, such as idealization- and the avoidance of negative social consequences, could be explained. In the same way, the relation between self and social identity of an older cohort was further deepened when placed in an online context. In particular, it was shown that the social identity on Facebook is extracted from the self but only displays certain parts, thus that the flow between online and offline spheres is restrained which affects their social identity construction.

In addition to contributing with knowledge within the areas of sociology and social psychology, this study also has implications for researchers within the field of marketing as the findings provide insights about the behavior of an important consumer group, in need of more attention. The findings showed that the behavior displayed on Facebook was underbuilt by a great amount of thought, and thus it becomes important for marketing researchers to go beyond the given behavior and tap into the minds of this consumer group to fully understand them.

By understanding a piece of the older users Facebook behavior, namely social identity construction, this study has provided new information, and a validation of findings from previous studies. To grasp how this study has related to other studies within online identity construction, these connections will now be accounted for in the following text. An area that was prominent amongst the empirical data of this study was the effect that Facebook, as a context, had on the participants' behavior. By adapting and restricting their social identity to the platform, the participants are showing that the Facebook environment limits the social identity construction process on the platform. This goes in line with Pfeil et al.'s (2009) findings where an older cohort (60+) tended to behave formal on the SNS Myspace. In general, it seems as if the older participants of this study are similar to the SNS users identified by Aresta et al. (2015), namely context- and user-driven. The sample in the study by Aresta et al. (2015) consisted of both young and older (-40) users and the majority of them belonged to the context-driven typology. However, the participants of this study seem to be a combination of both types where the participants were shown to be highly affected by the Facebook environment, but also that they, to some extent, were behaving authentic. In addition to contributing with such a combined user-typology, this study has generated



insights about an older group of people that were not accounted for in the study by Aresta et al. (2015).

An additional area of interest concerns the balance between authenticity and idealization, which was strongly emphasized in the findings of this study. The same logic was expressed by Davis (2014) who used the process of self-triangulation to describe the matter. However, it seems as if the actions taken to achieve this balance are different in the study at hand compared to Davis's (2014), as the participants do not seem to treat the offline and online worlds as synchronized. Hence, the studies are similar in that they both argue for a balance between authenticity and idealization, but differ in ways of achieving it. Furthermore, the notion of wanting to improve one's online presence was also found in the work by Zhao et al. (2008) where it was concluded that the social identities that young users presented on Facebook, was in fact a representation of socially desirable identities that differed from their identities offline. The findings of this study thus relate to Zhao et al.'s (2008) research on young users, but adds an additional dimension where the desire to remain authentic is also seen as important.

### **5.3 Practical implications**

This study's empirical material has provided several interesting insights, which can be considered as valuable for practitioners within the marketing field. Initially this study introduced arguments for why an older cohort should be acknowledged as a useful target group for practitioners, as the group not only is increasing its presence on Facebook but also because the cohort has an increased life span and strong purchasing power. This study has contributed with insights concerning older people's behavior on SNS in general, and the process of identity construction on Facebook in particular, which may serve as valuable knowledge for companies looking to develop their understanding of this consumer group on the platform. Marketers can, with a better understanding of this cohort's behavior, utilize the knowledge in order to effectively target and engage with the group on SNSs.

The empirical findings concerning how the older users of this study were striving to present a somewhat authentic representation of themselves but at the same time not wanting to be overly private may have implications for practitioners in their marketing communication. It could imply that the older users are re-

restrictive towards marketing efforts that require engagement with matters that the participants might consider as “too” private. Moreover, the insights regarding the older users’ awareness of an audience on Facebook in combination with their uncomfortable feelings towards technology generally made them restrictive in their behavior and affected their social identity on Facebook. The emphasis was thus on protecting themselves from behaving “wrongly” and by doing so, avoiding negative social consequences. This understanding can serve as useful for marketers who are interested in designing interactive marketing campaigns on Facebook, as these need to consider easy and approachable solutions, that do not adventure the older users’ uncertainty feelings.

Although the main focus of the participants was towards restricting their behavior in order to not act embarrassing, the study also provided insights that corresponded with a desire to present oneself favorably. Hence, marketing and communications efforts that make use of this desire may prove successful. Moreover, the Facebook profiles showed a great engagement in Facebook pages and groups that concerned civic matters. This was interpreted as the participants both wanted to be connected with these matters in order to appear positively and that these matters were seen as particularly interesting and of importance to the participants. This insight, in combination with that the participants did not want to be overly private on Facebook, could provide marketers with opportunities for engaging with this cohort through their interest rather than involving private matters their marketing efforts.

#### **5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future research**

One of the limitations of this study that could be taken into consideration in future research within online social identity is the demographical characteristics of the sample. The participants of the focus groups were rather skew in gender distribution and they were not selected with the purpose to represent a wide range of users. Hence, a potential direction for future research could be to investigate social identity construction on Facebook with a more demographically distributed sample where such factors would be especially accounted for in the analysis. By doing so, insights regarding how females and males differ in various areas such as identity construction, can be obtained.

Another limitation of this study was that the research process was rather short and concise due to time constraints. Future research could, if possible, take a more longitudinal approach and go deeper in investigating changes in social identity perception and construction over time. Moreover, as this study had a more general outlook on Facebook users above 55 years of age, it would be interesting to divide participants into categories based on time of use, an insight extracted from the focus group discussions. By comparing different types of users such as beginners and experienced users, one can see if social identity construction differs amongst these groups.

The structure of this study have had many advantages, however, it has not included an analysis of the Facebook profiles of the participants of the focus groups. Instead, the analyzed profiles were chosen to be other users with the aim of extracting information from a larger group of people. It would thus be interesting for future research to also include such an element, in order to see if any additional information could be found when observing the focus group participants' behavior on the social networking site. Furthermore, as this research have used a qualitative approach, a fruitful addition to the current body of knowledge about older cohorts and their social identity on Facebook, would be to also include quantitative elements such as content analysis of the profiles. This could result in a greater ability to generalize the findings compared to this study, which have only been able to give insights about the behavior of an older cohort.

As the last concluding words, the authors behind this study hope that they have contributed to an increased interest for the generational cohort investigated in this thesis, and that future researchers will be inspired to further investigate older generations' development on SNSs.

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# Appendices

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## **Appendix A**

### **Theme 1: Engagements**

- Why do you use Facebook?
- What do you usually do when you use Facebook?
- When you are to share something on Facebook, is this thought through or more spontaneous? How do you resonate about this? Any examples?
- Is there anything you would do on Facebook?
- How personal are you on Facebook? What do you share? How can this be?
- Who are in your friends list on Facebook? What kind of relation do you have to these people?

### **Theme 2: Impression management**

- The person you are on Facebook, is that you? What are your thoughts on this?
- How do you experience that other people in your age group behave and present themselves on Facebook?
- Is there any difference between who you are on Facebook compared to in real life? In what way is there a difference?
- Do you care about what others think about you? How important is it to be perceived “right”?
- How do you/others do in order to mirror yourself on Facebook?

## Appendix B

### FOCUS GROUP 15-16/4-2015

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

I HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF THE PURPOSE OF BOTH THE FOCUS GROUP AND THE STUDY

I AM BORN 1965 OR EARLIER

I HAVE A FACEBOOK ACCOUNT

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT MY PARTICIPATION IS OPTIONAL AND THAT I AM FREE TO LEAVE AT ANY GIVEN TIME

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE MATERIAL PRODUCED IN THIS ROOM WILL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL AND THAT I WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS THROUGH OUT THE PROCESS OF THE STUDY AS WELL AS IN THE FINAL RESULT

I APPROVE THAT THIS FOCUS GROUP SESSION WILL BE AUDIO RECORDED

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_