

LUKAS BLINKA

The “good” and the “bad” of the internet:
Studying subjective well-being as an
outcome of young people’s online practices



DISSERTATIONES DE MEDIIS ET COMMUNICATIONIBUS
UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

20

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Studying subjective well-being as an
outcome of young people's online practices



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Dissertation accepted for the commencement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (in Media and Communication) on June 26, 2013, by the Council of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Education, University of Tartu.

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Commencement: October 28, 2013, at 10.00.

The publication of this dissertation is granted by the Institute of Journalism, Communication and Information Studies, University of Tartu, and by the Doctoral School of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences created under auspices of European Social Fund.



European Union
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ISSN 1406–2313
ISBN 978–9949–32–381–4 (Print)
ISBN 978–9949–32–382–1 (PDF)

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Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus
www.tyk.ee

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation is based on the following original publications which are en-
listed in a chronological order and will be referred to in the dissertation with re-
spective Roman numerals.

- I **Blinka, L., & Šmahel, D.** (2009). Fourteen is fourteen and a girl is a girl: Validating the identity of adolescent bloggers. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(6), 735-739.
- II **Blinka, L., Subrahmanyam, K., Šmahel, D., & Seganti, F.R.** (2012). Differences in the teen blogosphere: Insights from a content analysis of English- and Czech-language weblogs. *Young*, 20(3), 277–296.
- III **Blinka, L., & Šmahel, D.** (2011). Predictors of adolescents' excessive internet use: A comparison across European countries. 15th European Conference on Developmental Psychology (337–341). Medimond.
- IV Šmahel, D., & **Blinka, L.** (2012). Excessive internet use among European children. In S. Livingstone, L. Haddon, A. Görzig (Eds.) *Children, risk and safety on the internet* (191–203). Bristol: The Policy Press.
- V Kalmus, V., Siibak, A., & **Blinka, L.** (2013 – in press). Internet and child well-being. In A. Ben-Arieh, F. Casas, I. Frønes, J.E. Korbin (Eds.) *Handbook of child well-being: Theories, methods and policies in global perspective* (2093–2133). Dordrecht: Springer.
- VI Kalmus, V., **Blinka, L., & Ólafsson, K.** (2013 – in press). Does it matter what mama says: Evaluating the role of parental mediation in European adolescents' excessive Internet use. *Children & Society*.

Author's contribution

Study I: The author was dominantly responsible for all the aspects of this article (including data collection, writing the theoretical, methodological and discussion parts) except for the analysis in which the author of the thesis partially participated.

Study II: The author was dominantly responsible for nearly all the aspects of the article – the data collection of the Czech part of the sample, data analysis, writing the theoretical, methodological and discussion part of the article.

Study III: The role of the author was dominant in writing of this article. The analysed data were taken from the EU Kids Online II project, in which the

author participated in conceptualization of the excessive Internet use scale and partially in verification of the Czech version of the survey.

Study IV: The author was partially involved in all the aspects of conceptualization and writing of this article. His role was bigger in writing the theoretical and discussion parts. The analysed data were taken from the EU Kids Online II project.

Study V: The author was responsible for writing parts 2 (Physical well-being and the Internet), 3 (Psychological well-being and the Internet), and 4 (Social well-being and the Internet).

Study VI: The author was partially involved in conceptualization of the article and in writing the theoretical, methodological and discussion parts of it. The analysed data were taken from the EU Kids Online II project.

INTRODUCTION

“For some children under some conditions some television is harmful. For other children under the same conditions or for the same children under other conditions it may be beneficial. For most children under most conditions, most television is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial.” (Schramm, Lyle & Parker, 1961)

This quote is taken from a publication which is half a century old. Although many might dismiss it as a flippant and rather humorous assessment, than the result of serious research, the quote has a certain appeal. It has been used many times over the decades by various media studies and scholars (recently for example by Rodman & Fry, 2009 and Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) and for several purposes – first, to document that the media can have mixed effects, second, that the effects are generally neither negligible nor powerful, and third, that the effects are contextual. Last but not least, although the quote describes the state of contemporary research concerning the effects of television on aggressive behaviour in children (as the television was a new and dominant medium of that time), nowadays we face a similar situation with the Internet.

Echoing the statement I started with, this thesis is based on the assumption that certain Internet applications can influence certain adolescents in a certain way. **The present thesis seeks to study the effects the Internet, or the manner in which it is used, may have on the well-being of contemporary adolescents.** In the theoretical section, titled "Setting the problem", I examine and describe the concept of well-being, in regards to the target group that is adolescents. Most importantly, both the “who” (the target group) and the “what” (well-being) will be considered primarily in relation to the medium, the Internet. Such relation will be framed by media effect theories. Using the co-construction model (Greenfield, 1984; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011), I will argue that the online environment serves primarily as an extension of the everyday lives of contemporary youth rather than a distinct place in the sense of norms, values, content, and behaviours. Also, I adopt a point of view that acknowledges the active role of media users, as opposed to assuming that users are passively affected by the medium. Young people will be shown as actively managing their well-being in an online environment, and not being disconnected from their normal offline lives. I will approach well-being from a multidimensional (Allardt, 1993) and, even more importantly, subjective and eudaimonic (Ryff, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2001) point of view, in which I will accent the effects caused by the media usage as an experience of both the positive and negative. The subjective and psychological well-being directly echoes throughout **Studies I, II, III, IV and VI** – on the phenomena of blogging and excessive Internet use. Theoretically, the thesis is predominantly built upon a cross-section of two fields – media studies (media effects) and social psychology (subjective well-being).

In the “Methods” section, the empirical studies which make up the corpus of the thesis will be introduced in more detail. This part includes the sample

procedures and sample descriptions, the measures used and their limitations. The “Findings” section then presents the results of those studies which are relevant in answering the research questions of this thesis. In the “Discussion” section, I elaborate further on the obtained results and will propose a model which may help in understanding the pathways which run between well-being and Internet usage. Finally, I will close the cover article by summarizing the results in “Conclusions”.

The corpus of the thesis is based on six articles, five empirical and one theoretical. Two of the empirical papers, **Studies I** and **II**, focus on blogging as a specific online praxis, already recognized in prior research as potentially being influential on the identity of its users (see Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011 for an overview), e.g. by providing a technologically useful playground for identity construction, presentation, and negotiation. These studies try to answer how this specific application is being used and what role it may play in the identity construction of youths aged from 13 to 17 years. The second part of the corpus, represented by **Studies III**, **IV**, and **VI**, focuses on the question of which conditions may lead to overuse and compulsive use of the Internet. These studies involve respondents aged from 11 to 16 in the EU Kids Online II survey, an extensive and unique project of pan-European comparison of children’s online practices (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson, 2011)¹. **Studies II**, **III**, and partially **V** and **VI** touch upon the difficulties of international comparisons – although the Internet is a globalized phenomenon, the way it is being used and with what consequences is still culturally and nationally specific; the application of results obtained in one country to another country should be considered with caution. Thus, I will also address this aspect. **Study V** is a theoretical paper reviewing the state of knowledge on the relationship between children’s well-being and the Internet.

¹ Additional information and reports are available at eukidsonline.net.

I. SETTING THE PROBLEM

The Internet is a new medium which has been rapidly evolving during the last decade and a half, and it has especially dominated the life of modern youth². Teenagers are the most prominent group of Internet users – the majority of European youth use the Internet on a daily basis; on average spending an hour and a half a day online (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson, 2011). Some scholars have even started to use terms like the “Net generation” (Tapscott, 1998) and “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) in reference to the fact that modern teenagers are the first generation to grow up in the digital era (and despite the fact that these terms have their own limitations, as noted, for example, by Kalmus, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Runnel & Siibak, 2009; Helsper & Eynon, 2010).

The role of media in adolescence has been constantly increasing over the past decades. This can be characterized by the rise of so-called bedroom culture. Livingstone (2007) points out that youths no longer spend much of their leisure time outdoors. At the same time, homes are becoming media-rich – the era of the one-television family has come to an end as myriad forms of media have proliferated in the household. Adolescents turn to their bedroom as a secure and very personal space – a place where they can take refuge from their families, where they can bring their friends and, most importantly, a place where they can access the media they like and they can access it alone. From the family’s perspective, the bedroom culture may seem isolating and overly obsessed with media consumption (Livingstone, 2007). Moreover, as it has been argued by Livingstone and Bober (2005) who brought the term *reverse socialization*, the younger members are usually those with the most expertise in media usage within their families³.

² The age range studied in this thesis is between 11 and 17 years, which fits the range usually labelled as adolescence in developmental psychology. Occasionally, individuals in this age range are referred to as youths, teenagers, and other variations of these terms. In the following part of the thesis, as well as in the research papers, these three terms – adolescents, youths, and teenagers – are used synonymously. As the basic proposition I adopt from developmental psychology is that adolescence is qualitatively and quantitatively distinct from previous and later stages of human development, I will not use the term “children”, as this term is too broad.

³ Mesch and Talmud (2010) argue that internet usage is a cause of increased family tension – the time spent with family members is being displaced by time spent online. While parents expect that technology should be used primarily for educational purposes, adolescents use it mainly for entertainment and communication with their peers. Parental monitoring of online activities may be taken with discomfort as it could challenge adolescents’ autonomy (Mesch & Talmud, 2010). Additionally, as adolescents are typically more acquainted with the Internet and more proficient at using computers, and this expertise threatens and reverses the traditional hierarchy – in computer-related matters, parents might be forced to seek guidance from their children, which further increases family tensions (Kalmus, 2007).

It is, perhaps, this perception which has attracted so many concerns about the influence of the Internet on adolescents in particular. Due to the "newness" of the medium, the only partially settled norms surrounding usage, and the unclear effects on children and their development, this topic has captivated the attention of both researchers and the general public. Kaltiala-Heino and Rimpela (2004) capture broad concerns that adolescence is a formative period for development⁴, and that misuse of the Internet during adolescence may be more harmful than in the later periods of life.

As Mesch and Talmud (2010) add, these changes in family organization are not caused by the Internet, or at least not exclusively. In characterizing modern society, adjectives like "information," "post-industrial," "network" and the like are being used, emphasizing the important but rather symbolic role digital media plays. The present thesis adopts this framework which rejects technological determinism (as for example by Tapscott, 1998 and Prensky, 2001), and instead highlights the role of the totality of contextual factors (**Study V**) in influencing the well-being of contemporary adolescents.

I.1 Well-being

Well-being is a theoretical construct used in research to cover the question of "what constitutes the good life" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 142). Recently, the importance of studying well-being as one of the most important indicators of personal and societal prosperity was acknowledged, for example by the OECD or UNICEF. One of the many definitions of well-being could be as follows: *good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences* (OECD, 2013, p. 10).

However, there is no generally accepted consensus in how to conceptualize and measure the phenomenon. One approach perceives well-being as a multi-dimensional construct. In the present thesis this multidimensionality is built mostly upon the work of Finnish sociologist Erik Allardt. He, using the *basic needs approach* (Galtung, 1980, cited in Allardt, 1993, p. 108), distinguishes three classes of well-being indicators (see **Study V**). These are *having* (material conditions), *loving* (interpersonal conditions), and *being* (personal development). It is the fulfilment of needs within these three areas that according to Allardt (1993) promotes well-being.

At the same time, well-being is often understood as being equal to happiness. In such a hedonistic view, the focus is on studying the conditions in which

⁴ Along with these physical and physiological changes, the adolescent individual faces extreme cognitive, emotional, and social stress, sometimes resulting in problematic behaviour (in comparison to previous life stages). A popular phrase labels adolescence as a period of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904, cited in Goossens, 2008). In fact, adolescence is often seen as a period of radical mood swings, risk taking, increased family tension, and even delinquency (Goossens, 2008).

pleasure is maximized and unpleasant effects minimized (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Happiness and well-being is thus characterized as an absence of negative feelings, and in research it is often measured negatively – the more a person scores in negative measures (for example in depression), the lower his/her well-being is, and vice versa.

However, in case of multidimensional constructs of well-being, the conceptualization follows the ancient Greek term of *eudaimonia* as a predecessor of the term well-being. The *eu* (good) and *daimon* (spirit) refers to the excellence of human spirit, to one's true potential (Waterman, 1984, cited in Ryff, 1989, p. 1070). Bradburn (1969) defines such well-being as a balance or equilibrium between positive and negative effects. At the same time, positive and negative aspects are not understood as one polarized line but as a two separate and distinct dimensions. To summarize, the basic characteristic of hedonic approach – usually labelled as subjective well-being – is to study *what is pleasurable to do*, while the (multidimensional) eudaimonic approach – often labelled as psychological well-being – studies *what is worth doing*.

If I relate subjective and psychological well-being⁵ to the described concept created by Allardt, it covers mostly the level of *being* and partially *loving*. In a self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2001), psychological well-being is described as the fulfilment of three basic needs: *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness*. Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes (1995) conceptualized psychological well-being as consisting of six dimensions: *self-acceptance*, *relations with others*, *autonomy*, *environmental mastery*, *purpose in life*, and *personal growth*. Interestingly, these components of subjective/psychological well-being noticeably cover adolescents' developmental tasks or adolescent's identity formation, as defined by Erikson (1968) and Havighurst (1972)⁶.

⁵ It must be noted that there is a terminological mix-up concerning these two terms. In Allardt's conceptualization, 'subjective well-being' refers to non-objective indicators (personal assessments or evaluations). In case of well-being which is connected to personal identity, when the hedonic approach is applied, the term 'subjective well-being' is used (Diener, 1984), while 'psychological well-being' is used in case of the eudaimonic approach (Ryff, 1998). In the present thesis, as the subjective and psychological well-being sometimes supplement and overlap rather than contradict each other, the term subjective/psychological well-being is used, when both are true and valid. They are used separately when only one is applicable. Contemporarily, the adjective "subjective" is being used as a cover term for all three mentioned approaches – evaluations, hedonic and eudaimonic – for example by OECD (2013) – hence it was adopted by the title of the thesis in this general meaning, and also used more concretely in the text.

⁶ Erik Erikson (1968) portrays adolescence mainly as a period of identity development, as the transition from childhood into teenage life is framed by discontinuity, or the rejection and revision of most of what formed one's personality in previous life stages. Unlike previous stages, which are characterized by what the individual passively experiences, now the adolescent comes into the fore as an actor. Identity formation could be roughly explained as a constant attempt to answer the question: "Who am I?" In answering it, adolescents primarily turn to peer relationships, and

Some researchers and theorists noted that the concept of well-being, and the concept of subjective/psychological well-being in particular, are culturally rooted and culturally biased (Diener & Diener, 1995; Christopher, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001). It is the aspects of normativity and morality which play a crucial role here – the way some praxis and some outcomes are labelled as good and healthy in one culture can be different in another one (Christopher, 1999). The notion and understanding of autonomy and personal identity in individualistic cultures is different from collectivistic ones (Ryan & Deci, 2001). For example, positive self-esteem is a very important indicator of well-being. But its role was reported to be higher in countries with an individualistic culture, while the importance of materialistic needs was higher in countries with collectivistic cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995). Thus, as stated by Ryan and Deci (2001), studying well-being inherently raises cultural questions.

1.2 Internet use and well-being

Within **Study V**, I will propose, following the Allardt's (1993) concept of having-loving-being, that the influence of the Internet upon the well-being of youth should be approached in a complex manner. On the level of *having*, it is not only the problem of having access at all, but also having personal access enabling creative use of the medium. The Internet is also an arena for advertising and promoting consumerism. Moreover, Internet usage has certain effects on the physical well-being of its users. On the level of *loving*, it is the quantity and quality of relationships influenced by the Internet. The youth use the medium mainly for communication purposes and enlarging and maintaining their social circle. The level of *being* influences identity construction, creativity, empowerment and digital literacy. As an overview, Table 1 presents examples of how the various dimensions of well-being (in Allard's conceptualization) are being reflected in the well-being of young Internet users. The representative outcomes are described in more details by **Study V**.

the importance of family diminishes. A sense of self is created in relation to one's peers.

Havighurst (1972) discusses so-called "developmental tasks" that must be completed by an individual in order to cope with the challenges he or she will face during later developmental stages. The developmental tasks faced by adolescents primarily concern the interconnected spheres of relationships, sexuality, and identity – adolescents must establish emotional independence from their families, build new forms of relationships with their peers (including sexual relationships), develop and accept a gendered role for themselves, and accept and adopt socially approved sets of behaviours.

Table 1: Multidimensional concept of well-being as related to Internet use.

Dimension	Subfield	Representative Outcomes
HAVING	access & ownership	digital inclusion & exclusion, inequalities reinforcement
	consumerism & commercialization	losing money in gaming & gambling, advertising effects (wrong body image, substances advertisements)
	physical health	access to health information, repetitive strain injuries, inadequate sleep patterns
LOVING	attachment to family	decreased time spent with family members, increased family tension
	peers and friends attachment	enlarging social capital, cyberbullying
	new relationships love & romance	finding similar others, online harassment sexting, sexual solicitation
BEING	education	multitasking, exposure to incorrect or harmful information
	digital literacy & creativity	online content creation
	self-formation and self-expression	self-disclosure, anonymity
	sense of empowerment	youth as expert digital media users, self-efficacy, civic engagement
	entertainment	mood management, excessive use

The border between positive and negative outcomes is often blurred and depends on the context or the viewer. For example, the generally accepted *rich get richer and poor get poorer hypothesis* has showed that the youth with more capital (either social, economic or cultural) tend to benefit more from Internet usage and thus the Internet tends to reinforce the inequalities. The negative and positive outcomes also go across the components of *having-loving-being*. For example, having one' own personal computer may bring along prestige (having), creativity and digital literacy (being) and autonomy and intimate communication with peers (loving), while, at the same time, jeopardize family communications (loving).

It should be noted that the fulfilment of most of the basic needs of adolescents still depends on their parents – they usually provide the very material conditions needed to connect to the Internet. Moreover, parental mediation may

play a crucial role in helping youngsters in coping with an uneasy situation they faced online as well as in empowering their children through making use of on-line opportunities – both may happen in the form of setting limits, controlling, active support or even neglecting, etc. (Eastin, Greenberg & Hofschire, 2006; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

Rodman and Fry (2009) propose a model poetically inspired by Aristotle's "golden mean" – they claim that both positive and negative effects of media use are present, but there is a mid-point between the extremes in internet use in which benefits are maximized. The EU Kids Online model (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012) presents a similar idea – usage (how the Internet is being used) and activities (what the children do online) meet with opportunities/risks (what factors shape the experience) and benefits/harm (what the outcomes actually are). Only few activities can be described as purely positive or negative – rather, a majority of activities contain both positive and negative elements (for example, a certain amount of risk could foster resilience in a young individual).

Although the above mentioned interpretations are fostered mostly by the eudaimonic approach, the hedonic one is needed to get a full scope of well-being in relation to young people's media use. It has been shown that media choice and usage is affected by the users' mood which, in turn, influences usage. Moreover, media use can serve as a form of escapism from problematic life events or situations. In general, the reason for usage of certain media is led by enjoyment and entertainment (Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld, 2004; Tamborini et al., 2011; Reinecke & Vorderer, 2013).

Except for the theoretical **Study V** focusing on the broad influence of the medium on well-being, two other studies (**I** and **II**) focus on blogging and three other on excessive Internet use (**III**, **IV** and **VI**). For framing these studies, I chose a narrower concept of well-being, sometimes labelled as subjective (Diener, 1984) or psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). In the following part of the theoretical overview, I will introduce the concept and relate it to the young people's Internet use. In the following two examples, I will illustrate the positive and the negative role of the Internet in youth identity formation. Those examples are chosen in congruence of the empirical studies of this thesis.

Internet: the good. A case of blogging

Weblogs (or blogs) are typically defined as web pages usually in the form of a personal diary. Blogs can store personal experiences, interests, creative works, thoughts and feelings for long periods of time – they can help build personal narratives and a feeling of self-coherence (Schmitt, Dayanim & Matthias, 2008). At the same time, the public nature of blog posts allows others to read and provide feedback. Thus, blogging may not be only a personal tool but a ritual of exchanging information between a blogger and the audience of his/her blog (van Dijck, 2004). As stated by Schmitt and colleagues (2008), broader online social communities where one can communicate also with people other than one's usual friends provide additional opportunities for testing and forming one's own identity. The influence of blogging on positive subjective well-being

through the process of self-disclosure has been stated in the literature (e.g. Ko & Kua, 2008). However, broader influence can be expected, not only through social networking – positive effects may be achieved via increasing digital literacy, creative expressions, etc. As such, keeping a personal blog may foster the fulfilment of all the key needs of psychological well-being: *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness* (Ryan & Deci, 2001). However, some potential risks must be acknowledged. The fact that teens communicate with their friends and schoolmates and the fact they access the Internet at home, for instance in their bedrooms, can lead to an overestimated feelings of security and familiarity that young people often report (boyd, 2008; Livingstone, 2002), which put them at the risk of presenting too much of their personal and intimate information and its subsequent misuse by others.

Internet: the bad. A case of excessive use

The way youth use this medium and incorporate it into their lives often leads to the question of whether it is too much. According to the *displacement hypothesis*, the use of the Internet can be on the expense of other activities – whether it is time spent with family, natural offline interactions with peers, structured afterschool activities, physical activities etc. This may lead to the deterioration of social ties and school results, or may separate an individual from the natural experience he/she should obtain at that age in general (Beard, 2010). A certain portion of youth has been showed to be unable to control the time they spend online and to have developing signs of pathological use (Beard, 2010), thus even an *Internet addiction hypothesis* has been proposed (Griffiths, 2000). However, it is not clear to what extent the Internet is a mediator or a cause of the pathology. The Internet offers a large space for relief and escape from everyday problems via mood management, or for replacing deficiencies in needs fulfilment, as expected by the *withdrawal hypothesis* (Romer, Bagdasarov & More, 2013). But ritualized and extensive use may lead to feelings of guilt and frustrations and thus further worsen a life situation (Reinecke & Vorderer, 2013). In fact, lower self-esteem, depression and psychosocial distress in general are often associated with excessive Internet use (see Subrahmanya and Smahel, 2011 for an overview).

1.3 Media effects framework of youth well-being

While acknowledging the role which the Internet usage may play in the well-being of individuals, it must be noted that such assumption generally adheres to theories about media effects. Thus, studying well-being as a media usage outcome is proposed in this thesis as similar to media effects.

In a traditional media effect model, it is expected that media influences the individual. Empirically, the results obtained through the media effect model are of uncertain value, and it cannot be said that the model has been entirely justified – as summarized by Rodman and Fry (2009), sometimes the effects are

perceived as large, as in the Pay Fund studies conducted in the late 1920s; sometimes as minimal, as Lazarsfeld and his colleagues conclude; and sometimes as mixed and contextual, as proposed by Schramm. However, both theoretical and empirical studies concentrate on mass communication or “traditional media,” such as film and television. In all of these cases, the effects are meant to be dominantly one-directional – going from the medium to the user. Thus, media are seen as external to the user and the user is seen as a more-or-less passive recipient.

Valkenburg and Peter (2013) contend that in the case of new (digital) media, the message has neither a clear transmitter nor receiver. Rather, the effects are self-generated. The effect depends on how the medium is being used – for example, what content was created by the user, how this content affected them, what feedback they received from the audience and, since the society is being increasingly media-saturated, the choice of media comes to a fore as well (ibid).

The uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974) looks at media effects from the perspective of the user. It is based on the assumption that different people use media for different purposes. It is the active media consumer who chooses the media and the way content is interpreted and integrated into one’s life – whether it is through information seeking, socializing, entertainment, escapism, and so on. Thus, it is the fulfilment of certain needs which is a motive for media consumption. And it is the classification of needs and their fulfilment where the gratification and well-being meet and intersect. However, the normative aspect of psychological well-being (Christopher, 1999) is not highlighted in the uses and gratifications theory – rather the gratification consists of a certain hedonic aspect which makes it closer to a concept of subjective well-being (which, on the other hand, lacks needs classification and framing). This makes well-being and gratification significantly overlapping, but yet not completely synonymous. However, I propose the usefulness of the uses and gratifications theory in studying well-being of young Internet users – both gratification and well-being can be understood as 1) *needs*, 2) *motivations* for media usage in search of fulfilment of those needs, and 3) *media outcomes* reached by the media usage.

Co-construction model of youth media use

What makes the studied age group specific is the fact that the needs they face arise from the characteristics of this age period (c.f. above mentioned theories of Erikson, 1968 and Havighurst, 1972). To reflect this, Greenfield (1984) proposed a co-construction model, which specifically focuses on how technology usage is linked to developmental processes and needs. The user, a young individual, is seen as an active and creative participant – for example, which application the user chooses, how it is adapted to the user’s personal preferences, and what content is created. The interactive features of the Internet allow users to construct and co-construct their online environments by using available tools in ways that their designers have not fully anticipated. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that internet users create a new context, within which norms are

formed and shared with other users (Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). What adolescents seek online is usually the same as what they seek in their everyday environment. At first glance, adolescents' main use of the Internet is to communicate with their peers, but looking closer, we see many other functions – including accomplishing the developmental tasks related to sexuality, intimacy, autonomy, gender roles, and identity in general. Online and offline worlds are not understood as disconnected, but rather as interwoven. The dissociated dichotomy of real and virtual is thus rejected, although it still has its importance in distinguishing between online and offline worlds (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2010).

The co-construction model is a specific version of uses and gratifications theory and thus both shares some of its advantages and disadvantages. Although the theory is certainly an improvement of the one-directional models of media effects, it could be criticized for overestimating the individual's power and freedom of choice. Also, both the co-construction and the uses and gratifications theories are empirical and only vaguely theoretically articulated. The main adopted ideas for my thesis are 1) the importance of the activity of the media user and 2) inseparability of the outcomes from the way the user approaches the medium.

I.4 Research questions

As the term “well-being” is rather broad and encompasses many individual and social aspects, this thesis focuses specifically on personal development and individual activity. The emergence and development of personal identity is one of the key aspects of teenage life. From its inception, it has been claimed that the Internet provides broad possibilities for reconstructing and experimenting with one's own identity, which may further attract and influence adolescents. Because psychological well-being involves the development and expression of a coherent identity which is, at the same time, positively acknowledged by others, and since within the context of co-construction theory the emphasis is on “how the technology is being used” rather than “what the effects are,” the first research question is:

How do contemporary adolescents use the Internet – particularly blogs – to express and negotiate identity? This issue will be addressed by **Studies I and II**, which explore the way personal online diaries, so-called “weblogs,” are being used to construct personal identities.

The Internet can be understood as a system of rewards, which serves to fulfil many (not only developmental) needs. According to several hypotheses, such as the time displacement hypothesis and Internet addiction hypothesis, some individuals spend too much time online at the expense of “natural” social ties, hobbies, etc., and thus excessive internet usage has a negative impact on their well-being. My next research question is, therefore:

What factors are related to excessive Internet use among teenagers? This issue will be addressed in Studies III, IV and VI, and partially in the theoretical Study V.

As it has been described, well-being is a normative concept and as such is culture-specific. The Internet has been labelled as a global phenomenon. But the knowledge about the effects of the Internet is often limited to the English-speaking and the Western (European) world, and even in these situations we can find many national differences. Thus, the final question is **to what extent is the Internet's effect on well-being moderated by users' local/national contexts?**

This question is addressed by **Studies II and III** and partially **IV and VI**.

2. METHODOLOGY

Various methods have been used to answer the research questions. The quantitative approach was used predominantly. More precisely, a small scale survey with face to face verification of answers (**Study I**), quantitative content analysis (**Study II**) and a large scale pan-European survey (**Studies III, IV and VI**) were used. **Study V** was a theoretical work based on literature.

Small scale research survey with verification of answers

For this study, I randomly selected 120 last updated blogs from the three largest blog servers in the Czech Republic. The selection criteria included: bloggers were aged between 13 and 17 years, the blogs had to exist for at least 3 months. The blog writers were then contacted via their emails or, if they did not respond, via their blogs or an instant messenger. The participants were introduced to the research goal and process and were asked to fill in the online questionnaire truthfully. They were also notified that there would be 12 prizes (e.g. mp3 players) for participants – randomly selected winners would receive their prize only if their answers in the questionnaire were true (regardless of their truthfulness in the blogs themselves), which would be verified during personal meetings. Thus, this study had two parts – first was data collection via the online questionnaire and the second was face to face meetings.

Out of the 120 invitations sent, 112 participants (90% girls, mean age 14.7 years) actually responded and filled in the questionnaire (93% return rate). In the questionnaire the participants were asked about their real-life identity (age and sex) and included seven questions about the frequency of lying about important subjects and also the usual topics teenagers blog about. Specifically, participants were asked whether they had lied about partnership, family situation, appearance, sexual experiences, skills, interests, and school. A 4-point Likert-type scale was used.

Out of the 12 contacted bloggers who were randomly chosen and had filled in the online questionnaire, 10 responded and received a prize. During the meetings, some basic information (age, domicile) were verified. Two remaining participants were contacted by phone; they tried to confirm their identity but failed to come to the meeting.

The advantage of this study was the fact that the sample was not self-selected. As shown by Kraut et al. (2003), especially the online-based self-selected samples face limitations in the form of false answers, mainly due to the anonymous nature of the medium. Since the focus of the study was to discover the level of deception, I chose the sample based on pre-selected criteria. Also, it was essential to measure the response rate, since its low level would radically devalue the results and the response rate in self-selected samples is very difficult to measure. The response rate was high in both parts of the study. The main limitation of the study came from the second part of the study – except for very basic information such as gender and age, it was impossible to validate all the responses in the survey. Thus the second part served more as a “motivation”

for respondents to be more honest in the survey rather than a real evaluation of their responses.

Large scale (international) survey research

The EU Kids Online II project (2009-11) funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme, aimed to enhance the knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies. Adopting an approach that is child-centred, comparative, critical and contextual, EU Kids Online II has designed and conducted a major quantitative survey of the experience of 9-16 year olds with respect to online use, risk and safety in 25 European countries (Görzig, 2012). Special attention was paid to ensure that the differences between countries were not caused by the methodology used. To minimise biases and maximise equivalence (van de Vijver & Leung, 2011), several a priori procedures were used (Görzig, 2012). The questionnaire, translated and back-translated from English into 24 languages (I played a role in ensuring the correctness of the translation to Czech), underwent first cognitive testing and then pilot testing to enhance comprehensibility. Several items and scales were supported by country-specific examples and culture-specific concepts. Data collection was adapted to best national practices and was conducted by a single agency employing specially trained interviewers in all 25 countries. Interviews took place during spring and summer 2010 in children's homes. They were conducted face to face and were supplemented with private questionnaires for sensitive questions, including those on excessive Internet use. Specifically, 25,142 children (50% girls) were interviewed together with their parents. The EU Kids Online II survey investigated key online risks ranging from pornography, through bullying, receiving sexual messages, contact with people not known face to face, offline meetings with online contacts, to potentially harmful user-generated content and personal data misuse.

The key concept (and the dependent variable) used in **Studies III, IV and VI** in this dissertation is Excessive Internet Use. I also participated in the creation of the scale itself. Questions about excessive Internet use were only given to children aged from 11 to 16 and thus the analysis covered 18,709 Internet users (9,357 girls). The EIU index was created to cover five dimensions of Internet addiction derived by Griffiths (2000) based on the concept of behavioural addiction. The dimensions and their indicators are: Salience – *I have gone without eating or sleeping because of the Internet*; Significant mood changes or withdrawal symptoms – *I have felt bothered when I cannot be on the Internet*; Tolerance – *I have caught myself surfing when I am not really interested*; Relapse and reinstatement – *I have tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the Internet*; Conflicts in one's life – *I have spent less time than I should with either family, friends or doing schoolwork because of time I spent on the Internet*. We created the EIU index as the mean value of the five items (Cronbach's alpha is 0.77 for the overall sample, ranging from .64 in the Netherlands to 0.84 in Turkey). The EIU index ranges from 1 to 4.

Additionally to the Excessive Internet Use Scale, several other variables and scales were used in studies from which the dissertation is comprised. In **Study III** *emotional problems* (5 items); *conduct problems* (5 items); *sensation seeking* (2 items); *exposure to pornographic material online* were used. Study **IV** included *psychological difficulties* (19 items), and *self-efficacy* (10). *Risky off-line behaviour* (5 items), *sensation seeking* (2 items), *meeting online strangers*, *cyberbullying (aggressor)* and *sexting* were a part of both **studies III** and **IV**. Questions about parental involvement in the Internet use of children were asked in **study VI** – *active involvement in the child’s Internet use* (9 items); *restrictive mediation* (6 items); *monitoring and technical solutions* (4 items), plus questions about *digital literacy and safety skills* (8 items); *scope of online activities* (17 items), and one item asking whether children experienced something upsetting on the Internet; the age the child began using the Internet; parental daily Internet use. *Age, gender and time spent online* were included as control measures in all the studies (**Studies III, IV** and **VI**).

Despite our best efforts to minimize biases through a vast number of techniques applied (e.g. translations and back-translations, several steps in cognitive testing, etc.; – see Görzig, 2012 for more information), some limitations still remain. The response-rates vary significantly between countries, implying cultural influence. Also, the meanings of subjective responses were probably not equal across the countries and languages. In such cases, correction for measurement errors would be helpful, unfortunately this has not been done before studies III, IV and VI were submitted or published. Another set of limitations came from the fact the data are “rich in sample but poor in measures”. Many scales were shortened due to cognitive testing and, more significantly, due to space limitations. As an example, the multidimensional construction of sensation seeking was reduced to two items only. The key dependent variable, excessive Internet use scale, was also reduced to five items – although all important components of the scale were present, the shorter version allowed only the usage of the scale as an index. Another limitation comes from the sample size – thanks to its extensiveness, many obtained results were statistically significant, but the effect sizes are often very small. The results thus should be read with caution.

Quantitative content analysis

This research involved two separate collections of data – one took place in the U.S. and one in the Czech Republic. The criteria for sampling were as follows – the blog should be maintained by a youth aged 14–17; it should be maintained for at least three months; there should be at least 5 blog entries during the last 4 months; and only blogs written in English for the U.S. blogosphere and in Czech for the Czech blogosphere were chosen. Once these criteria were identified, the last three entries from each blog were downloaded for the analysis. The American sample consisted of 558 blog entries (from 186 blogs) which were downloaded from 9 blog hosting sites. The Czech sample consisted of 480 blog entries (from 160 blogs) which were downloaded from 3 blog hosting sites.

The coding process was first done in the U.S. and then in the Czech Republic. Two independent coders coded the entries in both countries during the process. The first round of coding was connected to the creation of codes and the creation of operational definitions. The second step was to assess inter-rater reliability. Both coders in each country coded 60 entries from the final sample. The final kappa coefficient was between 0.77 and 1.00 in case of the US blogs and 0.74 and 1.00 in case of the Czech blogs. Subsequently, the remaining entries were coded separately, with each coder coding half the sample. Since the Czech study followed after the U.S. study, Czech coders also had to verify that they understood the operational definitions in the same way as the American coders. Both Czech coders coded 60 entries from the U.S. blogosphere, the Kappa coefficient was between 0.70 and 1.00. The inter-rater reliability ensured that the coding was done in the same way in both countries, and ensured that the results were comparable.

Basic demographic and contact information (age, gender, personal pictures, duration of blogging, address, email, IM number, phone number, link to other personal webpages) were obtained from the profiles of the blog writers. The mean self-declared age of Czech adolescents was 14.94 years ($SD = 1.04$), and the mean self-declared age of English speaking adolescents was 15.58 years ($SD = 0.95$). A minority of Czech bloggers identified themselves as males (6.3%) while the rest as females (93.8%, $N = 160$). The U.S. sample had a similar gender distribution; 4.3% of the sample identified themselves as males, 86.6% as females, and gender could not be identified for 9.1% of bloggers ($N = 186$). Excluding the bloggers for whom gender could not be identified, females amounted to 95.3% of the U.S. teen blogosphere.

The blog entries were coded for format, style, content, and tone. These codes and their sub-codes were developed based on the theoretical framework of Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008), which distinguishes between different aspects of media based on its formal (symbolic) and content features (topics and themes). These were as follows:

Six categories of blog style: 1) Narrative, descriptions of events, 2) Reflective, where the author analyses people, ideas, situations, and events, 3) Filter, an entry that primarily consists of content that is external to the blogger, 4) Feedback/response, specifically asking for feedback, a response, suggestions, or information, 5) Creative, including song lyrics, poetry, jokes, quotes, artistic photography, music, or drawings that may or may not have been created by the author, 6) Quizzes and surveys.

Ten blog content categories were used: 1) Family, the discussion of family members, including siblings, parents, pets, or extended family, 2) Peers, the discussion of friends but not including romantic relationships, 3) Romance/sexuality, the discussion of romantic relationships, or indications of concerns with romance, 4) Structured life, including school, extracurricular activities, and part-time work, 5) Teen problematic behaviour, the discussion of drugs, drinking, shoplifting, abuse, eating disorders, or abnormal/unhealthy behaviour that is typically associated with teens, 6) Life events/issues, everyday issues such as

dealing with braces, driver's licenses, car accidents, birthdays, or holidays, excluding anything connected to the categories described above, 7) Public scene, the discussion of news, politics, and pop culture, such as video games, modern electronics, movies, books etc., 8) Identity, the discussion of self-image, self-concept, self-description, self-esteem, or body image/appearance concerns related to the religious, ethnic, or sexual identity of the author, 9) Future, The discussion of long-term plans, 10) Blog-related issues, reflecting the author's conscious awareness of the audience/reader, for instance asking for comments or feedback, discussion on layout features, or remarks about the cessation of writing.

Lastly, seven emotional tone categories were used: 1) Emotion, if there was any prominent emotion present, 2) Happiness, 3) Sadness, 4) Anger/frustration, explicit statements were not necessary, 5) Love, 6) Opinion approval, containing strong ideas/language of approval on a subject, explicitly stated, 7) Opinion disapproval, containing strong ideas/language of disapproval on a subject, using words such as "hate, sucks, dump" etc.

Although this extensive content analysis and comparison between two different samples was carefully conducted (e.g. by measuring the inter-rater agreements in all the aspects), certain limitations are present as well. The most important one comes from the inequality of the two samples. While Czech society is very homogenous and culturally rather unified, U.S. society is the opposite. This makes any potential interpretation of "cultural differences" between these two samples problematic. Another limitation comes from the way the data were collected – collection was carried out during a single week and thus for the most part only the most frequently updated blogs were included. This might lead to the omission of those blogs which are not updated that often, even though the frequency of updates does not necessarily correspond to either the frequency of occurrence of these blogs in the teenage blogosphere or their importance and influence. Also, the nature of the collected data did not allow me to perform a deeper analysis; it is only descriptive.

3. FINDINGS

The empirical findings are introduced in two main parts, each consisting of subsections. The first one describes the way blogging is used for the creation and negotiation of a teenager's identity: 1) what the teens present on blogs and what forms they choose not to present about themselves, 2) whether and to what extent they experiment with the presented information, and 3) what is the cultural context of the self-presentations. The second part focuses on factors associated with excessive use of the medium: 1) what is the role of emotional distress and problematic behaviour, 2) what is the role of parental mediation, 3) what are the cross-country differences in predictors of EIU.

3.1 Identity formation via blogging

Revealing personal information online

According to **Study II**, Czech teenage bloggers tend to present a significant amount of personal information online. Two thirds of the bloggers in my sample present their actual photo, 90 per cent their age, 70 per cent their e-mail address, 61.6 per cent their instant messenger contact, and 58.8 per cent a link to other personal web-pages of theirs. In **Study I**, it was verified that personal information – age, gender, location – tend to be presented truthfully. Such results suggest that the young bloggers are not using this online tool disconnectedly from their actual identity. Demonstrating that “they” are really who they claim to be may help in identification with the content of their blog, with the personal narration they produce there, and it may also help them become identified and acknowledged by others. Hence such a practice may foster creation of their identity in general. But the fact that the young bloggers can be easily identified by others may discourage them from presenting very sensitive topics they would otherwise like to discuss. Or, on the other hand, when such sensitive topics are present, it may put the bloggers at risk of direct misuse of the information; either by their peers and school mates, or strangers, or even online predators – unlike social networking sites where personal information can be filtered, blogs are often completely accessible for anyone in the cyberspace.

Themes and formats of self-presentations

Concerning the formats and styles used for self-expression, **Study II** found that the expected dominance of text entries (in two-thirds of cases) was surmounted by the usage of visuals (79.8 per cent). Audio-visuals were used much less frequently (6.3 per cent). Thus, Czech teens' blogs can be characterized as a visual culture. It was probably this dominance of visuals what was reflected in the style of blog posts – majority of them were pictures and photos further adjusted in programs like Photoshop. To a smaller extent, when text was used, narratives (29.4 per cent), reflections (25 per cent), feedback requests (18.1 per cent) were present as the main themes. Again, the use of visuals was connected to what the

young bloggers tended to post. By far, the public scene was a dominant theme of blog posts (71.3 per cent) – these mostly included pictures of popular celebrities. It has been shown in the literature that identification with celebrities plays a very important role in the lives of teenagers (Giles & Maltby, 2004) – it provides a positive development of relationships with peers. At the same time, idealized and imagined public figures may take over the role of not so idealized parents and may help the young individual in the development of their autonomy (ibid).

Surprisingly, blogging about blogging (metablogging) was a very frequent theme in the posts (48.1 per cent). This result may be explained by the fact that the blog environment is not structured and as easy to handle as social networking sites (Bjarnasson, Gudmundsson & Ólafsson, 2011) and thus it takes time, skill and energy to become acquainted with the medium. Blogging itself may serve as an activity of learning, testing and showing one's own digital skills – an important step in mastering the digital environment, reflected for example in positive feeling of self-competence.

Regarding other themes that appeared on blogs, only peer relationship (21.9 per cent), romance and sexuality (20.6 per cent) and family (16.3 per cent) were frequently present, whereas future issues (2.5 per cent) were the least prevalent topic. However, the prevalence of these topics varied significantly depending on the age of bloggers. For instance, older bloggers aged 16–17 years tended to concentrate on topics of sexuality (29.3 per cent versus 14.9 per cent in age category 14–15 years) and events from their lives (44 per cent versus 24.2 per cent); on the other hand, asking for a feedback was the main domain among younger teenagers (24.2 per cent versus 44 per cent). Also, as found in **Study I**, the younger bloggers (aged 13–14 years) tended to lie more compared to older bloggers in the sample (Fisher's exact test 1-sided, $p = 0.048$); 51.9 per cent of the younger group confessed to lie sometimes on their blogs while the same accounted for 34.5 per cent of the older group. Concerning the occurrence of untrue information in concrete categories, 19.6 per cent accounted for both relationships and skills, 16.1 per cent for family situation, 10.7 per cent for appearance, 9.8 per cent for sexual experience, 8.9 per cent for interests and only 1.8 per cent for school related information. The results suggest that the truthful information was mostly the information that could be easily verified (school information), while intimate information such as sexuality or partnership were less often true. Blogging thus seems to be rather closely related to confirming and strengthening the identity of teenagers and to reinforcing the existing social ties rather than experimenting and deception.

A national context of self-presentation

In **Study II**, the comparison of Czech and US youth blogosphere revealed relatively noticeable differences. First, young bloggers in the US sample presented significantly less personal information compared to their Czech counterparts – the occurrence of a personal photo and contact information was more

than 50 per cent less frequent. Second, the total majority of US blog posts was in text format (98.6 per cent compared to 68.8 per cent in case of Czech blogs) while the usage of pictures was significantly less prevalent (33.2 per cent compared to 79.8 per cent). This is probably connected to the fact that US teenagers tended to be more narrative and reflective in their blog posts. Third, more narrative and textual approach of US bloggers led to different themes. Unlike the Czech bloggers, the US youth wrote about their peers (79.6 per cent), after-school activities (73.1 per cent) and family (56.5 per cent). Interestingly, the blog issue topic remained the same in both countries – this may suggest that importance of knowing the medium plays similarly an important role in both youth cultures.

In a closer look, the differences between the Czech and US youth blogs took different patterns. When the themes were analysed with respect to the format in the Czech sample, the Czech blogs using predominantly text became more similar to the US blogs. For example, 52% of blogs without visuals dealt with family issues, which was very similar to the number in the US sample. Similarly, 68.1 per cent of blogs using visuals dealt with the public scene compared to 51.0% of blogs without visuals – the latter case is again very similar to the US sample.

Also, in both the countries girls in mid-adolescence were predominantly those who had their own blogs. In addition to that, in both samples the importance of meta-blogging was similar, which suggests that in blogging praxis the know-how (or digital skills) is set to a fore. Also, there was a tendency to use this medium with rather visible identity, although concerns about privacy issues were stronger in the US sample. The themes, or what young bloggers presented, depended on the way of preferred presentation – similar formats led to similar content. When the US and Czech teenagers used textual format, they had a similar tendency to deal with issues about their friends, family and favourite celebrities.

The question is what affects their ways of self-presentation. It is possible, although this hypothesis would require further testing, that the way young people use the Internet is influenced by their societal conditions, for example the educational system. In case of US youngsters, they are used to write a lot of essays which is both perceived as important for further development and success in life (Lenhardt et al., 2008); the same cannot be said about the Czech youngsters. As Petrić (2005) summarized, central and east European and post-communist educational systems rather marginalize the importance of writing in curricula. We can hypothesize that Czech youngsters lack knowledge, experience and confidence in writing personal narrations and, therefore, may prefer other forms of self-expression, which further influences the content of such expression. Thus, although the Internet is a global phenomenon, the way it is being used particularly depends on local/national contexts.

3.2 Factors associated with excessive Internet use

The role of individual characteristics in excessive Internet use at young age

The results of **Studies VI** and **IV** rather clearly suggest that demographic variables do not predict excessive Internet use very well. More concretely, on the European sample of teens, boys and girls were similarly prone to use the medium excessively. This contrasts with public expectations or stereotypes that boys are much more computer oriented and spend much more time online, for example to play computer games. Concerning age, the older teens tended to be slightly more prone to excessive Internet use, but the actual effect size was almost negligible. As time spent online grows with growing age (Livingstone et al., 2011), this may be the explanation.

On the other hand, the way the medium is used had a stronger explanatory value. For example, the intensity of internet usage (or time spent online) reached a regression coefficient (beta) of .137 in **Study IV** and .216 in **Study VI**. Although such an association was significant and held even when controlled for other variables, this cannot lead to the conclusion that both the time spent online and excessive Internet use are synonyms. Excessive use is no mere function of the time an individual spends with the medium. Together with the time spent online, according to **Study VI**, the breadth of online activities was a good predictor (beta = .149). This is partially surprising because usually excessive Internet use is linked to specific online applications such as online games, rather than to the Internet as a medium. But data suggest that misusing various applications may be interconnected and thus excessive use may occur without any specific relationship to an isolated application usage. If digital and safety skills were taken into account, the explained variation of the model improved. Although rather modestly but still significantly, digital literacy and safety skills predicted excessive Internet use (beta = .037). Thus, one pathway leading to excessive Internet use may be the increased time spent online accompanied by a broader range of online activities, but which may also result in positive effects such as the improvement of digital skills and developed use of the medium.

The model which included psychological and behavioural variables predicted excessive Internet use to the greatest extent. Together with demographic variables and time spent online this model accounted for 21.4 per cent of the variation of the excessive Internet use score. The psychological variables (psychological difficulties, sensation seeking, self-efficacy) accounted for 12.3 per cent of the EIU score and thus seemed to be the most relevant predictors of all the tested variables. It was the scale of psychological difficulties with the strongest association (beta = .245) – it is worth noting that the strength of this association was almost doubled compared to the one between excessive Internet use and time spent online (which presented the second strongest association). This suggests the validity of the mood management theory (Reinecke & Vorderer, 2013) – the medium serves as a tool and space for escapism from life and emotional difficulties. This media effect can be particularly important for

adolescents, as this life time period is often labelled as more stressful than other stages of life.

Also, the tendency to experience boredom (higher sensation seeking) predicted higher excessive Internet use ($\beta = .095$). Interestingly, the highest prevalence of all excessive Internet use indicators was reached by the item “I have caught myself surfing when I am not really interested” – 15% of European teens did experience it very/fairly often. The fact that such a high number of European children often spend time on the Internet even though they feel bored raises a question about the other activities in which they engage. As it is concluded in **Study V**, the Internet usually does not displace time-structured activities, but rather the unstructured ones. The less frequently young people have something to do (hobbies, sport clubs, and such), the more time they spend with media. And this increased time spent online may be associated with boredom and sensation seeking. The latter has been shown to be related to problematic behaviour of young people and their consequent Internet addiction (for example, Ko et al., 2007). **Study IV** partially confirms this pathway. Besides sensation seeking, excessive Internet use was predicted by offline problematic behaviour (for example, truancy problems, alcohol abuse; $\beta = .100$), online risky behaviour such as meeting online strangers ($\beta = .124$) or sending sexual messages ($\beta = .024$) and to a lower extent also by online problematic behaviour such as bullying others online ($\beta = .024$). According to **Study VI**, even a stronger role was played by a tendency of having bothersome experiences online ($\beta = .179$). These results refer to a risk migration hypothesis – the Internet is just another place where risks and problems can manifest.

The role of parents in excessive Internet use at young age

Parents or other family members may be an important mediator of youth's Internet use. As has been shown above, the indirect influence on excessive Internet use manifest via the time an individual is allowed to spend online or the amount of structured time one has. **Study VI** concentrated on testing the direct influence of parents – of the mediation techniques of their children's Internet use. The mediation itself accounted only for about 3.3 per cent of the variance of EIU score. This means that the specific behavioural strategies of parents towards their children's Internet use does not have big influence on excessive use. The only strategy associated with moderating excessive Internet use was the restrictive one ($\beta = -.048$). It should also be noted that the higher the parents' experience was with the Internet, the lower was the prevalence of excessive Internet use reported by their children ($\beta = -.023$). This suggests that intrusive strategies, when applied by those parents who have digital experience, knowledge and skills, have a stronger effect on preventing problematic usage of the Internet. Otherwise the intrusion may be taken as inappropriate by the teenagers and further increase family tension. The fact that the Internet may reverse traditional socializing schema has been noted in prior research (Kalmus, 2007; Mesch, 2006). The results of **Study VI** also suggest that the role of parental mediation increased when children faced bothersome experiences online. For

the children who had had such negative experiences, it was the active and supportive parental mediation style which was more helpful ($\beta = -.063$), while the restrictive and monitoring approaches actually led to even higher scores of excessive Internet use ($\beta .011$ and $.024$ respectively). But the overall effects were rather weak. Thus, for adolescents' well-being, it is better when parents' actions are limited to situations of bothersome experience and when the action is rather supportive (similar results were obtained for other forms of online risks, see Dürager & Livingstone, 2012), depending also on the parents' digital skills.

Intercultural effects of excessive Internet use

The proposed model with dominance of psychological and behavioural variables did not explain excessive Internet use in all the studied European countries. For instance, it worked best in the Nordic countries and German-speaking countries – it explained almost 40 per cent of the variance in Germany, 38.2 per cent in Sweden, 37.7 per cent in Denmark, 35 per cent in Norway, 32.9 per cent in Finland and 32.5 per cent in Austria (**Study III**). Thus, for the young people from these countries it can be concluded that emotional problems had a strong effect on excessive Internet use, followed by conduct problems (lying, cheating, often losing temper etc.) and a tendency to establish contacts with strangers online. However, it remains unknown what these countries have in common. Although in Nordic countries youth spend much more time online compared to the rest of Europe, youth from Germany and Austria belong to the group of rather modest Internet users (Livingstone et al., 2011). Although the countries mentioned above belong to the richest, similar results were obtained for Lithuania (32.4 per cent) and Greece (34.6 per cent), which represent countries with a lower GDP than the previous ones. On the other hand, the emotional-behavioural model of explanation of excessive Internet use worked rather moderately in the Netherlands and United Kingdom, which could be considered culturally closer to the Nordic countries.

Other potential predictors varied significantly across countries. For example, the weakest predictor was gender – boys predominantly were more likely to use technology excessively only in Estonia and Lithuania, while in the UK and Norway girls were found to be more prone to excessive Internet use (**Study III**). Thus, cultural background may play a crucial role in predicting problematic Internet use (besides the way the survey was conducted, as described in the Methods part – excessive Internet use was conceptualized the same way in all the countries but the validity of such conceptualization may vary). As it seems, for Nordic and German speaking countries, excessive Internet use is dominantly related to emotional difficulties and partially to problematic behaviour. In other countries (for example the South-European ones) the prevalence of excessive Internet use may be rather influenced by the way the medium is used. But this assumption should be tested further.

The large variance of predictors in excessive Internet use among European countries puts societal aspects into a fore, for example the technological

infrastructure and educational systems (Lobe & Ólafsson, 2012). Concerning the educational system, it does influence the level of children's digital skills (ibid). It can be further hypothesized that in those countries where children consequently have more advanced digital skills, as in Nordic countries, the strength of the effect of digital skills on excessive Internet use diminishes in favour of other predictors such as emotional difficulties.

4. DISCUSSION

The thesis dealt with the issue of young people's Internet use and the multi-dimensional concept of well-being. Special attention was paid to 1) subjective/psychological well-being – focusing on aspects of identity formation (for example, autonomy, competence and relatedness in theory of Ryan and Deci, 2001) and 2) eudaimonic well-being – which takes into account both the positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon and well-being is understood as a balance between them. For understanding how Internet usage can influence the well-being of young individuals, the usefulness of the uses and gratifications theory was proposed, as both subjective/psychological well-being and gratification share many similarities.

In the introduction part of the thesis, I started with an assumption that “certain Internet applications can influence certain adolescents in a certain way.” Based on the empirical results I obtained in my work and based on the theoretical assumptions which framed my work in this thesis, I try to specify this undefined and vague word “certain.” Hence I propose a contextual model of youth Internet use in which **well-being** (consisting of both risks and opportunities, negative and positive) is reciprocally influenced by actual practice – the way the medium is chosen and used (see Figure 1). This reciprocal influence (the right side of the model) is adopted from the *uses and gratifications theory*. Both media choice and usage are framed by larger contextual factors – demographic variables – age and gender of the user⁷; societal conditions an individual lives in; close social surroundings – family and peers; and structural characteristics of the medium or its applications. At the same time well-being is a general and multidimensional phenomenon (**Study V**) which is also directly influenced by all of the contextual factors – it is the context which creates and defines the positivity and negativity of possible outcomes. The proposed model is presented in Figure 1 and its components will be described further.

⁷ Other demographic variables such as socio-economic status may play their role too. However, except for theoretical **Study V**, I did not touch on these in my empirical work, hence I present only age and gender in the model.

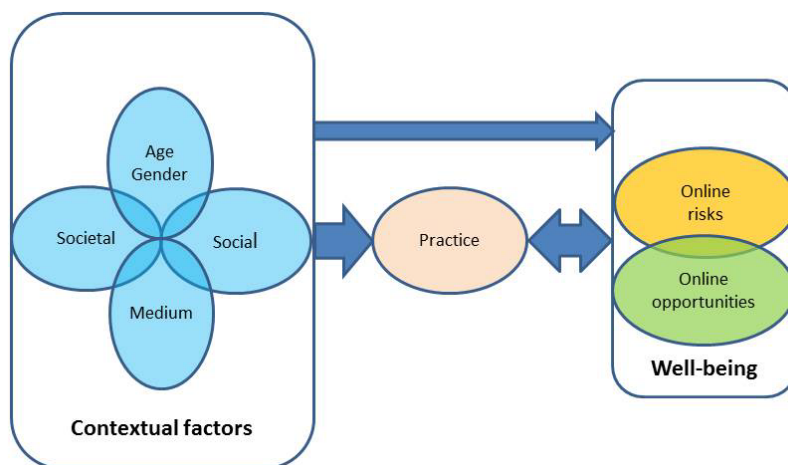


Figure 1: Contextual model of media effects upon well-being.

In general, the results of my studies confirmed the contextuality of Internet usage (i.e., the usage is determined by the context). The produced effects were both negative and positive in both of the studied phenomena – blogging and excessive Internet use. While blogging brings significant advantages for self-expression, socialization and digital literacy, it also brings risks in the form of showing too much of one's personal identity, participation in risk communities (for example pro-anorexia), or being exposed to online harassment. Also, even the generally negatively perceived phenomenon of excessive Internet use was accompanied by high digital skills of the users, which is highly valued in the information society. It has been mentioned, for example in the EU Kids Online project (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012), that usage of the Internet leads both to potential opportunities and potential risks/harm; that the same act can result in both positive and negative outcomes.

At the same time, the outcome is not simply produced by the media usage – rather, the effect influences both media choice and the way it is being used; which in turn influences the effect. Excessive Internet use can be one of the typical examples. This phenomenon refers to over-preoccupation by the medium or the situation when problems with control over usage result in emotional and social distress. But it is the emotional and social distress which also precedes the excessive usage (**Study III** and **IV**) – the cause and consequence are merged. Also in case of blogging, **Studies I** and **II** showed that such activities serve primarily for self-expression and maintaining/establishing connections with peers – both being a typical display of basic needs of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Self-expression and establishing peer communication has been also shown to be the motive for youth blogging (Fullwood, Sheenan & Nicholls, 2009). Thus, the effect of blogging merges with the motive for blogging and the need preceding them. This is what Reinecke and Vorderer (2013) called

reciprocal relationship between media usage and media effect, or what Valkenburg and Peter (2013) labelled as *self-generated media effects*.

The practice, or the way the medium is chosen and used, is also dependent on the context. The first contextual mediator is age – in case of the present thesis, it is the period of adolescence. Patterns of usage change with age – the intensity of staying online increases with increasing age, although excessive use follows only partially (i.e. there is only weak relationship with age). Popularity of certain online applications differs with age – in case of blogging, popularity peaks in mid-adolescence. In blogs, younger teenagers tend to experiment more with their identity and self-presentations – **Study I** found that they did so not only by providing false information about themselves, but mostly by exaggerating their skills and interests, trying to be perceived as older and more experienced. A similar tendency was also discovered and demonstrated in other online platforms (Siibak, 2009). According to the co-construction model (Greenfield, 1984), which was partially used as the theoretical frame here, youth use the Internet in accordance with their developmental tasks (needs). For example, in Havighurst's (1972) model it is the issue of building emotional independence of parents and, at the same time, building stronger relationships with peers as well as building a stronger sense of self. Interestingly, psychological well-being is characterized in a very similar manner (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Research on well-being has shown that adolescents usually experience a drop in their well-being compared to previous or later life stages (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011; NEF, 2004), and thus trying to cope with developmental tasks may be viewed as the task of improving their well-being. It can be said that adolescents' developmental needs and the needs behind well-being have a meeting point – it is not possible to understand the effects of media usage upon well-being without taking age characteristics into account.

Gender is another important contextual mediator, but especially in case of adolescence, it cannot be described separately from the age factor. It has been shown in the results section that the tendency to use the medium excessively is similarly distributed between both genders (**Study III, IV and VI**) and such a pattern has been found in most European countries (**Study III**). Where boys and girls may differ more is the way they use the Internet or the application they choose. Blogging was shown to be overwhelmingly a girlish activity, even across countries (for example in **Study II**). The attractiveness of blogs for girls and computer games for boys has been reported repeatedly during the last decade, and interestingly, those who blog tend to avoid computer games and vice versa (Bjarnason, Gudmundsson & Ólafsson, 2010). The Internet has been claimed to adopt many of the masculine characteristics from the beginning of its development (Zoonen, 2002) and boys are generally expected to incline to technology more (Gackenbach & von Stackelberg, 2007) – this resulted in a common expectations that boys spend much more time online and reach higher levels of digital skills. But the dominance of boys online has not been completely supported by recent literature – both boys and girls are similarly likely to use the Internet (Livingstone et al., 2011), although boys still seem to report

higher levels of digital skills (Sonck, Kuiper & de Haan, 2012). Thus the Internet not only helps to overcome as well as deepen the gender gap, it also reflects and reinforces the existing modes of behaviours and attitudes.

The second contextual mediator is the societal conditions in which the young individual lives. The Internet is a global phenomenon and the same applies to many of its popular applications. Examples of such global popularity could include Facebook or the online game World of Warcraft. The question is to what extent such globalization contributes to blurring cultural differences. Although the global online culture could be expected together with the emergence of the “digital generation”, empirical findings present in this thesis do not support such assertions. The national and cultural contexts still matter in young people’s Internet use. Educational systems can be used as a specific example. It has been shown that digital literacy is directly influenced by educational systems across European countries (Lobe, Livingstone, Ólafsson & Vodeb, 2011). From my thesis, an indirect influence emerged – it is still the school as a culturally rooted institution which provides general knowledge and skills, which the youth can use in their appropriation of the medium. Czech teenagers in my sample could be seen as less skilled in writing texts compared to their American counterparts (**Study II**), hence they used more visuals in their (more limited) self-expressions, which, on the other hand, may have helped them to learn to use photo-editing programs and thus increased their digital skills.

Together with the cultural/country context, the social micro level is also part of the contextual factors. For instance, parents are also the most important mediators of children’s Internet use and it can be claimed that the “having” aspect of well-being and Internet use (**Study V**) is predominantly mediated by the family – by providing an individual with electronic devices, the internet connection, setting time limits and providing rooms where to be online. Although the direct influence, through for instance mediating and rearing strategies, seems to be rather modest (not surprisingly, as adolescence is a time of separation and individuation), the importance of parental interventions increases when the young individual faces negative experiences online (**Study VI**). Intervention also depends on the parents’ digital skills, which in turn were influenced by the national-societal context. Another social context is provided by the peers. Family separation and peer attachment is probably the strongest motive in adolescents’ development, and the Internet may play a crucial role in it. Most of the studies agree that teenagers use the Internet primarily to be connected with their peers (concluded for example by Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011), and **Study II** confirmed that – except for public pop-culture and school/after-school activities, peer and romantic relationships are the most common blog posts.

The fourth contextual mediator is the medium itself. Various applications may have various results for users; as the Internet is a rapidly developing medium, its usage changes as well as its outcomes do. In the late 1990s, Internet usage was labelled as negatively challenging the well-being of its users (Kraut et al., 1998), while a little later, the outcome was shown to be opposite (Kraut et al., 2002). The difference lies in changes of the medium itself. Earlier

widespread anonymous communication via chat rooms was expanded, step by step, thanks to the emergence of other forms and tools for online communication which helped maintain already existing relationships. Online chats, used mainly for communication with strangers, were labelled as potentially risky in respect to meeting online strangers and sexual solicitation – teenage girls with emotional difficulties were especially vulnerable (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell & Ybarra, 2008). Massively multiplayer online games were similarly challenging with respect to the well-being of youths; these are often claimed to have addictive potential, especially for boys who seemed to be more vulnerable (Ko et al., 2007). Concerning the positive effects, various online tools can be used for maintaining one's identity, creativity and communication with peers, all at the same time. But the applications differ in their potential – in contrast to otherwise similar social networking sites, blogs are a rather unstructured online application which offers more options in adjustments, content creation and self-presentation (Kalmus et al., 2009). In **Study II**, it has been shown that a significant portion of posts concerned about blogging itself as an unstructured online application that has no automatic and easy-to-obtain outcome; rather, the time and energy investment may bring rewards in the form of experience and skills, which in turn may positively affect the well-being of users – by increased feelings of self-competence, autonomy and empowerment.

Thus, the proposed model presents the effect of media upon well-being as a complex phenomenon, where there is no mechanical relation between the use and the effect. Moreover, well-being is a multidimensional construct with various needs and motives involved in media practise. Methodologically speaking, there is interplay of more than one independent and more than one dependent variable with various directions of influence. It would be useful to study this situation with advanced analytical methods, such as structural equation modelling or hierarchical regression analysis (cf. Ruggiero, 2000). Also, a theoretical structure for creating hypotheses for the effects of the new media is needed (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) and the proposed model would be potentially useful in future directions for studies of well-being as a part of media effects.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the following part, I will conclude the thesis based on the research questions introduced earlier.

- I How do contemporary adolescents use the Internet – particularly blogs – to express and negotiate identity?
 - Adolescents do not experiment with their identity too much on their blogs. Personal information like age, gender, domicile were commonly present, moreover, such information was typically true. The same applied for contact information like e-mail, or link to other SNS profile. It can be concluded that blogging serves primarily for maintaining one's identity rather than experimenting or pretending to be someone else. This may be a reflection of the needs or motives for blogging – to help in self-development and to be in contact with the peers. The most truthful blog post concerned topics about school and the least truthful concerned topics about sexuality, personal interests and family – the first can be easily verified by the peers while those latter belong to the personal sphere (**Study I**).
 - By staying identified on blogs, it may help the young bloggers to create a feeling that they are really them – such a link can have additional uses, since blogging may serve other needs like self-presentation as digitally skilled and creative content creators. The younger teenagers tend to be a little more untruthful in their blogs compared to older adolescents. Typically, they were trying to be perceived as more experienced – having a broader range of interests, having more sexual experience (they seemed to rather show their ideal self than full-blown pretending). Thus, while the older teenage bloggers use the blog primarily for maintaining social contacts, the younger ones search for feelings of prestige and competence (**Study I**).
 - By far, the most common blog posts were about celebrities. This may suggest the importance of idealized public persons (either real or fictional) in adolescents' development. Moreover, it could mean that due to this fact the Internet has become an arena of pop-cultural consumerism, although the role of pop-cultural idols has been shown as an important socialization factor of contemporary youth. On the other hand, the other popular blog themes were about peer relationships, romance and sexuality and the family. This suggests that blogging serves mostly as a self-expression tool belonging to everyday reality, rather than a virtual or unreal space (**Study II**).
- II What factors are related to excessive Internet use among teenagers?
 - In the public perception, excessive Internet use is synonymous with high amount of time spent with the medium. Although spending time online is slightly related to the tendency of excessive use, these two

phenomena cannot be understood as one. Rather, it is the psychological distress which plays the most important role here. Interestingly, excessive Internet use is itself defined as causing distress in one's life, but the distress also precedes the whole situation. Internet usage might be used as a coping strategy, as it offers a wide range of entertainment and opportunities for mood management. But the direct outcome for well-being turns to be rather negative in a long term perspective (**Study III, IV and VI**).

- Together with time spent online, the broad scope of online activities and digital skills play a partial role too. This means that among European teenagers, excessive Internet use is associated with more expert use of this medium. More technological expertise is traditionally a gendered theme, as boys are perceived as the experts. However, gender is not a predictor of excessive Internet use – both girls and boys are similarly prone to experience this phenomenon (**Study III, IV and VI**).
- The role of parental mediation was not particularly strong. The importance of parental activities was however stronger when the adolescent faced bothersome experience online, and the best strategy for parents turned out to be active mediation and supportive attitude. Such strategy was related to a decrease of excessive Internet use. Facing bothersome content or communication online was not unusual, as various online risks were associated with overuse of the medium (**Study III, IV and VI**).

III To what extent is the Internet's effect on well-being moderated by users' local/national contexts?

- The tested difference in the forms and content of blogging among Czech and US youth bloggers revealed that in both samples it was mid-adolescent girls who were the most active group. Both samples were discussed issues about blogging itself with similar frequencies. However, further analysis revealed significant differences. First, Czech bloggers were much less concerned about the issue of privacy. US bloggers used textual narration more often and wrote mostly about themselves, their life experiences and their peers. Czech bloggers on the contrary used predominantly visuals, and had topics related to pop-cultural idols. But those Czech bloggers who used text dominantly did not differ from US bloggers in the sense of the presented themes. The “what” presented by young bloggers (or the way they present themselves) depends on “how” they do so (the means they choose for self-presentation) which may further influence what outcomes (well-being) are reached by usage. Even in one (globalized) online application, some important differences occur depending on the cultural background of the target group (**Study II**).
- The proposed model of importance of psychological difficulties in excessive Internet use was partially verified in the international cross-European context. However, its role was the highest in the Nordic and

German-speaking countries. Other factors tend to vary a lot across countries – but without a clear identifiable pattern – as for example gender is not generally associated with excessive Internet use, while in some of the cultural and country contexts it is. The phenomenon of excessive Internet use, as well as well-being, inherently includes a normative aspect. The normativity – what is and what is not considered to be “right” – varies across countries and thus any comparison of this phenomenon is problematic. When studying excessive Internet use specifically and well-being in general, the cultural specifics of the background of the samples cannot be avoided (**Study III** and **VI**).

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Interneti võimalused ja ohud: noorte *online*-praktikate mõju nende subjektiivsele heaolule

Internet kui uus meedium on viimasel kümnendil läbi teinud äärmiselt kiire arengu. Eriti keskset rolli on internet mänginud kaasaja noorte ja teismeliste igapäevaelus. Just nemad moodustavad interneti ühe märkimisväärseima kasutajaskonna. Kuna tegemist on siiski väga uue meediumiga, mille kasutust ei raamista väga kindlalt välja kujunenud normid ja mille mõju noorte arengule on ebaselge, on teema äratanud suurt huvi nii uurijais kui ka laiemas avalikkuses. Teiste hulgas jagavad Kaltiala-Heino ja Rimpela (2004) laialt levinud seisukohta, et noorukiiga on üks fundamentaalsemaid arenguperioode ja seepärast võib interneti väärkasutus noorukieas olla kahjulikum kui muudel eluperioodidel.

Käesolevas doktoritöös on vaatluse all noorte internetikasutuse võimalik mõju ja tagajärjed noorte heaolule, täpsemalt subjektiivsele heaolule.

Heaolu on vaadeldud järjest enam kui isikliku ja ühiskondliku jõukuse indikaatorit ning heaolu uurimist on peetud väga vajalikuks, muuhulgas on selle tähtsuse välja toonud OECD ja UNICEF. Heaolu on defineeritud väga erinevalt. OECD (2013) sõnastab heaolu mõiste järgmiselt: see on üldine hea vaimne seisund (kaasa arvatud erinevate positiivsete ja negatiivsete varjunditega), mis kujuneb inimeste elusündmuste, kogemuste ja nendesse suhtumiste põhjal.

Doktoritöö lähtub määratlusest, mille järgi heaolu on mitmetahuline konstruktsioon. Arusaam heaolust kui mitmemõõtmelisest konstruktsioonist tugineb peamiselt Soome sotsioloogi Erik Allardti töödele. Põhivajaduste teooriast lähtudes (Galtung, 1980, viidatud Allardt, 1993 kaudu), eristab Allart kolme heaolu indikaatorit (vaata uurimus V), milleks on omamine (materიაalne olukord), armastamine (inimsuhted) ja olemine (isiklik areng). Rahulolu nende kolme teguriga aitab luua heaolu.

Antud doktoritöö keskendus peamiselt kahele vajadusele – armastamisele ja olemisele – mida kirjanduses nimetatakse sageli subjektiivseks ja psühholoogiliseks heaoluks. Seejuures ei tähenda heaolu üksnes negatiivsete kogemuste vältimist ja positiivsete võimendamist, vaid just tasakaalu positiivse ja negatiivse vahel.

Eeldused, et internetikasutusel võib olla oluline roll indiviidide heaolus, tuginevad enamasti meedia mõjude või täpsemini tasude ja tarvete teooriale (Blumler & Katz, 1974), mis vaatlleb meedia mõjusid kasutajate vaatenurgast lähtuvalt. Selle teooria järgi kasutavad inimesed meediat erinevatel eesmärkidel nagu näiteks informatsiooni hankimine, sotsialiseerumine, meelelahutus või argimurede eest põgenemine ning lähtuvalt neist eesmärkidest teeb kasutaja aktiivse valiku, millist meediasisu tarbida, kuidas seda tõlgendada ja enda eluga seostada. Seega on tasude ja tarvete teooria järgi meediatarbimise ajendiks erinevate vajaduste rahuldamine ning see on ka üheks peamiseks punktiks, milles lõimuvad tasu ja heaolu.

Oluline on rõhutada, et tasude ja tarvete teooria keskmes ei ole normatiivsed psühholoogilise heaolu aspektid (Christopher, 1999), vaid just hedonistlikud tegurid. Seega on tasude ja tarvete teooria lähedasem subjektiivse heaolu kontseptsioonile, vaatamata sellele, et vajadusi ei eristata ega raamistata antud teoorias selgelt. Tasude ja heaolu kontseptsioonid on väga sarnased, kuid mitte samatähenduslikud. Siiski on ka tasude ja tarvete lähenemine noorte internetikasutajate heaolu uurimisel väga kasulik, sest nii tasu kui heaolu võib mõista kui 1) vajadust; 2) meediakasutust, mille motiiviks on neid vajadusi rahuldada; ja 3) meediakasutusest tulenevat meediamõju.

Greenfieldi (1984) kaas-konstrueerimise teooria järgi vastab noorukite meediakasutus enamasti nende arengulistele vajadustele. Internetikasutaja – noor indiviid – on aktiivne ja loominguline meediatarbija, valides näiteks, milliseid mobiilirakendusi ta eelistab, kuidas need seostuvad tema isiklike huvidega ja millist sisu ta ise loob. Interneti interaktiivsus võimaldab kasutajatel luua nii ise kui kaasluua koos teiste kasutajatega *online*-keskkondi, kasutades loominguliselt ära mitmesugused veebitööriistu viisidel, mida nende loojad algselt ei eeldanud.

Noored otsivad internetikeskkonnast sageli sedasama, mida päriseluski. Esmapilgul võib küll näida, et noored kasutavad internetti peamiselt suhtluseks, kuid lähemal uurimisel selgub, et internet täidab nende jaoks ka mitmeid teisi ülesandeid, toetades näiteks noore arengut seoses seksuaalsuse, läheduse, identiteedi, soorollide ja iseseisvusega. *Online*- ja *offline*-maailmu ei vaadelda enamasti eraldiseisvatena, vaid tihedalt omavahel läbipõimunutena. Päril- ja virtuaalse maailma dihhotoomia on siiski oluline, et eristada *online*-maailma *offline*-maailmast (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). Subjektiivse ja psühholoogilise heaolu ning noorukiea arenguliste ülesannetega seonduvad samad vajadused.

Väljatoodud teoreetilistele lähtekohtadele tuginedes olid peamised uurimisküsimused järgmised:

- 1) Kuidas tänapäeva noored kasutavad internetti – eriti blogisid – eneseväljenduseks ja oma identiteedi kujundamiseks?
- 2) Millised tegurid on seotud noorte ülemäärase internetikasutusega?
- 3) Mil määral sõltub interneti mõju heaolule internetikasutajate lokaalsest/rahvuslikust kontekstist?

Uurimisküsimustele vastamiseks kasutati mitut kvantitatiivset uuringut: väikese mahulist küsitlust (120 vastajat, uurimus I), laiaulatuslikku üle-Euroopalist uuringut EU Kids Online II, milles osales ligikaudu 1000 vastajat 25 Euroopa riigist (rohkem infot uuringu kohta leiab veebiküljelt eukidsonline.net; uurimused III, IV, VI), ja kvantitatiivset kontentanalüüsi, mis võrdles 558 USA blogosfääris tehtud blogipostitust 480 Tšehhis tehtud blogipostitusega (uurimus II). Kõigis uuringuis osalenute vanus jäi vahemikku 11–17 eluaastat.

Peamised uurimistulemused on järgmised.

I Kuidas tänapäeva noored kasutavad internetti – eriti blogisid – eneseväljenduseks ja oma identiteedi kujundamiseks?

- Noored ei eksperimenteeri blogides oma identiteediga väga palju. Isiklik info nagu sugu, vanus ja elukoht ning kontaktandmed nagu e-post või viide sotsiaalmeedia profiilile on noorte blogides enamasti välja toodud ja see info vastab tavaliselt ka tõele. Niisiis võib järeldada, et blogimine aitab noortel pigem olemasolevat identiteeti kinnistada kui identiteediga mängida ja erinevaid rolle proovida läbi kellegi teise teesklemise. See võib viidata sellele, et blogimise üheks motiiviks on enesearenguline vajadus ja soov suhelda eakaaslastega. Kõige tõepärasemad blogipostitused olid noored kirjutanud kooliteemadel. Samas kõige vähem tõesed blogipostitused olid seotud seksuaalsuse, isiklike huvide ja perekonnaga. Enam tõepärased olid seega postitused nendel teemadel, mille õigsust saavad eakaaslased kergelt kontrollida. Vähem tõepärased kirjutised pärinesid postitaja isiklikust elust (uurimus I).
- Blogis iseenda identiteedile vastav kirjutamine võimaldab noortel oma blogilugejatele kinnitada, et blogijateks on tõepoolest nemad. See on oluline eriti siis, kui blogija tahab näidata end digitaalselt osava ja loomingu sisuloojana. Vanuselisest võrdlusest ilmneb, et nooremad teismelised kipuvad blogisse kirjutama rohkem tõele mittevastavat sisu kui vanemad noorukid. Nooremad püüdsid väga tüüpiliselt näidata end kogenumatena, kui nad päriselus on, kirjeldades end näiteks omavat laiemat huviringi või enam seksuaalseid kogemusi kui tegelikkuses. Siiski ei saa öelda, et tegemist oli täieliku teesklyusega, vaid pigem peegeldasid need postitused noorte ideaale. Võib järeldada, et nooremad teismelised püüavad blogi abil tõsta oma prestiiži ja kompetentsust eakaaslaste silmis, samas kui vanemad noorukid kasutavad blogi peamiselt olemasolevate sotsiaalsete suhete hoidmiseks.
- Ülekaalukalt kõige suurema osa blogipostitustest olid noored kirjutanud kuulsustest. See osundab, et idealiseeritud avaliku elu tegelased võivad mängida tähtsat rolli ka noorte arengus ning mis veelgi olulisem – internet võib olla muutunud popkultuuri tarbimisväljaks. Popkultuuri iidolid mängivad tänapäeva noorte jaoks olulist sotsialiseerivat rolli. Ülejäänud blogipostituste teemadest olid populaarsed veel suhted eakaaslastega, romantika, seksuaalsus ja perekond. Need tulemused viitavad, et blogi on pigem igapäeva elu loomulik eneseväljendus, mitte eraldi virtuaalne või ebareaalne maailm (uurimus II).

II Millised tegurid on seotud noorte ülemäärase internetikasutusega?

- Avalikkuses seostatakse ülemäära internetikasutust enamasti liigse ajaveetmisega internetis. Kuigi internetis veedetud aeg on seotud kalduvusega liialdasele internetikasutusele, ei ole tegemist päris samatähenduslikult seotud nähtusega.

duslike nähtustega. Eristusi saab teha peamiselt psühholoogilise häirituse pinnalt, mida seostatakse interneti ülemäärase kasutamisega. Kuid samas võib see häiritus ja pingeseisund olla eelnevalt juba olemas ning internetikasutus on omamoodi toimetulekustrateegiaks pingelises olukorras, kuna internet pakub meelelahutust ja mitmeid muid viise, kuidas tuju tõsta. Siiski on ülemäärase internetikasutuse mõju heolule pike-mas perspektiivis üsna negatiivne (uurimused III, IV ja VI).

- Ülemäärast internetikasutust seostatakse nii internetis veedetud aja, *online*-tegevuste ulatuse kui digitaalsete oskustega. See tähendab, et Euroopa teismeliste ülemäärane internetikasutus on seotud suurema pädevusega interneti kasutamisel. Tehnoloogiline pädevus on soolistatud teema – tavaliselt eeldatakse, et poisid on tehnoloogia alal eksperdid. Siiski ei aita sugu ennustada ülemäärast internetikasutust – ühtmoodi aldis on selleks nii poisid kui tüdrukud (uurimused III, IV ja VI).
- Vanemliku vahendamise roll ei olnud väga suur. Selle olulisus kasvas siis, kui teismeline oli kogenud internetis midagi häirivat, ja parim viis, mida vanemad noore aitamiseks said kasutada, oli aktiivne vahendamine ning toetav suhtumine. Need strateegiad on seotud ülemäärase internetikasutuse vähenemisega. Häiriva internetisisuga kokkupuutumine ei olnud noorte jaoks haruldane, kuna ülemäärane internetikasutus on seotud mitmesuguste *online*-riskidega (uurimused III, IV ja VI).

III Mil määral sõltub interneti mõju heolule internetikasutajate lokaalset/rahvuslikust kontekstist?

- Uuringus osalenud Tšehhi ja USA noorte blogide vorm ja sisu näitasid, et nii ühes kui teises riigis olid kõige aktiivsemad postitajad keskmises noorukieas olevad blogijad. Mõlemas valimirühmas ilmnes sarnasusi seoses blogimise kui sellisega, kuid sügavam analüüs tõi välja siiski märkimisväärsed erinevusi. Tšehhi blogijad olid näiteks palju vähem mures privaatsusega seotud teemade pärast. USA blogijad kasutasid enam tekstilisi narratiive ja kirjutasid peamiselt iseendast, oma elukogemustest ja eakaaslastest. Tšehhi blogijad soovastu kasutasid rohkem visuaale, mis kujutasid peamiselt popkultuuri iidoleid. Samas need Tšehhi postitused, mille autorid kirjutasid tekstilisi narratiive, ei erine-nud märgatavalt USA blogijate omadest. See, mida noored blogis enda kohta esitavad, sõltub sellest, kuidas nad seda teevad. Sellest omakorda võib sõltuda blogimise mõju heolule. Isegi ühe ja sama globaalse *on-line*-rakenduse kasutajate hulgas ilmneb erinevusi sõltuvalt nende kultuurilisest taustast (uurimus II).
- Psühholoogiliste raskuste olulisus ülemäärase internetikasutuse ilmne-mises leidis antud uuringus osaliselt kinnitust, kuid need mõjud tulid enam esile just Põhjamaades ja saksa keelt kõnelevates riikides. Ülejäänud ülemäärase internetikasutusega seotud tegurid on riigiti üsna erinevad ega moodusta mingit selget mustrit. Näiteks mõnes riigis ei ole

sool mingit seost ülemäärase internetikasutusega, samas kui teises kultuuris ja riigis on need seosed selgelt olemas. Nii üleliigne internetikasutus kui ka heaolu sisaldavad juba oma olemuselt normatiivset aspekti. Samas normatiivsus – mis on ja mis ei ole „õige“ – erineb märgatavalt riigiti ja seetõttu on seda nähtust keeruline võrrelda. Uurides ülemäärast internetikasutust spetsiifiliselt ja heaolu üleüldiselt, on siiski möödapääsmatu võtta arvesse uuringus osalejate erinevat kultuurilist tausta (uurimused III ja VI).

Mõistmaks noorte internetikasutuse mõju nende heaolule, soovitab väitekiri kohandada selleks tasude ja tarvete teooriat, kuna subjektiivne/psühholoogiline heaolu ja tasud on paljuski sarnased mõisted. Tuginedes empiirilistele tulemustele ja tööd raamistavatele teoreetilistele lähtekohtadele, esitab väitekiri noorte internetikasutuse kontekstuaalse mudeli, milles heaolu (sealhulgas nii selle positiivsed kui negatiivsed küljed) on vastastikmõjus tegelike praktikatega ehk meediumi valiku ja kasutusega. See vastastikmõju on tasude ja tarvete teooria kohandus.

Nii meediumi valikut kui kasutust kujundavad laiemad kontekstuaalsed tegurid nagu vanus, sugu ja sotsiaalne keskkond (näiteks suhted pere ja eakaaslastega) ning ühiskondlikud tingimused (kultuuriline tasand), milles inimene elab. Samuti on mõjutajaks meediumi enda omadused ja võimalused. Ka heaolu on üldine ja mitmetahuline nähtus (uurimus V), mida mõjutavad otseselt mitmesugused kontekstuaalsed tegurid, millest sõltub positiivsete või negatiivsete tagajärgede avaldumine. Seega, väitekirjas esitatud mudel vaatab meedia mõjusid heaolule kui keerukat nähtust, kus puuduvad ühesed seosed meediakasutuse ja selle tulemite vahel. Heaolu on mitmetahuline konstruktsioon, milles sisalduvad erinevad meediakasutusega seotud vajadused ja motiivid. Väitekirjas esitatud mudel aitab püstitada täpsemaid ja fokuseeritumaid hüpoteese edaspidisteks uuringuteks, milles vaadeldakse heaolu kui osa meedia mõjudest.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings (William Blake, Proverbs of Hell). Although finishing one's doctoral study and writing a dissertation cannot be considered "too high" for me, this is the fulfilment of two dreams, on which I have been working for a decade. Only 10 years have passed since my first visit of Estonia and my wish to be connected with this country, and only 10 years have passed since I discovered my interest in social sciences and academia and my wish to be an academic. Touching a dream, or even two dreams of one's life – that is certainly "too high". And in fact, there are far too many people who helped me during this phase of my life than I can count – my sincere apologies to all of those not named here.

At first, my deepest gratitude goes to Veronika Kalmus and Andra Siibak, my supervisors, whose help was immense during the whole 4 years of my study. During our talks, during our collaboration when writing papers – I learned a lot. But my gratitude beyond expression especially concerns their help during the last phase – writing this dissertation proved to be harder than I expected and it was their experience, time, energy and patience what pushed me forward. Andra and Veronika, thank you!

My thanks also go to my third supervisor, David Šmahel. He gave me a very strong impulse in my academic carrier – it was him who introduced me to the field of Internet studies and it was him who introduced me to the network of Internet researchers. Last but not least, he is the co-author of most of my publications. Thank you for such a fruitful collaboration! My thanks also go to Kristiina Kruuse for translations into Estonian and Robert Ganian and Claire Osborne who have helped me improve the English language in the manuscripts.

During my career I have had the opportunity to work with many extremely intelligent and inspiring people. I am very thankful and happy for every single minute we spent discussing and influencing each other. I am especially grateful to my co-authors – Kaveri Subrahmanyam, Francesca Romana Seganti and Kjartan Ólafsson – it was a great honor to work with you!

None of my publications would exist without the financial support of many institutions and grant projects. The thesis and included articles were supported by the University of Tartu and Masaryk University. The articles were also supported by a grant from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (MSM0021622406); EU Kids Online network funded by the EC (DG Information Society) Safer Internet plus Programme (project code SIP-KEP-321803); grants from the Estonian Research Council (ETF8527, PUT44 and SF0180017s07); grants from the Czech Science Foundation (GAP407/12/1831 and P407/11/0585); the Grant Agency of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic (KJB708140702); VITOVIN project (CZ.1.07/2.3.00/20.0184), which is co-financed by the European Social Fund and the state budget of Czech Republic. My thanks also go to the publishers – Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.; Sage; Medimond; Springer Science+Business Media B.V.; Policy Press; Wiley – who kindly permitted reprints of the publications.

Also, neither the thesis nor the publications would ever have been written without the infinite amount of social support I received. First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents and family – I am immensely happy I could make your life investment worthy – by transforming your (our) genes into memes. And I cannot forget my friends and colleagues – I have had many opportunities to meet wonderful people with whom I am honoured to share friendship (with all the nuances and multiple meanings this word can possible bear) – my thanks go to those who played an important role in my life in the last years – thank you Adéla Procházková, Alena Černá, Filip Havlíček, Kača Škařupová, Kristian Daneback, Milan Vašek, Seili Suder. And my special thanks also go to Andra Siibak!

I also must recall those who serve as role model and gave me inspiration, intellectual strength and a sense of relief – among many of those, I want to point out C.G. Jung, J.R.R. Tolkien, Richard Dawkins, T.G. Masaryk and Václav Havel.

Last but not least, my very special thanks go to Anna Ševčíková. Anna, you played an extremely important role in all above mentioned aspects – you gave me inspiration, ideas, emotional and rational support. You are the fourth and hidden supervisor. You are my dearest close one. My feelings of gratitude go beyond my ability to express them. Thank you for being on my side!

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Rahvusvahelise uurimisvõrgustiku EU Kids Online II-III Tšehhi töörühma liige

Dokoritööga seotud täiendavad publikatsioonid

Smahel, D., Brown, B.B., & Blinka, L. (2012). Associations between online friendship and Internet addiction among adolescents and emerging adults. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(2), 381–388.

- Cerna, A., Blinka, L., & Seganti, F.R.** (2012). A Blog of Their Own. G.-M. Frånberg, C. Hällgren, & E. Dunkels (toim). *Invisible Girl* (lk 247-256). Umeå: Umeå University.
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