

DISSERTATIONES DE MEDIIS ET COMMUNICATIONIBUS
UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

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ANDRA SIIBAK

Self-presentation of the
“Digital Generation” in Estonia



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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation is based on the following original publications which are enlisted in a chronological order and will be referred to in the dissertation with respective Roman numerals.

- I **Siibak, A.** (2007). Reflections of RL in the Virtual World. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 1, online www.cyberpsychology.eu.
- II **Siibak, A.** (2007) Sugu virtuaalmaailmas. *Ariadne Lõng*, 1/2, pp. 36–48.
- III **Siibak, A.**; Kalmus, V. (2009). Online Environments: Self Presentation. Steinberg, Shirley R.; Kehler, Michael (Eds.). *Boy Culture: An Encyclopedia* (xx – xx). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press [in press].
- IV **Siibak, A.** (2009). Constructing the Self through the Photo Selection: Visual Impression Management on Social Networking Websites. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 1(1), online www.cyberpsychology.eu.
- V Kalmus, V.; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P.; Runnel, P.; **Siibak, A.** (2009) Mapping the terrain of “Generation C”: Places and practices of online content creation among Estonian teenagers. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Special Issue on *Young People, Mediated Discourse and Communication Technologies*, 14(4), July 2009
- VI Kalmus, V.; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P.; Runnel, P.; **Siibak, A.** (forthcoming 2009). Online Content Creation Practices of Estonian Schoolchildren in Comparative Perspective. *Journal of Children and Media* Special Issue: *Comparative issues and findings for children’s internet use in Europe*, 3(4), xx–xxx.
- VII **Siibak, A.**; Ugur, K (forthcoming 2009). Is Social Networking Sites the New Online Playground for Young Children? A study of Rate profiles in Estonia. In Berson, I. & Berson, M. (Eds). *High-Tech Tots: Childhood in a Digital World*, Information Age Publishing, xx–xxx.
- VIII **Siibak, A.** (forthcoming 2009) Constructing masculinity on a social networking website. The case-study of visual self-presentations of young men on the profile images of SNS *Rate.ee*, *Young*, xx–xxx.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The defenders contribution to the respective articles is as follows:

Study I: The study was initiated and fully designed by the author. The study was conducted and analyzed by the author and the author is fully responsible of the manuscript.

Study II: The study was initiated and fully designed by the author. The study was conducted and analyzed by the author and the author is fully responsible of the manuscript.

Study III: The role of the author of the thesis was dominant in the article. The materials for the theoretical overview were gathered and analyzed by the author. The analysis concerning the online self-presentation of men was carried out by the author.

Study IV: The author is partly responsible for the data collection and is fully responsible for the analysis of the data. The author is fully responsible of the manuscript.

Study V: The author is partly responsible for the data collection and analysis, and participated in providing the theoretical frameworks and the discussion part of the manuscript.

Study VI: The author is responsible for analyzing the content creation practices of the young based on the EU Kids Online data repository and participated in writing the theoretical overview and the discussion part of the manuscript.

Study VII: The author is responsible for the empirical analysis on the SNS profiles of young children and had a dominant role in writing the theoretical and methodological parts of the manuscript. The author also participated in writing the introduction and conclusions of the manuscript.

Study VIII: The study was initiated and fully designed by the author. The study was conducted and analyzed by the author and the author is fully responsible of the manuscript.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of new media environments has developed rapidly in the social sciences during recent decades. Today the Internet is viewed not as a special system available to the lucky few, but as a routine technology which has been incorporated into the everyday lives of millions. According to Haythornthwaite (2002), the Internet does not function on its own but has become embedded in the real-life practices that people engage in as part of everyday existence. The new media technologies have, therefore, also taken an emerging place in social interaction. On the one hand, the various online communities, social networking sites and other platforms for computer-mediated communication have long lost their aura of mystery and are viewed as some of the many ways in which people can stay connected. On the other hand, the new media platforms are still providing wholly original forms for expressing and experimenting with one's identity.

Young people in particular have been taking advantage of the opportunities offered by new media technologies wholeheartedly. When engaged in the networked publics created by the Internet, it's clear that present-day youngsters face public life with an unimaginably wide publicity (boyd 2008). Unlike their parents, who have remained partly in awe of the opportunities offered by the new media, present-day youngsters use the Internet for education, entertainment and communication. By interacting with familiar, as well as unfamiliar, peers in these online communities, the young learn the norms and values of society through trial and error. In order to earn acceptance by their online peers, youngsters need to learn how to conform to the prevailing rules in online communities so as to find their own place within the structure of the online hierarchy. Online impression management has become a necessary tool for creating social identity for the young, as the online setting provides freedom to experiment, as well as to receive instant social feedback. When trying out various identities, youngsters not only form collectively imagined boundaries around their communities but also produce a series of peer cultures that, during recent times, have been created in public playgrounds (boyd 2008).

Past studies in Estonia on the role that the new media play in the lives of young people have mainly concentrated on youngsters' use of new media technologies (see, e.g., Kalmus 2004; Runnel et al. 2006; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008). The objective of my work is to understand how young people use the various new media environments in order to construct their virtual identities. The main age group under investigation in my thesis is 11–25-year-olds. In my empirical studies, I have analyzed the engagement of Estonian youngsters in new media environments, in the context of the “digital generation” (Tapscott 1998). A special focus of my thesis involves analyzing youngsters' networking and self-presentation strategies, as well as their user-generated content creation in various online spaces, i.e. the activities characteristic of the “digital generation” in general, and “Generation C” in

particular. My thesis is mainly focused on the usage of social networking sites (SNS), youngsters' content creation practices in weblogs, personal homepages and news forums, from the perspective of media and communication studies.

Interdisciplinary theories and concepts are used in order to analyze how new media have opened up additional opportunities for communication, creativity and socialization of young people. My thesis draws on a conceptual framework related to structure and agency, as well as theories focusing on the new media in particular. The empirical research of my thesis mainly focuses on Estonian youngsters; however, a broader European perspective is also necessary for comparisons. The study has a methodologically rich empirical basis: a variety of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are included in the analytical process.

On-line self-presentation and content creation practices of Estonian youngsters are analyzed in eight empirical articles. The studies can be divided into three parts. The first part of the thesis concentrates on content creation practices of Estonian youngsters in a comparative European context. This part includes Study V, "Mapping the terrain of "Generation C": Places and practices of online content creation among Estonian teenagers" and Study VI, "Online Content Creation Practices of Estonian Schoolchildren in a Comparative Perspective" (both co-authored with Veronika Kalmus, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Pille Runnel).

The second part of my thesis is concerned with the visual self-presentation methods used in SNS profiles, a topic which has been my special research interest. Here I focus on the online visual gender identity constructions of youngsters in their SNS images. This part mainly includes Study I, "Reflections of RL in the Virtual World", Study II, "Sugu virtuaalmaailmas" ("Gender in the virtual world") and Study IV, "Constructing the Self through the Photo Selection: Visual Impression Management on Social Networking Websites". In Study VII, "Are Social Networking Sites the New Online Playground for Young Children?" (co-authored with Kadri Ugur), various identity games played in these online playgrounds are described.

As Internet research has so far mainly addressed issues of gender identity in online environments from the female perspective, i.e. the question of gendered performances online has often been limited to the identity play and experiences of women and girls, the third part of my thesis deals more with the virtual identity constructions of young men. This part is mainly based on the theoretical overview of the issue in Study III, "Online Environments: Self Presentation" (co-authored with Veronika Kalmus) and the empirical Study VIII, "Visual methods for constructing masculinity on a social networking website".

The structure of the introductory article is as follows: the first section of the theoretical overview presents the discussions around the generational differences and different labels used for referring to the new generation of Internet users. Also, the dual relationship of structure and agency in online environments, as well as online self-presentation strategies are discussed. Methodo-

logical issues of the studies are described in the second section. In the third section, I move on to the main findings of each study. In the “Discussion”, the fourth section, based on the empirical results emerging from my studies, I present an explanation of the different factors related to engagement and self-presentation strategies. The Introductory article ends with “Conclusions”, with a supplementary “Summary in Estonian”.

I. SETTING THE PROBLEM

I.1. “Digital Generation”– a social or a technological concept?

Compared to earlier research, which was mainly concerned with studying the access and diffusion of new media technologies, present-day research interests have turned to analyzing the use of the Internet.

The new social landscape brought about by the new media technologies has generated a discussion of generational differences in new media use. The visible generational differences are not only connected to the share of users in various age groups and the amount of time spent using the new media but are also connected to the terms of the main opportunities experienced by children and adults on line (see Jones & Fox 2009). The main opportunities experienced by children on line across Europe are connected to the use of the Internet as an educational resource, for entertainment, games and fun, for searching for global information and for social networking, whereas other online opportunities, for example, user-generated content creation or civic participation, are much less often taken advantage of (Hasebrink et al. 2008). Compared to adults, who value the Internet mainly as an educational resource or an opportunity to gain access to global information, young people are primarily attracted to opportunities connected with various forms of online communication, entertainment and play (Hasebrink et al. 2008). The special focus of my thesis, however, is to analyze young peoples’ engagement in online content creation, an online usage which is not as actively practiced as is often thought. Furthermore, I am especially interested in how the new generation of Internet users makes use of the opportunities provided by various new media environments for constructing and reconstructing their identities.

However, before I start to analyze the various practices young people engage in, it is important to define who are viewed as young people in the context of this thesis. Some authors (see Buckingham 2000; Sercombe et al. 2002; Flanagan & Syversten 2006) argue that, rather than being a “natural” category, social categories such as “youngsters” or “young people” are socially constructed and defined. Not only has the term “young” been undergoing significant changes as the age range covering youth, the traits attributed to young people and their position and function in society have changed, but the interpretation of the category is also specific to the social and historical context. Hence, countries also differ in terms of the age range they have set for defining who is an adult and who is not. Usually the term is used to refer to individuals in their adolescence, the years of emerging adulthood. In the context of this thesis, I have relied on the definition given in the Conception of Estonian Youth, which defines individuals whose age range is between 7 and 26 years as “young people” (poInt 4.1: 2001).

Young people and the formation of identity

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that “youth” need not be so heavily related to biological age but, rather, usually refers to people who have not yet fully assimilated to the dominant social codes, i.e. they have not fully mastered the schemas and rules that form the overall structure of society (Sercombe et al. 2002). Erikson (1968) has stated that the main task of adolescent transition is to explore and consolidate a personal identity. By identity, Erikson (1950) meant not only individuals’ conception of their uniqueness but also the sense of authenticity between what one believes in and how one acts, as well as a sense of solidarity with and commitment to similar others. In the world of late modernity, however, self-identity has to be viewed as a “reflexive achievement,” as individuals need to actively incorporate information from a variety of mediated experiences (Giddens 1991: 215). Furthermore, as proposed by Giddens (1991: 215) “the narrative of self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale.” Thus, the narrative of self-identity has to be continuously reordered according to the shifting experiences people face in their lives, as well as the overall changes occurring in the cultural and social context. In my thesis, I have combined the ideas of Giddens (1991) with generational theories according to which people who are born in the same time range and therefore go through their adolescence and youth at the same time are often categorized by generational labels.

Generational labels

Numerous labels, such as “Generation Y”, “Echo Boomers” and “Millennials”, have been used to refer to the new generation of present-day youth. According to Bruckhard Schäffer (2003, referred to by Fromme 2006), every generation grows up with its own specific style of media usage and culture, which helps to differentiate the generation from previous ones. Present-day children and young people are often defined by their relationship to technology, as a variety of labels, such as “digital generation” (Papert 1996), “Net generation” (Tapscott 1998), “digital natives” (Prensky 2001a), “electronic generation” (Buckingham 2002), “Generation C” (Bruns 2006) and “the Google generation” (Rowlands et al. 2008), are connected with new media technologies. These labels are also used to signify the preferences and supposed common characteristics of this generation. The proliferation of names for this new generation is also a response to the proclivities of the generation, as well as to those who describe and try to understand them (Donnison 2007).

Furthermore, the process of defining a concept such as “generation” is a complicated matter (see Buckingham 2006). Donnison (2007) suggests that the word “generation” has often been used in a too universalising way, often with

the assumption that the members of a generation necessarily share the same characteristics, beliefs and behaviours. Mannheim (1952: 290, 302) has suggested using such concepts as “generational location”, “generation as actuality” and “generation units” in order to overcome the “problem of generations”.

“Generation location” refers to people who were born during a common time period and into specific and particular social, cultural, political, economic and historical processes. The conditions, however, also form a concrete structure as this limits them to “a specific range of experiences, predisposing them to a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience” (Mannheim 1952: 291). As authors have not agreed on a universal label for the new generation of the digital age, there is also a disparity between the age parameters for this generation. According to Tapscott (1998) and Montgomery et al. (2004), people born between 1979 and 1997 belong to the Net generation, whereas some authors (see Carlson 2005; McGrindel 2006; Kennedy et al. 2007) view youngsters born between 1980 and 1994 as members of the digital generation. Furthermore, the confusion between birth and life span parameters has also led to the fact that it is very hard to estimate the size of this generation (see Donnison 2007).

Also, not all the individuals belonging to the generation are interested in experiencing and engaging in the potential practices offered by the historical, social, cultural, etc. conditions of the period (Mannheim 1952). Therefore, Mannheim (1952: 302) has proposed the concept “generation as actuality,” where the members of the generation are viewed as active agents who share a common response to changes in the social and cultural context. As the members of the digital generation grew up in a time of rapid technological changes in Western societies, it has been anonymously claimed that the members of this new generation have an intimate relationship with ICTs. The new media technologies help to shape and form the everyday lives of present-day youngsters, who are accustomed to using all the “toys and tools of the digital age” (Prensky 2001a: 1). The rapid changes in the technological gadgets youngsters own, as well as the new practices offered, for example, by the coming of Web 2.0, are now used to characterize the new generation. Hence, as claimed by David Buckingham (2008: 13), the advocates of the concept of the digital generation regard technology as a liberating force for young people which helps to create a generation that is more open, democratic, creative and innovative than any other generation before them.

Even the main characteristics of this generation – independence, investigation, immediacy, innovation and the need to authenticate – are said to be connected with the nature of the Internet medium (see Tapscott 1998). The other features which he named as characteristic of the generation, for example, openness, inclusion, free expression and sensitivity to cooperative interest, are, however, related to the Internet culture in general. Furthermore, as there is a technology-knowledge gap between the members of the new generation and

their parents, several authors (see Tapscott 1998; Alch 2000; Livingstone & Bober 2005) have also emphasized the fact that the Internet has provided youngsters with a position of greater authority and control. Moreover, compared to older generations, who, although they are also on line, “continue to rely heavily on traditional, analog forms of interaction”, the young view the new media technologies as “primary mediators of human-to-human connections” (Palfrey & Gasser 2008). In order to emphasize the differences between the new and the previous generation even further, some authors have claimed that members of the new generation “share and process information fundamentally differently” (Prensky 2001a: 1). The members of the digital generation are claimed to have a strong sense of immediacy, a desire for instant gratification, and a low boredom threshold, due to which they tend to learn new things by interaction and doing, rather than by sitting and taking notes (Gaylor 2002: 9). Some others (see Raines 2002) have emphasized their optimistic and sociable nature, as well as their interest in teamwork and their achievement orientation. According to the Gaylor (2002) “Generational Differences” chart, the members of the new generation tend to think in a non-linear, loopy, hyperlink and hopscotch fashion. Other authors (Prensky 2001b; Napoli & Ewing 1998) have also stated that, because of the heavy use of the new media technologies, the thinking patterns of youngsters have also changed and given rise to a new generation of critical thinkers.

Nevertheless, as some agents may realize and actualize the opportunities offered by the social and cultural context in different ways, Mannheim (1952: 302) has claimed that there could be subgroups or “generation units” formed within the actual generation. Therefore, although the critical debate about these generational classifications has been quite active in recent years, yet another term, originally coined by the international public relations site TrendwatchIng.com, was brought to the academic field by Axel Bruns (2006). According to this notion, the new group of Internet users is called “Generation C”, where C stands for both “content creation” and for “creativity” more generally (TrendwatchIng.com, 2004–2005). Youngsters belonging to “Generation C” have managed to create a wide array of alternatives for traditional content creation areas and have introduced user-led content creation to various online environments, for example blogs, wikis, online journalism and such various creativity websites as Flickr and YouTube (see Lenhart et al. 2007, 2008a, 2008b). These new opportunities for creating content have also changed the understanding of the concept of the consumer of the content, or audience. In order to emphasize that members of Generation C are no longer just passive consumers, readers or users of online content, but also “occupy a hybrid, user-*and*-producer” position, I make use of the concept of “*produser*”, introduced by Axel Bruns (2007b). User-led content production, collaborative engagement, evolutionary development, heterarchical community structures and alternative approaches to intellectual property are all common traits of *produsage* (production + usage) and occur in various instances and environments. In other

words, “produsage demonstrates the changed content production value chain model in collaborative online environments: in these environments, a strict producer/consumer dichotomy no longer applies” (Bruns 2007a: 4).

However, not all these classifications and all the academic hype about the possible digital generation have been unanimously accepted. For example, Susan Herring (2008) has taken a critical stand on classifications of generational digital divide by suggesting that adults, especially journalists, researchers and new media producers, created the construct of the Internet Generation. She also problematizes the severe discrepancy in the adult constructions of this new generation. On the one hand, mainstream media messages often create moral panic regarding the possible dangers and risks in online environments. On the other hand, the majority of new media research, as well as advertising campaigns of the new media production companies, describe the new Internet generation as novel, powerful and transformative. Therefore, for Herring (2008) the various classifications of the new generation reflect the interpretation of a demographic group that did not grow up with digital media, not the interpretation of today’s youth themselves, who take digital media for granted. Other authors (see Buckingham 2006) have mainly criticized attributing too powerful a role to technology or a particular medium. Furthermore, I claim that the labels used to refer to present-day youngsters are mainly constructed on technological changes and, thus, do not actually reflect the socio-cultural atmosphere.

It has become common knowledge that there is a “participation gap” in user-led content creation as, globally, “most children are not growing up digital” (Tapscott 1998: 12). Several very powerful social and cultural factors, among which are religion, ethnicity, social class and gender, as well as individual differences, interact with the developments outlined above (Tapscott 1998). Furthermore, even when there is access to the Internet, the majority of users usually prefer to “lurk around” in various online environments rather than to participate actively (Jenkins 2006: 23, see also **Studies V; VI**). The findings of some recent studies (see Kennedy et al. 2007) also do not fully support the speculations on the emergence of the “digital generation”. As reported by Kennedy et al. (2007: 523), there is a big “disparity between the proposed and the actual use” of the new media in the area of Web 2.0.

In studies of digital inclusion of children, Livingstone and Helsper (2007) have proposed a continuum of digital inclusion, with gradations from non-use through low use to more frequent use. They suggest that children usually start using the Internet for plain information seeking, which later leads to the use of online games and entertainment, which again is followed by a stage where the Internet is used for downloading music and communication purposes. Only when they reach the final stage do children also take advantage of more creative and interactive opportunities (*ibid*).

Considering all the above-mentioned points, I claim that, when constructing the labels used to refer to present-day youngsters, the majority of theorists have only been concerned with emphasising the technological changes and have not

paid enough attention to the socio-cultural aspects. Hence, rather than only being connected with the emergence of the new media field, the aspects considered characteristic of the “digital generation” are also closely related to the cultural and social thought prevalent in a society. As creativity, innovation, free expression and sensitivity to co-operation are said to characterise the young today (see Tapscott 1998; Prensky 2001; etc.), I use the label “Generation C” (Bruns 2006), which I consider the most comprehensive of the labels used to characterize the young, in the context of my introductory cover article.

I.2. Framing the online content creation of “Generation C””: Structure and agency

I propose to analyze the engagement of “Generation C” (Bruns 2006) in online worlds, especially their activeness in user-generated content creation, by means of the theoretical notions of structure and agency.

The main characteristics of the digital generation, described in the previous chapter, are closely connected to a list of terms – freedom, creativity, self-hood, choice, motivation, will, initiative etc. – which have all been associated with the concept of *agency* (see Emirbayer & Mische 1998). Relying on this, the members of the digital generation could be expected to exercise their agency to the fullest in the environments most familiar to them, i.e. in online worlds. Nevertheless, the online environments, just like the offline world, are built on *structures* which shape the practices of people engaged in these environments and, at the same time, are reproduced by these practices (see Giddens 1984). As the most important aspects of *structure*, according to Anthony Giddens, are resources and rules, people’s knowledge of certain rules could be interpreted as a target force which makes them capable of action. Thus, “knowledgeable” human agents (i.e., people who know what they are doing and how to do it) engaging in online environments need to put into practice their necessarily structured knowledge.

William H. Sewell (1992: 20) proposes that “agency is implied by the existence of structures,” as the actors’ knowledge, especially of cultural schemas, implies the ability to act creatively and, hence, is also the source of agency. Furthermore, Sewell (1992: 13) views agency as profoundly social or collective, as “the transpositions of schemas and remobilizations of resources that constitute agency are always acts of communication with others.” Hence, as the cultural schemas of the present-day world have been changed remarkably by the invention of new media, the generational differences between the members of the digital generation and previous generations could, theoretically, bring about changes in agency. However, agency also differs in its kind and extent depending on the social world that people inhabit and their social positions in these worlds, as the extent of agency exercised by each person is dependent on

his/her position in the particular community. Therefore, not all the supposed members of the digital generation need to have adequate knowledge of the structures in order to exercise their creativity and agency to the fullest in online environments.

Aspects related to online content creation

An author whose concepts of *field* and *habitus* have contributed a lot to the *agency-structure* debate is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1993) views a *field* as a structured place of positions that impose a specific determination on all who enter it. In other words, *fields* form distinct microcosms endowed with their own rules, regularities and forms of authority. Thus, on the one hand, the Internet medium as a whole could be viewed as a field which demands, of anyone who enters it, special skills and knowledge of its rules and regularities. On the other hand, the online world consists of a variety of environments which all form their own separate fields. However, as is stated by Bourdieu (1993: 72), “in order for the field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the *habitus* that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the *field*, the stakes, and so on.” According to Bourdieu (1977: 87), the *habitus* not only signifies how we think about the world but is also connected to “a certain subjective experience” that people bring to the *field*. For others (see Webb et al. 2002), the *habitus* has come to signify the way individuals “become themselves”, as well as “the ways in which those individuals engage in practices” (Webb et al. 2002: xii quoted in Mcleod 2005). Nevertheless, the *habitus* cannot be viewed as thoroughly individualized; the formation of the *habitus* is related to the common cultural context (Adams 2006) or, as stated by McNay (1999), *habitus* is a “generative structure” which is formed in the interaction with social fields.

Although Bourdieu has argued that the structures of the fields cannot predispose the *habitus*, as it also can be “creative, inventive, but within the limits of its structures” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 19), some authors (see Butler 1999) have suggested that *habitus* submits to the rules and regularities of a certain field. Thus, online environments are framed both by the overall structures prevalent in the society as well as by the specific structures framing the online field in general and every environment in particular. Hence, on the one hand, engagement in a variety of online practices demands a great amount of agency, which may be hampered by the structures of the specific online field. On the other hand, online practices are also related to the *habitus* of a person, which is related to the structure in general.

In the context of the debate on generations, the common response to the changes in the social and cultural context has been one of the aspects needed for a generation to emerge (see Mannheim 1952). Compared to the members of previous generations, who did not have a chance to grow up with the new

medium, present-day youth are used to having different new media technologies in their lives. Therefore, the *habitus* of the young may be more accustomed to the structures framing online fields, which helps them to get more easily acquainted with the variety of practices the online spaces offer.

As proposed in **Study V**, I assume that youngsters' content creation practices online are, on the one hand, enabled and encouraged by existing online spaces and communities and, on the other hand, regulated and constrained by the structures of technological interfaces, as well as by social norms and expectations that prevail in online communities and peer cultures (as depicted in Figure 1).

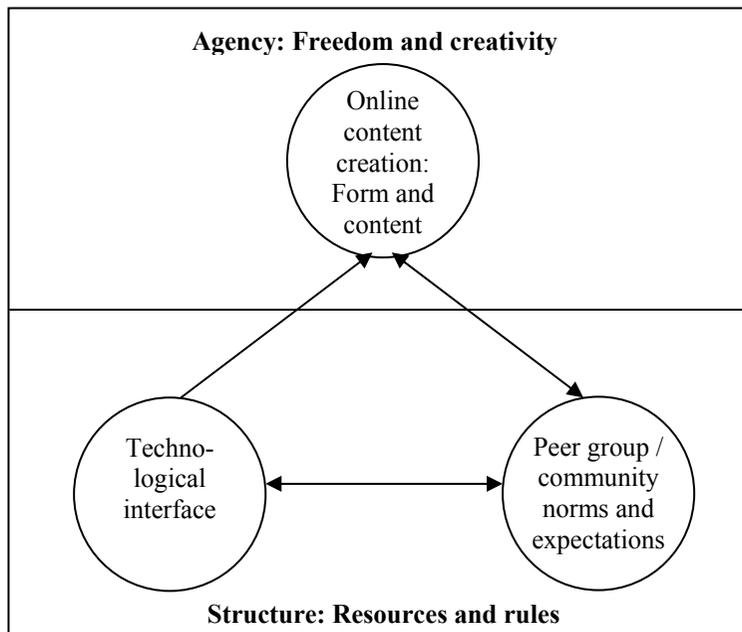


Figure 1. Agency and structure framing online content creation (Source: Study V).

In Figure 1, online content creation is related to agency – characteristics such as freedom, creativity, motivation, choice, etc. While engaged in content creation online, a person constantly makes choices regarding both the form and the content of input. The form of input (photos, videos, longer or shorter texts, etc.) depends largely on what is afforded by the technological interface, while the form and content of input are interdependent. Both the form and content and, hence, also the virtual identities created online, are dependent on the norms and expectations of the peer group or community, i.e. they reflect the overall structures inside the cultural and social context. Producing innovative and creative online content, i.e. content which does not obey the norms of the

community, can in time lead to changes in the overall structures. Although peer group norms are, on the one hand, related to the technological interface, continuous peer group pressures may also bring forth changes in the technological platforms of these environments. Changes in the technological interface do not derive directly from the innovative content produced in these online environments, but are instigated by the expectations of the peer group for these changes to occur.

Also, when speaking of the structural aspects of online activities, several researchers (see Livingstone 2008; Willett 2008; Stern 2008) have observed that young people are often constrained by the technological limitations of a particular website. Still, it is argued (see boyd 2008) that, in some cases, young people do actually know how to exploit the frames built by the technological interface and therefore manage to exercise their agency by creating a far more personalized profile on SNS or Instant Messenger pages. Furthermore, rather than emphasizing the technological limitations which frame the various online environments and make it difficult to exercise one's agency, a number of researchers (see Livingstone 2008; boyd 2008) stress the importance of rules practiced by the community as the main motivators of youngsters' activities. Nevertheless, as proposed in Study VI, young people may be engaged in two types of discursive practices in online content creation: contributing to reproducing existing norms and discourses, and modifying those discourses by inventing new forms and conventions of self-expression and social interaction (see Fairclough 1992).

I also propose that online environments, as a certain type of field, can be viewed as arenas for struggle, where all the agents active in the field would like to overturn or preserve the existing distribution of capital. I believe (see **Study VII**) that children who are involved in different online communities, such as social networking sites, share a certain number of fundamental interests, which are all connected to the mere existence of the community. Thus, youngsters engaging in online environments could be viewed as "virtuosos" (Bourdieu 1977: 79), who need not feel dominated by the abstract norms and schemas of the community but, rather, can elaborate on these schemas depending on their relations with the other agents in the field. They have adopted "the sense of the game" (Bourdieu 1992: 19) which Anthony King (2000: 419) has interpreted as "a sense of one's relations with other individuals and what those individuals will regard as tolerable."

The status of a person in an online community should be understood as *the process of achieving status* (Solomon 1999), i.e. the skillful impression management in the online environment which corresponds to the ideals and norms perceived by the community leads to the attainment of a certain placement in a social hierarchy of website users. Solomon (1999) proposes that, in terms of achieving status through consumption habits, the self-definitions of community members are derived from a common symbol system which the members of the community most often use to construct the personality of their group. Even

though young people are not always willing to confess the need to live up to the expectations of the peer group and refer to status-seeking among the members of the community as something that everybody *else* does (see **Study VI**), the desire to be ranked is an ongoing, dynamic process in which social feedback and various cultural intermediaries play a crucial role (see Solomon 1999). In online environments, different elements, for example, being good-looking, sexy and trend-conscious in profile images (see **Study IV**), the ability to combine different identity markers and posing techniques in the collection of profile images (see **Study VIII**), or membership in certain communities and the ability to use proper netspeak (see **Study VII**), are employed both by the profile creators and the observing users to determine the persons' social identity and their placement within the hierarchy of the members of the community.

1.3. Gendered identity performances online

While communicating in offline as well as online worlds, people always try to obtain information about each other in order to be able to know in advance what kind of response to give in order to match the expectations of others. Thus, in the variety of modern settings, people engage in “promoting an integration of the self” (Giddens 1991: 190). Erving Goffman (1990: 4) was the first to emphasize the importance of impression management, i.e. people often engage in activities in order “to convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey.” Whenever other persons are present, people tend to emphasize aspects of the self that typically correspond to norms and ideals of the group the person belongs to, or wishes to belong to (see Goffman 1990). Giddens (1991: 191) has also noted that in order for the individual to feel “psychologically secure in his self-identity” other people have to “recognize his behavior as appropriate or reasonable”. As people are used to exhibiting characteristics that are thought of as masculine or feminine, and in doing so construct themselves to fit into one of the two categories male or female, gender is one of the central aspects of the person's sense of self. Most adults and children “perform” plenty of gender-related characteristics and behaviors that make them ordinary members of their gender in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Thus, also in the case of communicating online, impression management is formulated by a constant worry about how to construct one's virtual identity so that it will be appreciated and accepted by one's peer group.

According to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, people who are uncertain about their abilities and opinions tend to compare and evaluate themselves by making comparisons with similar others. Young people in particular most often feel the need to meet societal expectations and may, therefore, unconsciously engage in social comparisons. Nevertheless, in the case of gender identity constructions, just as in other groups, some norms have higher status than others, implying that some kinds of behavior give more 'rewards' than

others, typically in the form of positive (or less negative) responses from the peer group. Mass media are often the main tools for people who are trying to model their own identities (see Riesman 1966; Goffman 1979; Gauntlett 2002; etc.). The role of the media can be strongly felt especially in the socialization into gender roles, because the representations of gender in the media help to reinforce the visions of how “ideal” women and men should look and behave. Therefore, it is no surprise to find that youngsters and children often rely on gender portrayals in the mass media (e.g. movies, television, magazines, music and advertisements) in order to construct their own gender identities (see Studies II–VI). Referring to the great influence of the media and the advertising industry on the identity constructions of people, theorists (Thiel 2006) have stated that usually “females and males ‘perform’ what they interpret their gender to be based on what culture has taught them is the correct (heterosexual) interpretation of gender” (Thiel 2006: 182).

According to Ros Ballaster et al. (1996: 88) “the construction of women as a homogeneous group, or even a group at all, is primarily achieved by the invocation of its supposedly ‘natural’ opposite – men”. Although there are several masculinity types related to each other, several authors (see Connell 1995; Trigiani 1998) have assigned the central role to hegemonic masculinity. Trigiani (1998) characterizes hegemonic masculinity by several factors: “physical strength and bravado, exclusive heterosexuality, suppression of ‘vulnerable’ emotions such as remorse and uncertainty, economic independence, authority over women and other men, and intense interest in sexual conquest.”

Nevertheless, Connell & Messerchmidt (2005: 836) have argued that masculinity cannot be viewed as “a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals;” rather, it should be viewed as “configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action”. Thus, as masculinity is dependent on the schemas and resources available in a particular social and cultural context, one should recognize the existence of multiple masculinities (see Imms 2000; Connell & Messerchmidt 2005). Authors (see Connell & Messerchmidt 2005; Lusher & Robins 2006) have also noted that masculinity is mainly dependent on three contexts – local, regional and global – which are all complexly interdependent on each other. Wetherell & Edley (1999) also propose that males take up hegemonic norms strategically, depending on the context, specific situation or their interactional needs. In their view, the self-presentation of males is positioned through various discursive practices, as males simultaneously try to construct themselves in multiple ways.

The most valued femininity in society is often referred to as normative. Nevertheless, just as in the debate on masculinity, authors (see McRobbie 1993) have claimed that the concept of normative femininity does not consist of any universal aspects, as “the ideal girlhood is constantly being rewritten” (Bettis & Adams 2008: 10). Hence, not only is femininity culturally constructed, it is also appropriated and resisted by different females in different ways. Although

Bettis & Adams (2008) suggest that while some of the markers that used to signify normative femininity (e.g. passivity, quietness and acquiescence) have now been replaced by new markers of ideal femininity (e.g. self-assertiveness, self-confidence, sexual subjectivity, individualism and independence), some nonnegotiable markers have still remained part of normative femininity. Among these universally accepted markers of ideal femininity, Bettis & Adams (2008) point out the need to look beautiful and attractive (see also Studies **II**, **III** and **IV**), as well as an expectation that women should marry and have children. Susan Douglas (1994: 8) has mentioned the existence of representations of gender in the mass media as one of the reasons why many women are turned into “cultural schizophrenics who rebel against yet submit to the prevailing images of what a desirable, worthwhile woman should be”.

It has been claimed (see Walker 2001) that people often use gender scripts for self narratives “so that identities and processes of identification occur within the social networks and power relations that are most familiar in society” (Walker 2001, referred by Thiel 2006: 187). In spite of the fact that one is allowed to adopt whatever identity one chooses in virtual environments, studies have shown that men and women still tend to create attributes thought to be sought by the opposite sex (Schmidt & Buss 1996; Albright 2001)¹. These findings provide a reason to suggest that people interacting in online environments cannot fully exercise their agency but, rather, have to conform to the rules and norms prescribed by society, and by the value orientations and expectations of the community engaged in the particular online environment.

Although gender-specific styles in online self-presentation have been studied in various online platforms, the majority of the research so far has mainly addressed issues of gender identity in online environments from the female perspective (see Harcourt 1999; Green & Adam 2001; Consalvo & Paasonen 2002; Mazzarella et al. 2005; Paasonen 2005; etc.), i.e. the question of gendered performances online has often been limited to the identity play and experiences of women and girls. Online identity management of boys and men has usually been discussed in order to compare their self-presentation in online worlds to

¹ Several studies have reported that people use very gender-specific styles in their self-presentations in case of all major online content creation environments like personal homepages (cf. Befring 1997; Miller & Mather 1998; Dominick 1999, Miller & Arnold 2000; Stern 2002); blogs (cf. Schler et al. 2005; Scheidt 2005; Gray 2005; Lenhart & Fox 2006; Herring & Paolillo 2006; Pedersen & Macafee 2006, 2007) and social networking websites (Elm 2007; see also Studies **I**; **II**; **IV**; **VII**; **VIII**). Furthermore, several important factors upon which one’s online identity is being built, for example the choice of nicknames (Scheidt 2005), selection of avatars (Scheidt 2005) and netspeak (Huffaker 2004) have often been referred to be built upon gender stereotypes.

that of girls or women.² However, masculine identity constructions in online environments have rarely been discussed exclusively from the perspective of boys and men. The majority of the studies which deal with the representations of masculinity in online environments have concentrated on the manifestations of masculine identity in text-based environments, such as forums (Kendall 2000) or MUDs (Kendall 2002), or in platforms which have traditionally been associated with masculinity, for example in online games (Sørensen 2003) or pornographic websites (Cook 2006). I believe it is important to study the way masculine identities are constructed in the wider variety of new media environments which are not only limited to the textual ways of presenting the self but also allow visual self-displays. Hence, my thesis involves studies which give an overview of the methods young men use to construct their identities in various online environments in general (see Study **III**), and on social networking sites in particular (see Study **VIII**).

I.4. Estonian context

Estonia, as with all the other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, has been shaped by a highly systemic transition process which covers all areas of life. Lauristin & Vihalemm (1997) viewed the transitional changes taking place in Estonian society as a “civilization shift”, also referred to as a process of Westernization. In that process, transition societies try to structure the attitudes and values of a post-socialist society into the context characteristic of developed Western countries (Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997). The process, however, is characterized by constant contradictions between the structural changes at the institutional level and the agencies of subjects. Thus, when speaking of the transition process in Estonia, we also have to acknowledge the conflict between the desire to adopt Western models of welfare in terms of values, beliefs and ideology, and the actual attitudes, habits, lifestyles and knowledge inherited from the former Soviet Union (see Strömpl 2000). Although Estonia has taken a huge leap from a society in transition to a consumer and information society, in terms of institutional changes, the societal learning process, as suggested by Lauristin & Vihalemm 1998: 906), in “the replacement of the mental world of

² A number of authors has been comparing the online self presentation techniques of men and women in various online platforms like personal homepages (Befring 1997; Miller & Mather 1998; Dominick 1999; Miller & Arnold 2000; Stern 2002), online games (Cassell & Jenkins 1998; Griffiths et al. 2003; Jonsson 2006; Yee 2006) and blogging (Orlowski 2003; Henning 2003; Herring et al. 2004; Schler et al. 2006; Pedersen & Macafee 2007; Argamon et al. 2007). Other researchers have concentrated on comparing the gender differences in language and emoticon use in online environments (Rodino 1997; Witmer & Katzman 1997; Huffaker 2004; Huffaker & Calvert 2005), or analyzed the gender-swapping phenomena from a gendered perspective (Bruckmann 1993; Turkle 1995).

the Soviet time” has proved to be a much longer battle. One of those cultural aspects where the attitudes, stereotypes and values of people have been notable in generational changes has been the question of gender.

The strong ideological pressures of the Soviet period insisted on equality between the genders in all fields of life, i.e. women as well as men were active agents in the public sphere and had equal opportunities to work. However, the ideological standards did not progress into the everyday lives of people. Although women were allowed to work in a variety of positions in the public sphere, patriarchal values and norms dominated not only in the private sphere but also in the overall cultural and social context. As Estonia started to struggle for independence, previous, although purely ideological, ideas of gender equality were formed into a solid traditional gender structure (Kurvinen 2008). Thus, in order to be an ideal woman one had to have at least three children, whereas the role of the man was to be the main breadwinner of the family (see Narusk 1997; Hansson & Laidmäe 2000).

In recent years there have been some positive influences which have introduced a debate on gender discrimination³. Nevertheless, the existing gender stereotypes and norms, in many ways, still rely on the social and cultural practices of the Soviet Union and earlier times. Research on gender in Estonia indicates that changes in age-old mental patterns and beliefs regarding gender roles have proved to be extremely difficult, as Estonians still tend to value conservative and traditional gender roles (Vöörmann 1997; Oras 1999; Laas 2000; Hansson & Laidmäe 2000; Pajumets 2007; Kutsar 2007). For instance, according to Oras (1999) “marriage, home, children, love, taking care of loved ones, respect for other people, culture and a good education” are the things Estonian women cherish and desire in life. Estonian men, on the other hand, are clearly more success-oriented, both in terms of career and position in society. The same values were also visible in the results of the survey “Estonian woman during a new century”, as “many people from the survey group believed that women were given, by nature, better qualities for home maintenance” (Laas 2000: 31). Furthermore, compared to other European countries, the attitudes of

³ For instance, the Bureau of Equality between women and men was established in the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1996 whose main activity is to coordinate the mainstreaming of the gender equality perspective into socio-political development. Gender Equality Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and obliges public bodies and employers to promote gender equality, was enacted in 2004 and an independent and impartial expert was appointed as The Gender Equality Commissioner in 2005 in order to monitor compliance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act. Furthermore, several international projects (e.g. ILO Program “More and Better Jobs for Women” 1999-2003; Phare Twinning Project “Development of Administrative Capacity of National Authorities in the Field of Gender Mainstreaming 2004–2005) have been launched and books (see Doblhofer & Küng 2006; Kutsar (ed.) 2007; Järviste 2007; Donnely & Silvera 2008) have been published which should promote gender equality in Estonia.

Estonians toward gender roles in compensation for paid work and housework are less gender-equality oriented (Telpt 2008: 73). Although Estonian women's average hours of labor per week are 11 per cent higher compared to the contribution of Estonian men (see Telpt 2008: 80), the most recent statistics indicate that Estonia faces the highest gender pay gap in the EU (Karapetyan 2009).

In terms of the media, it has been claimed that women are "universally underrepresented in all media channels" (Pilvre 2002: 117). In addition, in the media, their image largely depends on traditional gender stereotypes (see Pilvre 2000; Põldsaar 2001). For example, studies by Põldsaar (2001) and Pilvre (2000) showed that themes belonging to the private sphere (home, relationships, looks, children and care) are prevalent in the media portrayals of women in Estonia. Furthermore, as the images of women in Estonian media have been "linked to a trivializing beauty cult" (Põldsaar 2001), most girls have been brought up with the knowledge that they need to take good care of their looks in order to appeal to boys. Even the representations of female politicians in the media are gendered and reproduce the stereotypical power relations and gender order in society (see Kivilo 2003; Lindma 2004). In the case of men, however, the emphasis is on their work, and issues connected to the private sphere are seldom mentioned (see Pilvre 2000).

Gender-stereotypical attitudes are also present regarding people's usage of new media. Kalmus (2006) has noted that teenage boys, as well as 65–74-year-old men and women, tend to be the most conservative groups and cling to gender-stereotypical attitudes towards the new media. Based on the results of the survey "Me. The World. The Media" (2005), teen-age boys are most inclined to such opinions as "Men can use computers better than women" and "The use of computers and the Internet should be taught primarily to boys" (see Kalmus 2006). Therefore, rather than being influenced by the new trends predominant in present-day post-modern societies, the opinions of Estonian youngsters, even in the case of the new media, are reflections of age-old gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, even though there is no reason to speak of a gender gap in home access to the Internet in the 15–19- age group, gender differences in terms of the usage of new media are mainly visible in the case of Internet user types and in self-evaluated computer skills (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008). The most active Internet user types – Versatile Internet users and Public and practical information users – are prevalent among men. The Pragmatic work and information user type and Entertainment and family information user type, however, consist mainly of female users (Pruulmann- Vengerfeldt et al. 2008). Furthermore, as the skills of teenage boys have significantly increased but the average level of self-evaluated computer skills among girls has stayed the same, significant differences between the genders in terms of self-evaluated computer skills emerged in 2002–2005. Relying on these results, Kalmus (2006: 519) has suggested that cultural stereotypes and gender differences in computer skills

form a dialectical relationship: “gender stereotypes function as a structural norm in the process of socialisation and identity formation; differences in computer skills, in turn, reinforce the stereotypes.”

In discussions of the emerging information society, Estonia has often served as an example of a success story (see Krull 2003). According to the Global Information Technology Report, compiled by the World Economic Forum (2008), Estonia, with its 5.12 points, is ranked 20th among 127 rated countries in the Networked Readiness Index. The Lisbon Review (Blanke 2006), compiled a few years earlier, indicated that Estonia ranked as high as 5th among European countries in information society development. Estonia’s high position in different rankings and its reputation as an information society has mainly been associated with the ICT usage and readiness of the government sector (Vengerfeldt & Reinsalu 2009).

Furthermore, various programs (e.g. Tiger Leap) and initiatives have been instituted to bring Internet connections to every school in Estonia. These various programs have also led to remarkably high Internet penetration among Estonians (70 percent; see Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Reinsalu 2009). Internet usage is especially high among youth, reaching 99.9 percent of 11 to 18-year-old pupils (see Study V). Relying on the results of several hundred studies, the EU Kids Online network⁴ divided 21 European countries into three groups based on children’s Internet usage: countries where more than 85 percent of all children use the Internet are considered high-use countries, the medium-use group includes countries in which more than 65 and less than 85 percent of children use the Internet, and countries with less than 65 percent of young Internet users are low-use countries (Hasebrink et al. 2008: 14). Based on the report by the EU Kids Online network, Estonia is considered a high-use country, ranking 2nd to 4th, after Finland, with 93 per cent of 6–17-year-old children using the Internet (Hasebrink et al. 2008).

Despite the relatively high Internet use among the youngest age groups, Estonia cannot be viewed purely as a success story. The EU Kids Online network also classified countries based on children’s online use and risk. According to this analysis, Estonia, together with the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and the UK, is considered to be a country with high use and high risk (see Table 2).

⁴ The network consists of researchers from 21 European countries involved in the project EU Kids Online (2006–2009). Funded by the Safer Internet plus Program, the project examines European research on cultural, contextual and risk issues in children’s safe use of the Internet and new media (for more info see www.eukidsonline.net).

Table 2: Overall country classification on the basis of online use and risk perception.
Source: Livingstone & Haddon 2009: 17

<i>Online risk</i>	<i>Children's Internet use</i>		
	<i>Below EU average (< 65%)</i>	<i>Average (65%–85%)</i>	<i>Above EU average (> 85%)</i>
<i>Low</i>	Cyprus Italy	France Germany	
<i>Medium</i>	Greece	Austria Belgium Ireland Portugal Spain	Denmark Sweden
<i>High</i>		Czech Republic Bulgaria	Estonia Netherlands Norway Poland Slovenia UK

One of the reasons for this ranking is the fact that, compared to parents in other European countries, Estonian parents tend to be much less concerned about the online activities of their children. For example, the latest Flash Eurobarometer (2008) results show that only a bit more than 60 per cent of Estonian parents, compared to the average 83 per cent in the European Union, have told their children not to communicate online with people whom they do not know in person. Furthermore, only 39 per cent of the parents are concerned that their child might fall victim to a “cyber-flirt” and only 33 per cent are worried that their child might be bullied online (the EU average is 60 and 54 per cent, respectively). The same study also revealed that only 50 per cent of Estonian parents talk frequently to their children about their activities online, whereas an average of 74 per cent of the parents in the overall EU sample discuss these matters (Flash Eurobarometer 2008).

The relative lack of interest of Estonian parents in the activities children engage in online has also led to the fact that adults are often not aware of the content their children produce in online environments. An analysis of the studies in the data repository of the EU Kids Online network indicates that user-generated content creation is most often practiced by children in the high-use countries, such as Denmark, the UK, Iceland, Belgium and Estonia (Study VI). Compared to older age groups, Estonian 15–19-year-olds have been found to be most active in online content creation, as well as consumption practices (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008). However, rather than actively participating in user-generated content creation, the most frequent activities Estonian youngsters engaged in were connected to uploading photos and downloading movies and music. The more sophisticated activities of online content creation,

such as updating one's blog or homepage, however, were never practiced by more than two thirds of the youngsters (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008). Thus, compared to older age groups, Estonian teenagers may be distinguished as "Generation C", while acknowledging that the consumer/user aspect is still more predominant than that of producer in their online practices (Study V). I propose that in order to study involvement in online environments one has to take into consideration the overall structural aspects, i.e. the prevalent thought patterns and norms of the peer culture, e.g. in terms of gender stereotypes, as well as the norms characteristic of the online field in general and the specific online environment in particular. The members of "Generation C" are characterized by their creative and innovative online practices; hence, they should be exercising their personal agency in online environments to the fullest compared to the members of previous generations. As the members of "Generation C" have grown up with the new technologies, their habitus should be more easily accustomed to the peculiarities of the online fields than any of the older generations. Through an analysis of online content creation and self-presentation practices of Estonian youngsters, this thesis strives to contribute to the broader discussion of the possible emergence of the "new generation".

The particular research questions are presented below.

1.5. Research questions

Based on the previously presented theoretical framework, the goal of the thesis is to problematize the applicability of the label "Generation C" in the Estonian context. My aim is to determine if the online content creation practices of Estonian youngsters actually match the general hype about the new generation, as well as to consider whether the self-presentation strategies youngsters use in online environments can be viewed as something revolutionary that could not have been used by members of any of the previous generations. Furthermore, my aim is to analyse the role of the peer culture on the self-presentation strategies of young people in online environments, as well as to determine if these strategies have brought about changes in the stereotypical thought patterns regarding femininity and masculinity otherwise prevalent in Estonian society. This larger goal can be divided into three main questions, and related sub-questions which help to answer the main questions:

I What are the prevalent tendencies in children's online content creation?

- What online content creation activities are predominant among Estonian youngsters? (Study V)
- What are the main reasons for being engaged in online content creation? (Study V; VI)

- Are particular online content creation activities mutually exclusive or can they co-exist in young people's lives and communication habits? (Study V)
- Can we distinguish, and how can we distinguish, between different types of online content creators? (Study V)
- How are the self-evaluated computer skills, time spent on the Internet and attitudes towards the language and content of the Web related to students' content creation activities online? (Study V)
- Are there any cross-national factors that influence user-generated content creation by young people? (Study VI)
- What are the similarities and differences among European countries in online content creation by young people? (Study VI)

II What kind of means and visual elements do the young use for self-presentation in online environments?

- What kind of strategies for visual self-presentation do the young use in their profile images on social networking sites? (Studies I; II; IV; VII; VIII)
- What aspects are considered important in one's online self-presentation in order to become popular among the online peer group? (Study IV)
- Can we perceive different stages of impression management in online communities? (Study IV)

III How do the young construct their gender identity in the profiles of social networking websites?

- Can we distinguish between gender-specific and gender-neutral ways of posing in profile images? (Studies I; II; VII; VIII)
- How do young males construct their virtual masculine identities? (Studies I; II; III; VIII)
- How do young females construct feminine gender identity in profile images? (Studies I; II; VII)

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Methods and Data

In order to answer the study questions, the methodological base of my dissertation is varied. I have made use of different quantitative (Study I; II; IV–VI) and qualitative (Study III; VI) methods to study how online content creation in various new media environments affects the identity constructions of young Estonians. First of all, I will provide background and explanation for the surveys used in the thesis. Then I will describe the process of carrying out the visual content analysis of youngsters' profile images.

Surveys used in the thesis

I used the data of two different surveys in the studies for my dissertation. In Studies III, VII and VIII, I made use of the data from the pre-designed multiple-choice questionnaire “Youth and the Internet”, which was conducted among 11 to 18-year-old pupils in autumn 2007. Data was gathered in comprehensive schools in Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu, with a total sample of 713 pupils. The questionnaire “Youth and the Internet” included 316 indicators, among them measures of pupils' online activities, attitudes and opinions on the Internet, reasons for being or not being engaged in online content creation, and self-evaluated computer, Internet and English-language skills. Depending on the focus of the particular article, the emphasis was either on gender and age differences in online content creation among Estonian pupils (see Study V), or the pupils' attitudes, opinions and experiences regarding some content creation activities and their reasons for being or not being engaged in online content creation (see Study VI). I also used this survey data to analyze the attributes pupils considered important when selecting their profile images, as well as the attributes they considered important in order to become popular among other SNS users (see Study IV).

The broader European context is provided in my thesis by using a database of the MEDIAPPRO survey for comparison. A common questionnaire was distributed in schools from September to October 2005 among 11–18-year-old pupils in eight different European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Poland, Portugal and the UK), with a total sample of 4767 individuals (see Studies V; VI). The MEDIAPPRO database was selected for the analysis because it is one of the few large-scale cross-national surveys in Europe focusing on the appropriation and use of new media by children.

To analyze youngsters' practices and opinions regarding being engaged in online content creation, methods appropriate for analyzing quantitative data were applied. An analysis of frequencies and comparison of means (see Studies VII; VIII), a regression analysis (see Study VIII), Pearson's correlations, and

two-step cluster analysis (all in Study **VII**) were used in processing the data from the “Youth and the Internet” survey. I found the survey method useful for obtaining a general overview of the online content creation practices among the pupils, as it allows statistical profiles to be easily and quite quickly obtained because of the standardized variables.

The results both from the MEDIAPPRO and the Estonian survey “Youth and the Internet” (2007) were also compared to the findings of studies carried out in 21 European countries participating in the EU Kids Online Network (see Studies **V**; **VI**). The data repository of the EU Kids Online Network and the report “Comparing children’s online opportunities and risks across Europe: Cross-national comparisons for EU Kids Online” (Hasebrink et al 2008) were used to write the literature review on the topic of online content creation practices among children in Europe.

The method of content analysis

The other quantitative method I used was content analysis (see Studies **I**; **II**; **VII**; **VIII**), which is usually applied to study either spoken or written text, but in my dissertation it was used to study visuals. I found content analysis methodology useful in the light of my research goals, as cultural artifacts embody, reflect and mediate the views of the society from which they emerge. Furthermore, content analysis not only aims at description rather than explanation, but being a non-intrusive method it tries to be as objective as possible. Another advantage of content analysis methodology is the opportunity to carry out studies on various contents and over a relatively long time frame, as well as to repeat studies either by the same coder or by additional independent coders.

For my thesis, I first carried out a visual analysis based on the profile images of people selected as the “TOP 100 of the Most Remarkable Men” and “TOP 100 of the Most Remarkable Women” on the SNS rate.ee. Content analysis was carried out to analyze 117 photos of males and 105 photos of females who appeared in the TOP 100 from August 2005 – February 2006 (see Studies **I**; **II**). Content analysis was also carried out to analyze the 599 photos of 108 males who were accepted as members in the community “Damn I’m beautiful!” on the SNS rate.ee (see Study **VIII**).

In several of my studies (see Studies **I**; **II**; **VII**; **VIII**), content analysis methodology was combined with the method of “reading images” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996; Bell 2001). The theories of Goffman (1976), Kang (1997) and Umiker-Sebeok (1996) were applied to build up the categories for the visual content analysis. The main coding categories were conceptually described as Participants, Location, Activities, Body Display, Facial Expressions, Behavior and Social Distance. In-depth descriptions of the main coding categories are provided in the studies. To assess inter-rater reliability, an independent coder

was asked to code 10 per cent of the sample in Study **VIII**. Inter-rater reliability was established by calculating the kappa coefficient, which in the case of all the categories ranged from 0.77 to 1.00.

Content analyses methodology was also used in order to analyze what kind of hobbies, interests and tastes children exhibited on the textual parts of their social networking site profiles, as well as in what kind of communities the children belonged on SNS (see Study **VII**). The search engine of rate.ee was used to find the sample based on the age and gender of the users. A total of 10 profiles of boys and 10 of girls between 11–12 years of age were investigated.

Supplementary qualitative interviews

Furthermore, in the thesis I have supplemented the quantitative analysis of data with qualitative methods (see Study **VII**). In order to get a more in-depth understanding of how young children use the social networking sites for identity constructions, the co-author of Study **VII**, Kadri Ugur, carried out semi-structured interviews with children and adults. The semi-structured interviews were carried out in August-December 2008 with 12–13-year-old users of the social networking site rate.ee and some parents and teachers of 11–13-year-old users. A total of six children and six adults were interviewed. All the respondents were found by using the “snowball method.” According to the method of semi-structured interviewing, the order and wording of the questions were not pre-determined. Thus, the respondents were free to answer as they wished and the interviewer was also able to follow up on their responses. During the interviews, a list of activities and communities available for the rate.ee users, as well as the profile images of the young were shown to the respondents to get their reactions and opinions of the self-presentation techniques of children on the website.

The main results will be described in the next three sections of the thesis.

3. FINDINGS

The empirical findings are introduced in three chapters. In the first chapter, I will introduce the general tendencies related to the online content creation habits of Estonian youngsters. Then I will analyze the construction of online environments from the viewpoint of creative identity playgrounds. The third chapter reflects upon the youngsters' gender identity constructions and reconstructions in various online environments, particularly on social networking sites.

3.1. Online content creation practices of Estonian youth

In order to analyze the aspects which may encourage or hinder active engagement in online content by youngsters, Studies V and VI compare the practices of Estonian youngsters in a larger European perspective.

In Study V, the data derived from the survey "Youth and the Internet" was used to analyze the online activities of Estonian schoolchildren, particularly their engagement in online content creation. The results of Study V showed that communication and entertainment related activities, as well as searching for information, are the most frequent Internet activities Estonian schoolchildren engage in. The findings showed that online content creation practices in more structured online environments, such as social networking websites, news portals and forums, which are more constrained by pre-given formats and the technological interface, are much more widespread than engagement in less structured platforms, such as personal homepages or blogs, which would require and enable young Internet users to employ greater creative skills and freedom.

Youngsters' reasons for being engaged in the more structured content creation activities differed from their motives for taking part in those online content creation activities which enable and require greater individual freedom and creativity. The main motives for creating a profile in the SNS rate.ee, i.e. engaging in more structured content creation activity, were clearly socially oriented, as 67 per cent of the profile owners were influenced by the fact that their friends already had profiles and 55 per cent wanted to find new friends and acquaintances. The reasons for keeping one's own blog, however, as Studies V and VI report, were more self-centered and derived from the need to be original and distinct from others (82 per cent of the bloggers kept a blog in order to express their opinion, 73 per cent wanted to offer their readers something original, 70 per cent loved writing and only 26 per cent followed the example of other bloggers). Hence, the results indicate that different levels of exerting one's agency play a crucial role in the choice of the type of online environment for content creation: a stronger orientation to conforming to peer group norms and

expectations was a likely reason for choosing a more structured online space, whereas youngsters with a stronger inclination to individuality and originality tended to pick a less structured environment for self-expression.

Relations between different content creation activities and types of content creators

An analysis of the Estonian data revealed interesting patterns in the relations between different content creation practices. The results of the correlation analysis showed that the pupils who kept a blog also commented on others' blog postings more often ($r=0.46$; $p<0.001$), updated their homepages more frequently ($r=0.23$; $p<0.001$) and were more active in updating their SNS profiles ($r=0.14$; $p<0.001$). Creating a homepage correlated with posing topics for discussion in forums ($r=0.24$; $p<0.001$), keeping a blog ($r=0.23$; $p<0.001$), participating in forum discussions ($r=0.22$; $p<0.001$) and commenting on blog postings ($r=0.20$; $p<0.001$). Pupils who were more actively engaged in the SNS rate.ee were also more active in commenting on others' blog postings ($r=0.22$; $p<0.001$) and were more likely to have a blog of their own ($r=0.14$; $p<0.001$; Kalmus et al. 2008). In order to take a more detailed look at the relations between different practices and to find out the types of content creators, a cluster analysis was carried out in Study V.

Six types of content creators – the Versatile, blog-centered type; the Homepage-centered type; the SNS-centered type; the Forum-centered type; the News comments-centered type; and the Indifferent type – were ranked according to an activeness-passiveness scale. This scale was based on the sum index of the frequency of being engaged in seven content creation activities, and the differences in the frequency of activities were compared to the average of the whole sample. The results of the cluster analysis in Study V indicated that active engagement in less structured practices was a strong predictor of general activeness in user-led content production. The most active content creators in the Estonian sample were the pupils belonging to the Versatile, blog-centered type, who make use of all kinds of opportunities and online environments to express their creativity and identity. The activity level of pupils belonging to the Homepage-centered type, who are mostly engaged in exercising their creative skills on a less structured platform such as personal homepages, was also considerably higher than the sample average.

Nevertheless, as demonstrated in Studies V and VI, the majority of Estonian children exerted their creative activity while creating content for just one or two, usually more structured, online platforms. The members of the largest group, the Forum-centered type, for example, were most active in posing topics for discussion and commenting on topics of others in forums or news portals; however, they were considerably less active in participating in the blogosphere or social networking sites, as well as creating personal homepages. The

activeness of the youngsters belonging to the News comments-centered type, on the other hand, was considerably lower than the sample average in all the activities, apart from commenting on online news. The most passive in terms of the overall engagement in various content creation activities, however, were the pupils belonging to the Indifferent type, among whom a considerable number were not engaged in any of the online content creation practices. Still, findings of Studies V and VI suggest that there is a reason to speak of a continuum in online content creation, as the frequency of blogging or homepage creation was best predicted by active participation in more structured online platforms.

Factors fostering or hindering the engagement in online content creation

The results of Studies V and VI indicate that the main reasons the majority of young people did not actively participate in creating content online can be explained not only by the unequal skills of individual users, but also by the lack of specific motivation as an important aspect determining non-engagement in online content creation. The main reason for not being engaged in content creation practices in less structured environments named by the Estonian pupils in Studies V and VI was a lack of necessity, followed by not having enough time, while not having enough skills or content to upload was mentioned less often. Nevertheless, the results of Study V confirm the ideas of Nielsen (2006), which explained active engagement in online content creation by adequate computer and Internet skills. The three most active types of content creators – the Versatile, blog-centered type, the Homepage-centered type and the Forum-centered type – stood out in their self-evaluated computer and Internet skills, as well as in their knowledge of English. The majority of pupils belonging to the Homepage-centered type regarded their skills in all of the above-mentioned fields as higher compared to the rest of the types and claimed that they did not need any additional help from others when using a computer or the Internet. In attitudes toward the language use and content of the Internet, the findings of Study V indicate that participation in online environments that require greater creativity and credibility (such as blogs, homepages and forums) obviously entails a responsible attitude towards the linguistic correctness of one's own postings, as well as the content of online comments in general. All four more active types of content creators, except for the SNS-centered type, were stricter and more normative in their attitudes regarding the language and content of the Internet, i.e. they tended to use correct written language on the Internet and agreed with the need for stricter regulations for online commenting than the average of the sample. The attitudes of the youngsters belonging to the Homepage-centered type, however, were the strictest of all.

Both Studies V and VI revealed some gender and age differences in terms of not being engaged in online content creation in less structured online environments, such as blogs or personal homepages. Even though no considerable

gender differences were found in the index of general activeness in content creation, the boys outnumbered the girls in terms of the four most active content creator types⁵. The girls stressed not having enough time for blogging or keeping a homepage considerably more often than their male counterparts. Girls not only outnumbered boys as members of the Indifferent type, but also were prevalent in the SNS-centered type and the News comments-centered type, i.e. they were mainly engaged in more structured online environments which do not require as competent technical skills as making a homepage does, for example. As the self-evaluated computer and Internet skills and knowledge of English of girls were, in general, significantly lower compared to the boys, these factors could also help to explain their more active participation in these environments. This claim is also supported by the results of Study VI, according to which girls were more active in blogging, an activity which is also not as technologically challenging, and their smaller engagement in homepage creation was explained by not having the necessary skills (23 per cent of the girls and 12 per cent of the boys). Although any large-scale assumptions cannot be made based on these gendered differences, they still point to the age-old ICT-related gender stereotypes which have remained stable in Estonia for several years (cf. Kalmus 2006).

Age could be viewed as another aspect which is related to the youngster's engagement in online content creation practices, as both Studies V and VI revealed age differences in youngsters' activeness in producing content online. The Estonian data indicated that 11–13-year-old schoolchildren were most likely to engage in online content creation, while the activeness in creating content on line decreases as children get older. Older youngsters simply cannot find enough motivation to participate in these activities. For instance, 73 per cent of the 6th to 7th graders, compared to 78 per cent of the 8th to 9th graders and 86 per cent of the 10th to 11th grade pupils, said there was “no need” for them to create a homepage. The overall proportion of the most active content creator types – the Versatile, blog-centered, the Homepage-centered and the SNS-centered type – decreased linearly as pupils grew older. The Indifferent type was most common among the youngest pupils, as well as among the 10th to 11th graders. Among the latter, the proportion of the least active content creators was, however, the highest (34 per cent). On the basis of the survey data, it is, nevertheless, difficult to say whether these age differences are caused by the developmental or cohort effect, i.e. do the older pupils just grow out of the habit of creating content online and turn their attention to other activities, or does the reason lie in the fact that this group first acquired the Internet at a later age (cf. Livingstone & Helsper 2007), which has resulted in their critical self-evaluation as well as lower actual computer skills?

⁵ Versatile blog-centered type, Homepage centered type, the SNS-centered type and the Forum-centered type.

International comparison

In order to find out whether any cross-national regularities appear in the factors influencing engagement in online content creation by children, the differences and similarities in co-variation patterns, socio-demographic factors and mediating variables⁶ were investigated in Study VI. The results of Study VI demonstrate that children's creative online activities, especially blogging and homepage creation, were, across all European countries, much less widely practiced than would be assumed by the hype around "Generation C". User-generated content creation is more frequently practiced by children in Denmark, the UK, Belgium and Estonia, which all have a high or even distribution of Internet usage across different socio-demographic groups. However, in Denmark and Greece, for example, where girls and older children are less engaged in online content creation, the overall engagement in online content creation practices is also below average. Furthermore, an analysis of the MEDIAPPRO data, as well as the reasons for creating a profile in social networking websites by Estonian youngsters (see Study VI), makes it clear that peers have the biggest influence on taking up the practices of online content creation.

Nevertheless, the results of Studies V and VI indicate that Estonia is an exceptional country in terms of youngsters' engagement in online content creation. Although Estonia is considered a high-use country according to both the results of the MEDIAPPRO and the report by the EU Kids Online network (see Hasebrink et al. 2008), the user-generated content creation of children is still less frequent in Estonia than, for example, in the UK. Furthermore, rather than being active in blogging or homepage creation, Estonian youngsters content creation practices mainly occur in more structured online environments, for example on social networking sites.

3.2. Impression management strategies of Estonian youngsters on SNS

Since 2002, when the first national-language-based social networking site rate.ee was launched in Estonia, the network has been immensely popular among Estonian youngsters. Based on the survey "Youth and the Internet", 70 per cent of the 11–18-year-old Estonians in the sample have constructed profiles on the site. As reported in Study IV, the majority of reasons for creating a profile on rate.ee have a distinctly social focus: 67 per cent of the profile owners were influenced by their friends' already having profiles and 55 per cent wanted to find new friends and acquaintances, while 32 per cent wanted to get to know people who shared their interests and hobbies. However, receiving

⁶ Children's Internet access, online usage, the related skills, and mediation by parents, teachers and peers.

social feedback motivated 27 per cent of the youngsters who had created a profile in the hopes of getting to know what other people thought of them. Nevertheless, social networking sites such as rate.ee have not only provided thousands of youngsters with an opportunity to find new friends and acquaintances, to gain social feedback and to keep in contact with their offline friends, but also to test various identities (see Study **IV**). The latter topic has been the theme in several of the studies (see Studies **I–IV**; **VII–VIII**) in my thesis.

Involvement in an online community may, on the one hand, offer much appreciated freedom and anonymity; on the other hand, the users of the sites need to learn to find a balance between their identity experiments and the pre-determined rules and expectations of the peer group involved. In this sense, the children's online playgrounds on social networking sites can be compared to Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) concept of the field, as, in both cases, they form distinct microcosms endowed with their own rules, regularities and forms of authority. As proposed by Kalmus (2009a), it is also possible to distinguish the same kind of processes and influences building up the structures and rules of the online playground that make the fields function. First of all, the online playgrounds where youngsters gather to play are built by adults. The social networking site rate.ee, which has its own monetary system, various special products and services for its users, and productive cooperation with media companies, is an excellent example of the adult business world (see Study **VI**). The important role of adults can not only be seen in the functioning of the website but also in interpreting the identity games of youngsters engaged on the site. In the latter case, adults are used as role-models whose actions, rules and roles are creatively interpreted by the young while playing and communicating together on the website. As Study **VI** reveals, children often incorporate socio-dramatic role play, gendered play and mimicry in their profile entries in an effort to try out adult roles through imaginative play. While constructing their profiles and profile images, young children not only mimic the behavior and posing style of older youngsters on the websites, but also interpret the representations of gender seen in the mass media and in advertising industry images (see Studies **I**; **II**; **VII**; **VIII**).

Nevertheless, as youngsters can communicate on the social networking sites without the surveillance of adults, they often regard the online environment as "their space," where they can easily experiment with different identity constructions and sometimes even try out more adult roles (see Livingstone 2008; Study **VII**). Reflecting on the theories of peer culture by Corsaro (1997), I believe that children have made use of social networking sites as online playgrounds in order to play various identity games and creatively appropriate the knowledge gained from the adult world to produce a peer culture of their own (see Study **VII**).

While playing together with peers on social networking sites, children not only conform to the rules and norms set by the adult culture, but also start to modify the rules according to their own standards. In Study **VII** it is revealed

that young children try to fight against the restrictions, rules and regulations they have to face in their offline lives by joining in various rebellious communities. Children also enjoy empowerment by taking up adult roles when giving advice to their peers or when joining communities in order to authoritatively propose their ideas and opinions. Through their active identity play on the sites, children start to change, emphasize or reduce the position of different understandings, rules and hierarchies apparent in all the fields of society. Therefore, it is also suggested in Study VII that children's play in online playgrounds should be viewed as a certain type of "anticipatory socialization", i.e. a preparatory activity in order to be able to function in other fields (economic, social, cultural etc.) later in life (Merton 1965). Furthermore, these short term identity experiments taken up while constructing their profiles on rate.ee may later lead to the construction of their "identity-across-timescales" i.e. to a more long-term identity which is not determined by a single identity performance in a single situation, but is made up of several actions and different types of situations we encounter and which, therefore, are connected to our *habitus* (Lemke 2008).

Still, as engagement in social networking sites means being under the constant observation of peers, youngsters feel a need to conform to the rules and norms of the given online community in order to earn acceptance and recognition from the peer group. The results of Study IV show that youngsters have a very concrete understanding of the qualities and aspects needed in order to become popular in the virtual peer group. The majority of boys (79 per cent) and girls (85 per cent) from the sample claimed that a person primarily needed to be good-looking in order to become popular in the social networking site rate.ee. Boys also ranked sexiness (70.2 per cent) and trend-conscious clothing (70.3 per cent) as high priorities, whereas girls believed photo processing skills (67 per cent) and a large social network (66 per cent) helped to increase popularity among peers on line. Study IV indicates that, as in the case of communicating on dating websites (see Whitty 2008), youngsters using social networking websites such as rate.ee also tend to stress the importance of the visual self-presentation of a person rather than valuing more textual features, such as membership in communities, interests, nicknames, etc., for constructing one's identity in an online environment. Social networking websites have provided youngsters with an opportunity to properly solve the problem of a faceless and placeless medium, as the Internet used to be. Profile images accompanying the textual parts of profiles have started to play a huge role not only in the virtual identity construction process as such, but also as important features for receiving positive feedback from members of the community.

As indicated in Study IV, the young are very aware of the expectations of their peers, and thus prefer to select profile images where their good looks are most clearly portrayed. Both girls (56 per cent) and boys (31 per cent) believed that looking good in photos was the main element one had to pay attention to while choosing profile images for rate.ee. Girls were especially conscious of their selection of photos in the profile. They valued the aesthetic (e.g. beautiful

surroundings, and the photo has a nice look in general), emotional (e.g. important moment, and “important others”), self-reflective (e.g. the photo reflects my essence, and describes my lifestyle), and practical (good photo-processing, and famous photographer) aspects of photos more than their male counterparts did while creating their virtual identity. Young men, on the other hand, seemed only mildly interested in choosing photos where handsome appearance was portrayed. These discrepancies between genders, revealed in Study **IV**, can be explained by the socialization differences between genders, as females are said to develop stronger self-other contingencies than do males (Higgins 1991). It has been claimed that because of this sex-typed socialization process, girls may develop an orientation to regulate according to the guidance of significant others, whereas boys may develop an orientation to regulate according to their own self-regulatory guides (Hoffman 1973, 1977; Cross & Madson 1997). Still, it would be an understatement to say that young men are not oriented towards gaining positive feedback from their peers. On the contrary, the findings of Study **VIII** suggest that young men have simply found another impression management strategy. As revealed in the analysis of Study **VIII**, the profile images of young men contained a range of photos that functioned on many levels and might therefore appeal to different audiences. By combining different character traits, posing styles, locations and social distances for taking photos in their photo collections, young men tried to gain acceptance and earn the approval of both female and male users of rate.ee.

Based on all the findings described in this sub-chapter, I suggest viewing the social networking site rate.ee as an arena for struggle, where all the users would like to overturn or preserve the existing distribution of capital. The users of the network need to share a certain number of fundamental interests, based on which the existence of power hierarchies on the sites constantly change. These fundamental interests and the stakes the members of the community value, however, are necessary for the mere existence of the playground (see Study **VII**). Compared to some other social networking websites that are mostly focused on networking, most of the users of rate.ee, for example, are primarily interested in being rated and rating others. The majority of the agents acting in this field hope to receive positive comments and points for their profile images accompanying the textual parts of the profile. Those who receive the highest points have the opportunity to become members of one of the numerous popularity charts created on the site (e.g. “TOP 100 of the most remarkable men and women in Rate”, “TOP 100 of the most famous users”, “TOP 100 of the most popular dates”, etc.) (see the analysis of the images of “TOP 100 of the most remarkable men and women in Rate” in Studies **I**; **II**). Furthermore, new users of rate.ee have to fully recognize the value of the game and learn the practical principles of its functioning.

3.3. Constructing gender identity in online environments

The majority of the studies (Studies I–IV; VII–VIII) in my thesis focused on analyzing the gender identity constructions of youngsters in new media environments. Two of the studies (I; II) reported on the ways 14–25-year-old youngsters who had been selected for the “TOP 100 of the most remarkable men and women in Rate” presented themselves on their profile images, whereas Study VII concentrated on the ways 11–12-year-old ordinary website users posed in their profile images. In order to be able to clearly differentiate between gender-specific styles in terms of online impression management, two of the studies focused on the virtual identity constructions of young men. Based on an analysis of relevant literature on the subject, a general overview of masculine gender identity constructions in online environments is given in Study III. Study VIII focused on an analysis of the profile images of young men belonging to the rate.ee community “Damn I’m Beautiful!”.

An analysis of the profile images revealed some gender-neutral (see Study II) and gender-specific (see Studies I and II) methods of visual self-presentation on rate.ee. Both of the genders (56 per cent of the girls and 67 per cent of the boys) preferred to pose in public settings, either somewhere in the wilderness or in a city (Study II). The number of photos taken in a private sphere, i.e. in a living room, bedroom, kitchen etc. was rather limited: just 17 per cent of the girls and 18 per cent of the boys chose a more private setting in which to pose for the camera. Although previous findings (Study II) associated the representations of men with a public sphere; the more public posing locations of girls were surprising. On the one hand, this can be explained by the specificity of rate.ee as an online medium. As having especially catchy photos on the site has become a question of honor, as well as a need to gain popularity among peers, ordinary photos are not suitable to be presented on rate.ee (see Study IV). A number of youngsters therefore organized special photo shoots with their friends to take photos to be uploaded on the site. Selecting an interesting location for taking the photos thus played an important role in making the person look both unique and trendy. In addition, as proposed in Study II, a person posing in a public space can be viewed as being outgoing, independent, ambitious and adventurous – traits which a 21st-century woman should strive for, according to the role-models from the TV series “Sex and the City”.

Another posing strategy which was commonly used by both the boys and the girls is connected with the category of Participants. An analysis of the sample photos in Study II showed that the majority of the youngsters preferred to pose alone (see also Studies I; VII). Compared to an analysis of the questionnaire data in Study IV, where girls particularly stressed the importance of selecting photos where they could be found together with important others in profile images, in 76 per cent of the photos in the female sample and 56 per cent of the

photos in the male sample the profile owner posed alone. Only rarely were there other participants, such as a female (14 per cent of the photos of boys, and eight per cent of the photos of girls) or a male friend (five per cent of the photos of boys, and four per cent of the photos of girls), accompanying the profile owner in the photo. Posing alone in photos can be regarded as an adequate way of presenting oneself on a website where the main aim is to show off one's looks and character. Furthermore, soon after the founding of the site, rate.ee was used by many of the youngsters as an online dating site. Hence, as suggested in previous studies (see Schmidt & Buss 1996), posing alone in the profile images of rate could be interpreted as a signal that the profile owner is single and sexually available.

A comparison of posing techniques used by the males and females in Study **II** also revealed that in most cases the youngsters were not portrayed as engaged in any purposeful activities (see Studies **II**; **VII**). The passivity displayed in the photos has usually been associated with females; males on the other hand, have traditionally taken the role of agents. An analysis of the profile images of rate.ee, however, indicates that young men are also quite willing to take the role of objects under the investigative gaze of website users. The majority of the photos of the boys (70 per cent), as well as the girls (83 per cent), on the site were taken so as to show the youngsters in passive model-like poses. Furthermore, the results of Study **VII** also confirm the idea that the image of an active male, someone with an agentive nature, is gradually disappearing from the self-presentations of ordinary males. Inspection of the photos of young men belonging to the community "Damn I'm Beautiful!" showed that, in 80 per cent of the cases, the young men advertised themselves by the codes revealed by male models in the advertising industry. Photos which displayed the youngsters as romantically involved, entertaining others, doing sports or just being engaged in everyday activities were, however, rarely found in any of the studies.

Although some of the posing strategies were used by both genders, an analysis of photos also revealed some gender specific ways of posing in the profile images. The results of Studies **I** and **II** indicate that the most remarkable differences between genders occurred in the behaviors exhibited in the profile images. Most often (41 per cent of the images of women), behavior by the women belonging to the "TOP 100 of the most remarkable women in rate" was classified as Demand/Seduction. Women in these photos canted their heads seductively to the side, simultaneously inviting and teasing the viewer. In such a pose, the viewer was placed in a position of superiority compared to the woman depicted in the photo. In all of the visual analyses done for the thesis (see Studies **I**; **II**; **VII**; **VIII**), the photos of men, however, rarely portrayed the above-mentioned behavior. The analysis showed that, rather than trying to seduce the viewers of the photos, young men preferred to offer themselves as ideal specimens in a display case by portraying the Offer or Offer/Ideal look in their profile images. In these photos, young men did not look directly at the camera but shifted their gaze dreamily somewhere in the distance. Compared to

the women, men (10 per cent versus 18 per cent) also displayed the behavior classified as Demand more frequently. Photos of this kind presented the men facing the viewers of the photo directly, without smiling (see Studies **I**; **II**; **VIII**).

The category Facial Expressions used in the photos was another aspect that revealed concrete gender differences. As shown in Studies **I** and **VIII**, young women smiled in their profile images more often than did young men (65 per cent of females, 24 per cent of males). Males' favorite facial expression for posing was a serious look, as 46 per cent of the images of males, compared to 16 per cent of females, portrayed them with that expression. This finding corresponds to the results of several studies (see Ragan 1982; Mills 1984; Massé & Rosenblum 1988), all of which explain the finding as showing the necessity of conforming to traditional masculine gender norms. Only the results of Study **VII**, where the profile images of 11–12-year-old children were analyzed, indicated that not smiling in the photos could also be related to the age of the profile owner. Compared to the photos of older boys, younger ones tended to smile more often in their profile images.

Another gender specific strategy for posing was found when analyzing the social distances of where the photos were taken (see Studies **I**; **VII**; **VIII**). Even though the most popular distance for taking a photo was the “far personal” distance for both boys (30 per cent) and girls (30 per cent), differences in posing distances were revealed while analyzing the photos in which the whole body of a person was visible. Although the findings of Study **II** reveal that the popularity of posing from a “close personal” distance among young men has increased somewhat over the years, the results of Studies **I** and **II** show that females (28 per cent) used the above-mentioned posing technique more often than did males (15 per cent). The public distance, however, was more often used by males (11 per cent, compared to 3 per cent by females). Furthermore, as the number of photos which focus on the body of a male has been constantly growing, it could be claimed that the findings of Studies **I**, **II**, **VII** and **VIII** indicate an important change in the posing strategies of young men. In comparison to previous studies (see Levesque & Lowe 1999; Price-Rankin 2001; Konrath & Schwarz 2007; Szillis & Stahlberg 2007), which associated males with higher facial prominence in photos, the profile images of rate.ee reveal that 21st-century males have rejected the traditional masculine way of posing. No extra emphasis is laid on the face and the shoulders of a male – body parts which used to be stressed in earlier times. Rather, present-day youngsters regard the whole body as a source of symbolic capital. The growing trend of showing sexualized images of men in men's magazines (Rohlinger 2002: 62) has also introduced the trend into social networking sites. Although the majority of males still prefer to pose fully clothed, the number of youngsters posing so that their bare athletic body is visible is also large enough (34 per cent) to reveal that the body should be regarded as a project not just for females but for young men as well (see Studies **I**; **II**).

The overall analysis of the masculinity types apparent in the profile images of rate.ee indicates that young men tried to combine a variety of different masculinity types in their collection of photos (see Studies **I**; **II**; **VIII**). Especially in the hopes of gaining additional social capital, young men were often eager to combine stereotypical masculine traits with new interpretations of manhood in order to appeal to a large audience of website users (see Study **VIII**). In some of the profile images, for example, stereotypical images of the macho man were displayed. In these photos, young men could either be found posing in front of a car or a motorbike, or exposing their muscles in order to show their strength and manliness. The youngsters in these photos definitely appear to be more “individualistic, hedonistic and sexually predatory” (Gill et al. 2005: 23) than the other type of youngsters, whose experiments with masculine gender identity could be understood as representations of Mr. Nice Guy (see Studies **I**; **II**). In these photos, the boys were willing to show their softer side – they posed near a lake when the sun was setting, or in the wilderness gazing dreamily into the horizon. The photos of this type of male were therefore taken so as to show him as sensitive and romantic, qualities which made him irresistible to the opposite sex. Previous studies (see Mazzarella 2005) on the topic suggest that, partly thanks to the media image young girls get from the fan magazines and other popular magazines, girls tend to be drawn to “safe’ romantic heroes – the kind of boys one could bring home to meet mom and dad” (Mazzarella 2005: 154). The profile images of some of the male members of the website rate.ee show that youngsters have actually taken up the role of romantic hero. In these photos, the boys posed while holding their girlfriends tenderly in their arms, or walking hand-in-hand to the altar (see Study **VIII**). All in all, the results of Studies **I**, **II** and **VIII** clearly indicate that the self-marketing strategies of young men have shifted from hegemonic masculinity to a more metrosexual type of thinking. Hence, at least in the case of the social networking site rate.ee, the new media environment does seem to encourage the expression of alternative masculinities and eliminate the need for purely stereotypical masculine self-presentations. Only in the case of Study **VII** was it noted that the 11–12-year-old children tended to exaggerate the stereotypical elements of the gender identity, rather than experimenting with new identities.

It seems that young men freely combined different roles and expectations about gender identity in their visual presentations on the site. Females, however, as suggested in previous studies (see Albright 2001), still need to largely conform to the societal expectations of ideal female beauty in order to gain popularity among their peers. For example, as shown in Study **I**, most of the girls in rate.ee seem to share a “strikingly clear norm of ‘proper slenderness’” (Lahde 2006: 11). Furthermore, on several occasions, young women were ready to expose their perfect bodies by wearing revealing clothes or hardly any clothes at all (see Siibak 2006). The majority of girls in Study **I** also had long blond hair, an appearance trait of a female which, according to the studies of Rich &

Cash (1993), is usually associated with sexuality and beauty. Therefore, in comparison to the gender identity constructions of young men, which seem to be encouraged by the relative anonymity people experience in online environments and by the freedom to experiment with one's identity constructions by easily deleting improper images, the visual representations of females are largely based on the stereotypical images of females displayed in traditional media.

4. DISCUSSION

My thesis deals with issues that are currently often at the center of academic interest, especially in the fields of youth and childhood studies and pedagogy, but also in the fields of media, communication and psychology. The main aim of my thesis was to problematize the applicability of the label Generation C in the Estonian context. By giving an overview of the variety of online content creation habits of Estonian youngsters in general, and their self-presentation strategies in social networking sites in particular, my thesis aims to examine whether the online practices of Estonian youngsters match the hype about the supposedly revolutionary new generation of Internet users.

Figure 2 summarizes the results of the studies by illustrating the interaction between the different components related to the construction of virtual identity. Figure 2 also gives an overview of the aspects related to people's engagement in online environments, as well as their self-presentation strategies. The empirical results based on my studies carried out among Estonian youngsters are used as illustrative material to discuss the proposed model.

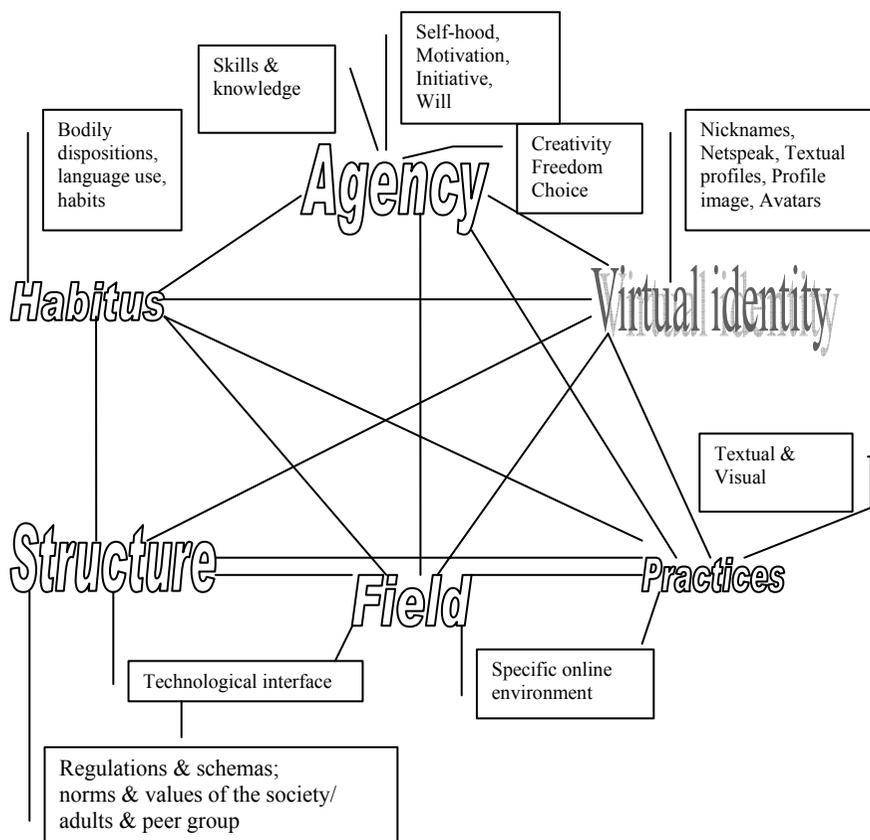


Figure 2: Interaction between the different components related to the construction of virtual identity

Angela Thomas (2007) has proposed that, in online communities, a new type of body is created. The self-produced virtual body consists of both textual and visual parts. The components considered to be the cornerstones of the textual online identity are: a person's nickname, netspeak and textual profiles on social networking websites. Visual self-presentation in online communities is constructed mainly by the choice of an avatar or the profile images used. In Figure 2, I propose that in online environments the construction of *virtual identity* is closely connected to such concepts as *structure*, *agency*, *field* and *habitus*. Furthermore, the above-mentioned concepts are related to the textual and visual practices people can engage in to present themselves in online environments. In the next paragraphs, I move on to explain my choice of concepts and their coexistence in the model.

I propose in the model (see Figure 2) that new media technologies in general and the online environment in particular, form a new and separate *field* (Bourdieu 1993) with its own schemas and operating principles. As *fields* are viewed as structured contexts which simultaneously shape and produce different *practices* (see Meleod 2005), the particular structured context of the new media field differs from the context which shapes the practices people may engage in in offline environments. Furthermore, the online *field* also consists of a multitude of online environments which all have their separate rules and structures. Thus, while engaging in online spaces, people first of all need to appropriate their *practices* according to the general online principles and then reform them strategically depending on the rules and norms of a specific online environment. For example, the rules and norms which are applicable in the case of keeping a blog or creating a homepage are not necessarily the most appropriate to use while engaging in social networking sites, chatting on Instant Messenger or playing online games. Nevertheless, in some instances, it can be difficult to differentiate between the variety of online *fields*, as their operating principles and structures can be overlapping or ambivalent. Compared to older people, who have not grown up embedded in the emerging online *field*, youngsters are more aware of the variety of codes different online environments demand, and modify their textual and visual *practices* accordingly. Furthermore, as young people are often simultaneously engaged in different online activities (e.g. chatting with several people on Instant Messenger, searching for information for homework, and listening to music) they are used to multi-tasking and thus also constructing and reconstructing their virtual identities depending on the task at hand.

According to Bourdieu (1992 cited by Maton 2008: 4), there is a “double and obscure” relation between *field* and individual *habitus*. I agree with Adams (2006: 514), who has suggested that “the field instantiates us as subjects and reproduces social distinctions via the enactment of *habitus*.” New experiences, practices and opportunities introduced by the Internet and the emergence of the online *field* can therefore be fully accepted and enjoyed by those whose previous experiences, life-style, thought patterns, etc. support the process (see

North et al. 2008). Young people, who are used to having numerous digital gadgets and the Internet in their everyday lives, can therefore quite easily modify the experiences offered by the new online *field* to fit their existing *habitus*. Older generations, however, whose *habitus* is not familiar with the opportunities or the peculiarities of the new media technology, tend to struggle harder in adopting the new habits.

Several authors (see Bourdieu 1990; McNay 1999; Adams 2006; etc.) have stated that *habitus* is not a determining but a generative structure which is, thus, not only connected to the concept of *structure* but also to *agency*. My empirical findings indicate that different levels of exerting one's *agency* play a crucial role in the choice of the type of online environment for content creation. An analysis of the online content creation practices of Estonian youngsters suggests that a stronger orientation to conforming to peer group norms and expectations is a likely reason for creating content in a more structured online space (e.g. SNS), whereas youngsters with a stronger inclination to individuality and originality tend to use a less structured environment (e.g. blogs) for self-expression. The results of my studies indicate that Estonian youngsters, in general, tend to participate more actively in those online environments, e.g. social networking sites, which are limited by their technological interfaces and restrained by peer group norms. Furthermore, the empirical results of my thesis indicate that the majority of Estonian youngsters are well aware of the rules and schemas prevalent in the online environments and form their self-presentation according to the norms of the peer culture, i.e. the young share a common "sense of the game" (Bourdieu 1992). Thus, although some authors have suggested that *fields* create an opportunity "to 'play the game' in more than one way" (Adams 2006: 515), young people in Estonia mainly preserve dominant structures in their online practices. In conforming to pre-existing rules, youngsters decline the opportunity to exercise their agency to the fullest and, by doing so, abandon one of the main opportunities introduced by the online medium.

Furthermore, the online peer culture of Estonian youngsters is, to a great extent, based on the norms and expectations of the adult culture and, thus, upon those prevalent in society in general. Only in some cases, especially in the case of the textual self-presentations of younger children, is children's willingness to bend the rules of the adult culture by testing the overall social boundaries, while engaging in playful identity experimentation, visible. Thus, it could be claimed that the peer culture of the youngest children studied in the thesis is less conforming and more ambivalent to the general *structures* of the adult culture than are the self-presentations and online practices of older youngsters. Children at the age of 11–12 use online environments as playgrounds and hence exercise their *agency*, to a great extent, by trying out roles they cannot yet perform in offline worlds. The elements of their peer culture which stand in contrast to the adult culture consist of their own netspeak, humor, customs and communities. When constructing visual self-presentations, especially gender identity, the

youngest age group studied in my thesis, however, also conformed to the strategies familiar from the representations of gender in the everyday media and the adult culture in general. The empirical results of my thesis, however, revealed that adults do not fully grasp the *structures* of the online *field* and, thus, expect online values to be totally exceptional and unknown to the older generation. Estonian parents, thus, tend to use different standards when evaluating the practices of youngsters in online and offline settings (Study VII).

Stages of impression management in online environments

The findings of my studies clearly indicate that self-presentation on social networking sites is a socially constructed process. The impression management strategies youngsters use are built on the collective peer culture, as its values and norms help to frame the self-presentation process. These collective schemas upon which the online community are built have also assigned value to concrete visual, as well as textual, self-presentation strategies and techniques. Inspired by the theories of Solomon (1999), I created a four-stage model of impression management on SNS (see Table 2). I propose that, while engaged in impression management in online communities, the individual is motivated to: 1) identify what strategies are most efficient in receiving favorable feedback from the virtual peer group, 2) make use of those strategies he/she believes will help him/her to attain acceptance and popularity among other users, 3) evaluate the feedback to one's impression management strategies, and 4) validate one's strategies.

Table 2: Stages of impression management on social networking websites

Stages of impression management in SNS	Focus	Typology Dimension
1. Framing	Monitoring the environment to identify the values and expectations of peers, and determining the optimal strategies to achieve them	ACTIVE
2. Performance	Strategic self-presentation in the environment in order to steer the opinions of other users in the service of personal or social goals	EXTRINSIC
3. Surveillance	Evaluating the impact of one's self-presentation strategies on other users	OTHER-ORIENTED
4. Validation	Depending on the feedback received, proceeding with the chosen self-presentation tactics or returning to stage 1.	STRATEGIC

A person's visual and textual impression management strategies in an online environment may also be related to the motivation to attain membership in some idealized category. For example, in the case of rate.ee, youngsters are interested in attaining a position on one of the various popularity charts the website offers. Furthermore, it is important to consider which elements and aspects a person wants to reveal and stress in his/her profile, and which aspects the person has chosen not to emphasize or reveal at all. Nevertheless, the visual impression management choices one makes in online environments can be said to originate from a variety of resources, ranging from choices based on the *habitus* and personal *agency* of a person, to the norms and values prevalent in the community and society in general. In the former case, youngsters try to combine the markers of their personal everyday lifestyle (e.g. hobbies, interests, important others, and choice of clothing and accessories) when constructing their visual self-presentations. Hence, these profile images can be viewed as creative personifications of a profile owner, with an emphasis on the aspects the person considers important or characteristic of him/herself. In the latter case, the representation of males and females in the contemporary media and prevalent images in the advertising industry serve as role-models, especially in the case of constructing one's virtual gender identity. The findings of my studies indicate that, in the hope of receiving positive recognition and acceptance by virtual peers, youngsters primarily experiment with various poses and facial expressions that have been made familiar to them by the "porno-chic" of the 1990s and are now carried forward by the "striptease culture" (McNair 2002). Thus, rather than constructing their online personae on totally new grounds, as would be expected with the members of the digital generation, Estonian youngsters usually hold on to the strategies formed by previous generations.

My empirical findings indicate that impression management in online worlds in general, and on social networking websites in particular, consists of various strategically calculated acts in order to create a desired persona. Still, in order to enhance the positive reactions to one's self-presentation strategies, these strategies need to appear to have occurred without any instrumental action on the part of the exhibitor. Hence, while striving for recognition by the peer group, youngsters tend to stage their performances so as "to appear as if they were not actively undertaken, but rather occurred naturally or were bestowed upon the individual reactively by others" (Solomon 1999: 71). Nevertheless, the impression management performance is not successful unless it has a positive effect on the intended audience. Thus, external feedback to one's profile and profile images is needed in order for the person to know whether to continue constructing him/herself in the proposed manner and to validate one's position in the eyes of the community, or to start monitoring the environment once again.

Solomon (1999: 71) has claimed that "we hold ourselves to a standard defined by others, which is constantly changing." Thus, youngsters also struggle to find ways to leave a positive impression of themselves on as large an

audience as possible. In the case of the visual self-presentation of young men, for example, my findings indicate that they try to construct themselves in multiple ways. Hence, I suggest that rather than concentrating on the portrayals of hegemonic masculinity, the impression management of young men is dependent on the structuring mechanisms of a new *field*, as well as on their interactional needs. In order to appeal to a wider audience, young men combine the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity with other masculinity types. My findings reveal that, compared to young women, whose virtual identities are to a large extent built on age-old gender stereotypes, the young men in Estonia are more willing to experiment with persona and even to try out contradictory masculinity types in their profile images. The studies of these images reveal that the peculiarities of the relatively new online *field* may start to produce some changes in the thinking patterns prevalent in society. An analysis of the virtual identity constructions of young men in particular shows that present-day masculinity is undergoing changes which may help to change the general traditional gender stereotypes still predominant in Estonian society.

“Digital generation” – still yet to emerge

It has been proposed that theorists should be careful when labeling the younger generation “in terms alien to its members or in terms that construct its members as alien” (Stern 2008: 88). In characterizing the “digital generation”, theorists (Tapscott 1998; Prensky 2001; etc.) have mainly enlisted qualities which are often associated with agency. The empirical results of my studies indicate that taking advantage of many of the interactive and creative opportunities of the Internet in general, and user-generated content creation in particular, depends mostly on user agency: motivation, creativity and setting one’s priorities. Nevertheless, the motivation to contribute to these kinds of activities has been relatively low among Estonian youngsters, as it is in the majority of European countries (Study VI; see also Hasebrink et al. 2008). Changes in attitudes, values and thought patterns can only emerge after a longer period of time, not simultaneously with institutional changes. In this regard, Estonia serves as an excellent example of a country which has undergone major transitional changes in terms of its institutional factors and developments related to the ICT. However, in order to be able to exercise all the opportunities offered by the new medium to the fullest, changes in the societal value system have to appear.

At the moment, the practices Estonian youngsters engage in in online environments, cannot be viewed as something revolutionary but, rather, as proposed by Bolter & Grusin (1999: 45), “remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media.” Although Estonian youngsters are heavy users of the new medium, they are, to a large extent, “repurposing” the values, structures and norms familiar from the older media in order to reuse them in the new online *field*. Thus, the youngsters and the online environment “remain depen-

dent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways” (Bolter & Grusin 1999: 47). Although this kind of “repurposing” is regarded as one of the main aspects that is “unique to the digital worlds,” it is also considered to be the aspect which “denies the possibility of that uniqueness” (Bolter & Grusin 1999: 50). In other words, rather than becoming a space where new values, knowledge and attitudes are created, the online medium is mainly used as a space for repeating earlier thought patterns and social constructions in a new context.

For example, the self-presentation strategies of Estonian youngsters are mainly based on the predominant rules and norms of the environment and the community. By imitating the strategies of others, the youngsters do not actually make use of all the opportunities which are available in online worlds. The findings of my studies indicate that, while involved in online environments, Estonian youngsters mainly restore and re-impose old cultural thinking patterns rather than introducing new ones.

After analyzing the online activities of Estonian youngsters, I find the labels “digital generation” (Papert 1996) and “Generation C” (Bruns 2006) particularly problematic in the Estonian context. This is mainly because, when engaged in online environments, Estonian youngsters not only lack creativity, openness and innovation, aspects which are considered to be characteristic of the digital generation (see Tapscott 1998; Prensky 2001), but their activeness in producing content for different online communities is also quite limited. My findings indicate that, although the majority of Estonian youngsters have made use of the search for information, communication and entertainment related opportunities offered by the Internet, these supposed members of “Generation C” have actually not yet reached the highest stage of Internet inclusion, i.e. they have failed to take up more interactive and creative online activities (see Livingstone & Helsper 2007). Hence, rather than making use of the opportunities of free expression and inclusion, considered characteristic of the “digital generation” (see Tapscott 1998), the quality of content Estonian youngsters produce in the e-participation platforms is relatively low and does not help to shape public opinion (see Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Reinsalu 2009).

Nevertheless, characteristic traits of the “digital generation” – optimism and achievement orientation (Raines 2002) – do emerge in the self-evaluations of the youngsters. For instance, compared to 61–70-year-old Estonians, among whom 52 per cent are satisfied with their lives, 87 per cent of youngsters up to 20 years of age are either satisfied or very satisfied with their lives (Kutsar 2009: 65). Furthermore, one of the main aspects of the subjective well-being of youngsters is related to Internet use. According to Kalmus (2009b: 123), youngsters who have more money at their disposal and who use the Internet more frequently tend to be the most satisfied. However, as they have not managed to make use of all the opportunities the online field offers, their high self-evaluation is more likely based on the actual use of the online medium as such, being loosely connected to the full variety of practices it offers.

My empirical findings allow me to claim that online environments have become spaces for the self-socialization of Estonian youngsters. The textual and visual *practices* youngsters perform in online environments help them to not only grasp the always existing and obligatory boundaries inside of the *field* of the new media, as well as in the society, but also by exercising their *agency* youngsters may start gradually re-forming some age-old mental *structures*, at least in the case of gender roles.

The possible changes in thought patterns could also motivate youngsters to participate more actively in a variety of online environments, e.g. encouraging civic participation and user-generated content creation. However, the full potential of the online medium can only be enjoyed by those who, besides experiencing changed mental worlds, have adequate media literacy and digital literacy skills. In the changed media world, several new capacities, e.g. critical, collaborative, creative, and communicative (Bruns 2007), have been included in the list of aspects needed to become media literate. Several authors (see Buckingham 2003; Burgess 2007) have even suggested that, because of their collective, collaborative and participatory nature, digital literacies should be viewed as a social phenomenon. The present results also indicate that peers play an important role in taking advantage of the opportunity for creative online activities; thus, in order to encourage youngsters to collaborate and work collectively, practices of peer-to-peer teaching should be more effectively integrated into media education in schools.

5. CONCLUSIONS

My conclusions are based on the three main research questions.

I What are the prevalent tendencies in children's content creation in online environments?

- Estonian youngsters tend to be engaged in content creation practices in more structured online environments, such as social networking websites, news portals and forums, rather than in less structured platforms, such as personal homepages or blogs. Different levels of exerting agency play a crucial role in the choice of the type of online environment for content creation: the main motives for creating content in more structured environments are clearly socially oriented, whereas in the case of the less structured online environments, youngsters' motives are more self-centered and derive from the need to be original and distinct from others (Studies V; VI).
- According to the frequency of being engaged in different creative activities on line, Estonian youngsters were classified into six types of content creators: the Versatile, blog-centered type; the Homepage-centered type; the SNS-centered type; the Forum-centered type; the News comments-centered type; and the Indifferent type. Although active engagement in more structured practices is a strong predictor of activeness in homepage creation and blogging, the majority of Estonian children exert their creative activity while creating content for just one or two, usually more structured, online platforms (Studies V; VI).
- The lack of specific motivation is the main reason why the majority of Estonian youngsters do not actively participate in creating content on line. Compared to the other types, the members of the three most active types of content creation – the Versatile, blog-centered type, the Homepage-centered type and the Forum-centered type – regard their computer and Internet skills, as well as their knowledge of English, as being better. Participation in online environments that require greater creativity and credibility also entails responsible behavior towards the linguistic correctness of one's own postings, as well as the content of online comments in general (Studies V; VI).
- There are more boys than girls among the members of the most active content creator types. Girls stressed not having enough time to be active in content creation considerably more often than their male counterparts did. Their self-evaluated computer and Internet skills were, in general, significantly lower compared to their male counterparts. This could be one of the reasons why considerably more girls than boys are engaged in content creation in more structured online environments, such as SNS, which do not demand as big technical skills (Studies V; VI).

- Age is related to the youngsters' activeness in producing content on line. Younger children (11–13-year-olds) are most likely to engage in online content creation. As youngsters grow older, they often cannot find enough motivation and time, and activeness in creating content on line decreases (Studies V; VI).
- Across all European countries, children's engagement in creative online activities, especially in blogging and homepage creation, is much less frequent than would be assumed by the hype around "Generation C". The international comparison suggests that the opportunities for user-generated content creation are more frequently practiced by children in countries which have a high and even distribution of Internet usage across different socio-demographic groups (Study VI).

II What kind of means and visual elements do the young use for self-presentation in online environments?

- Young people use the social networking sites as online playgrounds in which to play various identity games and creatively appropriate the knowledge gained from the adult world into producing a peer culture of their own. Members of the younger age-group often incorporate socio-dramatic role play, gendered play and mimicry in their profile entries, so as to try out adult roles through imaginative play. However, they also enjoy the empowerment of engaging in adult roles and modifying adult rules according to their own standards. Youngsters' play in the online environments should be viewed as a preparatory activity in order to be able to function in other fields later in life (Study VII).
- Estonian youngsters using social networking websites stress the importance of the visual self-presentation of a person rather than valuing more textual features, such as membership in communities, interests, nick-names, etc., for constructing identity in an online environment (Study IV).
- The young are well aware of the expectations of their peers and thus prefer to select profile images in order to earn acceptance and recognition from peers. Girls are especially conscious of their selection of photos in their profiles, as they value the aesthetic, emotional, self-reflective, and practical aspects of photos more than their male counterparts do (Study IV).
- Visual self-presentation strategies of youngsters are based on the creative interpretations of gender representations seen in the mass media and the advertising industry (Studies I; II; VII; VIII).

III How do the young construct their gender identity in the profiles of social networking websites?

- The analysis of the profile images revealed some gender-neutral methods of visual self-presentation. Both genders preferred to choose public settings rather than the private sphere when taking photos. The majority of the youth also posed alone in the photos and did not engage in any purposeful activities (Study **II**).
- Gender-specific ways of posing were especially found in the case of the behaviors exhibited in profile images. While females tended to tease and seduce viewers by directly looking at the camera, the majority of males portrayed themselves as ideal specimens and shifted their gaze away from the viewer. Traditional gender roles were also conformed to, as young women mostly smiled in their photos, compared to the serious appearance the young men presented (Studies **I**; **II**).
- The self-marketing strategies of young men have shifted from hegemonic masculinity to a more metrosexual type of thinking. Young men often combined stereotypical masculine traits (e.g. a macho image) with more metrosexual interpretations of manhood (the image of Mr. Nice Guy) in order to appeal to a large audience of website users (Study **VIII**).
- Images of young women largely conform to the societal expectations of ideal female beauty. The “most remarkable girls in rate” often had long blond hair and slim bodies, and portrayed themselves in revealing clothes or hardly any clothes (Study **I**).

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Eesti “digitaalse põlvkonna” enesepresentatsioon

Uue meedia keskkondade uurimine on viimastel aastakümnetel pälvinud paljude sotsiaalteadlaste tähelepanu. Põhjusena võib välja tuua fakti, et Internet pole enam ainuüksi väheste õnnelike jaoks kättesaadav keskkond, vaid on muutunud miljonite jaoks tavalise igapäevaelu lahutamatuks osaks. Uue meedia tehnoloogiatele omistatakse järjest suuremat tähtsust ka sotsiaalse interaktsiooni tekitamises. Kuigi erinevaid veebikeskkondi varemalt ümbritsenud müstiline aura on nüüdseks asendunud suhete hoidmist ja loomist võimaldava alternatiivse kanali ideega, pakuvad uue meedia keskkonnad endiselt uudseid ja eksperimentaalseid võimalusi identiteedi väljendamiseks.

Noored on olnud eriti agarad uue tehnoloogia poolt loodud võimaluste kasutamises. Seetõttu on mitmed autorid (Papert 1996; Tapscott 1998; Prensky 2001; Buckingham 2002; Bruns 2006; Rowlands et al. 2008, jt.) püüdnud anda tänapäeva nooremale põlvkonnale ühist nimetajat, vaadeldes neid enamasti läbi tehnoloogia või uue meedia prisma. Rakendades Mannheimi (1952) põlvkonna-teooriat tuleb tõdeda, et kuigi sellel „uuel“ põlvkonnal puudub ühine ja universaalne nimetaja ja lahtarvamusi esineb ka vanuseliste parameetrite (nt. Tapscott 1998; Carlson 2005; Montgomery et al. 2007; Kennedy et al. 2007) ning seetõttu ka põlvkonna võimaliku suuruse osas, on teoreetikud üksmeelel „digitaalsele põlvkonnale“ iseloomulike tunnuste kirjeldustes. „Digitaalsele põlvkonnale“ omistatakse selliseid uuele meediale iseloomulikke jooni nagu avatus, loomingulisus, iseseisvus, innovaativsus, koostööle-orienteeritus jne (Tapscott 1998). Samuti eeldatakse, et noored ei ole enam tavalised passiivsed *online*-sisu lugejad ja tarbijad, vaid on üheaegselt nii selle sisu loojad kui kasutajad, olles paljude *online*-sisulooje võimalusi pakkuvate veebikeskkondade (nt. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, jne) aktiivseimad kasutajad (Bruns 2006).

Eestis toimunud infoühiskonna arenguid on rahvusvahelistes hinnangutes tihti esitletud kui edulugu (Krull 2003). Erinevad projektid (nt. Tiigrihüpe) on aidanud kaasa Eesti internetiseerumisele. Nii on näiteks igas Eesti koolis internetiühendus. “Digitaalse põlvkonna” kontekstis muudab Eesti huvitavaks uurimisobjektiks aga fakt, et 99,9% Eesti 11–18-aastastest noortest kasutab Interneti (uuring VI). 6–17 aastaste noortest kasutab Eestis interneti 93%, selle näitaja osas jagatakse Soome järel 2.–4. kohta (Livingstone & Haddon 2009). Noorte internetikasutuse aktiivsuse osas liigitub Eesti seega kõrge internetikasutusega Euroopa riikides hulka (Livingstone & Haddon 2009). Eesti ühiskond on infotehnoloogilistes aspektides läbi teinud märkimisväärseid arenguid, samas ei ole paljud Eestis levinud normid ja väärtused asendunud postmodernistlikes riikides toimivate mõttemustritega. Mitmest soo-temaatikat puudutanud uuringust (Oras 1999; Laas 2000; Hansson & Laidmäe 2000; Pajumets 2007; Kutsar 2007) järeldub näiteks, et traditsioonilised ja stereotüüpsed soorollid ning normatiivid on eestlaste mõttemustritest väga vaevalised kaduma.

Soo-stereotüüpsed hoiakud ja suhtumine avalduvad mitte ainuüksi traditsioonilistes küsimustes (naiste roll ühiskonnas, palgavahed, kodutööde jaotus), vaid ka uue meedia keskkonda ja Interneti kasutamist puudutavate uuringutes (Kalmus 2006).

Kui varasemad Eestis tehtud uuringud on peamiselt vaadelnud noorte hulgas levinud uue meedia tehnoloogiate kasutuspraktikaid (Kalmus 2004; Runnel et al. 2006; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008), siis minu töö eesmärk on mõista, kuidas on uue meedia keskkonnad noorte hulgas kasutust leidnud identiteedi loomise eesmärgil. Peamiselt tegelen oma väitekirjas 11–25-aastaste laste ja noorte *online*-praktikate analüüsiga. Läbi viidud empiirilistes uuringutes vaatlen Eesti noorte *online*-sisuloome praktikaid “digitaalse põlvkonna” (Tapscott 1998) kontekstis. Töö fookuses on noorte suhtlus- ja enesepresentatsiooni strateegiad ning *online*-sisuloome praktikad ehk eelkõige tegevused, mida peetakse “digitaalse põlvkonna”, eriti aga “põlvkond C” (Bruns 2006) liikmetele üldomaseks. Peamise uurimisobjektina käsitlen nii Interneti sotsiaalseid võrgustikke kui ka teisi *online*-sisuloomet võimaldavaid veebikeskkondi, nt. blogid, kodulehed, foorumid, uudiste kommentaariumid. **Minu töö peamine eesmärk on problematiseerida „digitaalse põlvkonna“ kui kategooria õigustatust Eesti kontekstis. Analüüsides Eesti noorte hulgas levinud *online*-sisuloome praktikaid ja nende kasutusaktiivsust ning käibel olevaid virtuaalse enesepresenteerimise strateegiaid uurin, kas Eesti noorte poolt veebikeskkondades loodud sisu on niivõrd unikaalne ja innovaatiline, et seda saab pidada „digitaalse põlvkonna“ liikmetele ainuomaseks. Samuti on minu eesmärk uurida, millist rolli omab eakaaslaste kultuur virtuaalsete enesepresenteerimise strateegiade loomisel ning vaadelda, kas veebikeskkondades kasutusel olevad muljekujunduslikud strateegiad on toonud kaasa muutusi Eesti ühiskonnas levinud traditsioonilistes soorollides. Üldine eesmärk jaotub omakorda konkreetseteks alaküsimusteks: Millised peamised tendentsid iseloomustavad laste ja noorte *online*-sisuloomet? Milliseid vahendeid ja visuaalseid elemente kasutavad lapsed ja noored enda presenteerimisel veebikeskkondades? Kuidas konstrueerivad lapsed ja noored sotsiaalsete võrgustike profiilides oma soolist identiteeti?**

Väitekirjas kasutatud interdistsiplinaarne lähenemine on oluline analüüsimaks, kuidas noored on asunud kasutama uue meedia poolt loodud täiendavaid võimalusi suhtlemiseks, loominguks ja sotsialiseerumiseks. Uue meedia keskkondades toimuva uurimiseks põimin omavahel Anthony Giddens’i (1984) poolt välja pakutud kontseptuaalsed mõisted „struktuur“ ja „agentsus“ ning Pierre Bourdieu’ teooriaist tuntud mõisted „väli“ (1993) ja „habitus“ (1977). Virtuaalse enesepresentatsiooni uurimisel kohandan Erving Goffmani (1959) klassikalise muljekujunduse teooria uue meedia keskkonna spetsiifikale.

Käesoleva uurimuse sissejuhatava artikli teoreetilises osas jõuan järeldusele, et „digitaalsele põlvkonnale“ omistatud erinevad nimetused on eelkõige tehnoloogikesksed, kuid liialt vähe on tähelepanu pööratud sotsio-kultuurilistele teguritele, mis mängivad suurt rolli võimaliku „digitaalse põlvkonna“ sünnis.

Internetikeskkondades toimuvate praktikate uurimisel tuleb arvestada üldiste struktuursete aspektidega, st. ühiskonnas levinud ja eakaaslaste kultuuris edasi kantavate mõttemustrite ja normidega (nt. soolised stereotüübid). Samas tuleb Interneti sisu uurides kui ka veebikeskkondi kasutades lähtuda nii üldistest Interneti-keskkonnale omastest kui ka konkreetsest *online*-platformist sõltuvatest normidest. Loomingulisi ja innovaatilisi *online*-praktikaid peetakse oma-seks eelkõige „põlvkond C“ liikmetele, kes peaksid erinevates veebikeskkondades suutma rakendada oma agentsust efektiivsemalt kui eelnevate põlvkondade liikmed. Olles kasvanud üles uue meedia tehnoloogiate ajastul, peaks „põlvkond C“ juba *habitus*-likult olema paremini kohanenud *online*-väljal toimuvate eripärasuste mõistmiseks kui vanemate põlvkondade esindajad. Analüüsides Eesti noorte *online*-sisulooime ja enesepresenteerimise praktikaid loodan oma väitekirja abil anda oma panuse võimaliku „digitaalse põlvkonna“ tekke üle käivasse diskussiooni.

Eesti noorte *online*-sisulooime ja virtuaalse enesepresenteerimise strateegiaid uurin ma oma väitekirja kaheksas empiirilises artiklis. Tinglikult võib väitekirja jaotada kolme ossa. Esimeses osas, kuhu kuuluvad uuringud **V** ja **VI**, on vaatluse all Eesti noorte *online*-sisulooime praktikad. Artikkel **VI** keskendub Eesti noorte *online*-sisulooime praktikate analüüsile, tutvustades kuut Eesti noorte hulgas levinud *online*-sisulooja tüüpi. Artiklis **V** vaadeldakse Eesti noorte *online*-sisulooimet võrdlevas Euroopa kontekstis. Väitekirja teises ja keskses osas analüüsin Eesti noorte virtuaalse enesepresentatsiooni strateegiaid. Analüüsi fookuses on visuaalse soolise identiteedi loomine Eesti noorte hulgas ülipopulaarse sotsiaalse võrgustiku rate.ee profiilifotodel (artiklid **I**; **II**). Täiendavalt analüüsin erinevaid identiteedimänge, mida lapsed rate.ee sotsiaalses võrgustikus profile luues mängivad (artikkel **VII**). Kuna varasemad uue meedia keskkondadel põhinevad uuringud on eelkõige vaadelnud soolise identiteedi konstrueerimise võimalusi naiste näitel, siis analüüsisin enda uuringutes (artiklid **III**; **VIII**) meeste virtuaalse identiteedilooime praktikaid.

Nende uuringute teostamisel olen kasutanud nii kvantitatiivset kui kvalitatiivset metodoloogiat. Kolmes uurimuses – **IV**, **V** ja **VI** – põhinevad kvantitatiivsed andmed Tartu Ülikooli ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituudi poolt 2007. aasta sügisel läbi viidud Tallinna, Tartu ja Pärnu 11–18-aastaste kooliõpilaste ankeetküsitlusest „Noored ja Internet 2007“. Rahvusvahelise võrdlusmaterjali pakkumiseks on uurimustes **V** ja **VI** kasutatud oktoobris-novembris 2005 kaheksas Euroopa riigis (Belgias, Taanis, Eestis, Prantsusmaal, Kreekas, Poolas, Portugalis ja Suurbritannias) 11–18-aastaste õpilaste hulgas läbi viidud ankeetküsitluse MEDIAPPRO kvantitatiivseid andmeid. Täiendava rahvusvahelise võrdlusmaterjali saamiseks on analüüsitud uurimisvõrgustiku EU Kids Online poolt kogutud 21 Euroopa riigi uuringute tulemusi (artikkel **V**).

Mitmetes uuringutes (**I**; **II**; **VII**; **VIII**) kasutasin fotode visuaalse analüüsi läbiviimiseks kontentanalüüsi meetodit. Kontentanalüüsi kategooriate loomise aluseks võtsin erinevates visuaalanalüüsi teooriates kasutatud lähenemisi. Peamiste autorite hulka, kelle kontseptsioonidest lähtuvalt ehitasin üles kodeerimis-

juhendi, kuulusid Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), Goffman (1979), Umiker-Sebeok (1996), Kang (1997) ja Bell (2001). Peamised kodeerimiskategooriad olid järgmised: Sotsiaalne distants, Käitumine, Näoilme, Tegevuspaik, Osalejad, Tegevused, Keha paljastatus.

VIII uuringu puhul rakendasin kontentanalüüsi meetodit uurimaks sotsiaalse võrgustiku rate.ee 11–12-aastaste kasutajate tekstiliste profiilide näitel laste virtuaalse identiteedi konstrueerimist. Uuringu fookuses olid profiilidel esitatud hobid, huvid ja klubidesse kuulumine. Laste virtuaalsete identiteedimängude täiendavaks uurimiseks viis minu kolleeg Kadri Ugur läbi semi-struktureeritud informandi-intervjuud kuue “lumepalli meetodil” leitud 12–13-aastase rate.ee kasutaja ning kuue, samal meetodil leitud, 11–12-aastast last kasvatava täiskasvanuga.

I uuring põhineb noormeeste virtuaalse identiteediloome spetsiifikat käsitletud teaduskirjanduse analüüsil.

Käesoleva väitekirja peamised järeldused eespool püstitatud uurimisküsimuste lõikes on järgmised:

I Millised peamised tendentsid iseloomustavad laste ja noorte *online*-sisuloomet?

- Eesti noorte hulgas on enam levinud sisu loomine struktureeritumates, konkreetse *online*-keskkonna võimalustega piiratud veebikeskkondades (sotsiaalsed võrgustikud, foorumid, uudiste kommentaariumid); vähem-struktureeritud keskkondi (nt. blogid, kodulehed), mis nii pakuvad kui ka nõuavad suuremat loomingulisust, kasutavad Eesti noored märgatavalt harvemini. Agentsus mängib olulist rolli *online*-sisuloomispraktikateks sobiva veebikeskkonda valikul – struktureeritumate keskkondade osas domineerivad sotsiaalse suunilusega motiivid, seevastu vähem-struktureeritud keskkondades ajendavad noori sisu looma eelkõige mina-kesksed faktorid, näiteks soov ja vajadus teistest eristuda ning olla originaalne (**V**; **VI** uurimus).
- Võttes aluseks *online*-tegevuste harrastamise sageduse, jaotati Eesti noored *online*-sisuloome aktiivsuse-passiivsuse teljel kuude erinevasse sisuloojatüüpi: mitmekülgne, blogikeskne; kodulehekeskne; rate.ee-keskne; foorumikeskne; kommentaaride-keskne ja väheaktiivne. Kuigi aktiivne sisuloome struktureeritud keskkondades on eelduseks sisuloomisele vähem-struktureeritud keskkondades nagu blogid ja kodulehed, rakendab suurem osa Eesti noortest oma loomingulist aktiivsust ühes-kahes, tavaliselt struktureeritumas, veebikeskkonnas (**V**; **VI** uurimus).
- Vastava motivatsiooni puudumine on peamine põhjus, miks enamik Eesti noori ei tegele aktiivselt *online*-sisuloomega. Võrreldes teiste sisuloojatüüpidega hindavad kolm aktiivsemat tüüpi – mitmekülgne, blogikeskne; kodulehekeskne ja foorumikeskne – oma arvuti- ja internetikasutusoskusi ja inglise keele oskust paremaks kui teiste tüüpide esindajad. Osalemine suuremat loomingulisust ja tõsiseltvõetavust nõudvates veebikesk-

kondades eeldab vastutustundlikumat suhtumist nii enda poolt tehtud postituste keelelisse korrektsusesse kui *online*-kommentaari sisusse üldisemalt (V; VI uurimus).

- Keskmisest aktiivsemate sisuloojatüüpide hulgas on rohkem poisse kui tüdrukuid. Tüdrukud põhjendavad oma vähest aktiivsust *online*-sisuloomel ajapuudusega sagedamini kui noormehed. Tüdrukute hinnangud oma arvuti- ja internetikasutusoskustele on oluliselt madalamad kui poistel. See võib olla ka üks põhjustest, miks tüdrukud loovad sisu pigem struktureeritud veebikeskkondades, näiteks sotsiaalsetes võrgustikes, mis ei nõua märkimisväärseid tehnilisi oskusi (V; VI uurimus).
- *Online*-sisulooja aktiivsus sõltub inimese vanusest. Nooremate laste (11–13-aastased) osalemine *online*-sisuloomes on tõenäolisem kui vanemate vanusegruppide puhul. Vanemates eärühmades vähenevad nii motivatsioon kui ka ajalised võimalused veebikeskkondades sisu loomiseks (V; VI uurimus).
- *Online*-sisulooja, eriti blogimise ja kodulehtede tegemise aktiivsus, on Euroopa laste hulgas palju väiksem, kui seda võiks eeldada “põlvkond C-ga” seonduvatest positiivsetest ootustest ja meediakajastustest. Rahvusvaheline võrdlus näitab, et *online*-sisuloomega tegelevad eelkõige nende maade lapsed, kus Interneti-kasutus on kõrge ning kõigis sotsiaaldemograafilistes rühmades ühtlaselt levinud (VI uurimus).

II Milliseid vahendeid ja visuaalseid elemente kasutavad lapsed ja noored enda presenteerimisel veebikeskkondades?

- Noorte jaoks on sotsiaalsed võrgustikud (rate.ee; Orkut; Facebook; jne.) muutunud *online*-mänguväljakuks, kus mängitakse erinevaid identiteedimänge ja kohandatakse loominguiliselt täiskasvanute maailmast saadud teadmisi eakaaslaste kultuuriga. Nooremad lapsed jälgivad oma profiilidel tihti vanemate käitumist ning mängivad soolisi või sotsio-draamaatilisi rollimänge, proovides nende illusoorsete mängude läbi erinevaid täiskasvanutele omaseid rolle. Veebikeskkondades naudivad lapsed nii voli, mida täiskasvanute rollide proovimine neile annab, kui ka modifitseerivad täiskasvanute maailma reegleid enda standarditele kohasemaks. Veebikeskkondades mängitavaid mängu tuleks seega näha kui lapsi ettevalmistavat tegevust, mille abil omandatud kogemusi saab hilisemas elus ja teistel väljadel toimides rakendada (VII uuring).
- Veebikeskkondades toimuva identiteedilooja puhul peavad sotsiaalseid võrgustikke kasutama Eesti noored visuaalset enesepresenteerimisoskust olulisemaks kui profiilidel avalduvaid tekstilisi elemente, näiteks klubidesse kuulumist, huvisid või kasutajanime (IV uuring).
- Noored on vägagi teadlikud eakaaslaste ootustest ning seetõttu langevatakse profiilifotode valik enamjaolt vastavalt sellele, kuidas saaks paremini võita eakaaslaste poolehoidu ja tunnustust. Võrreldes noormeestega

valivad neiu enda profiilifotosid läbimõeldumalt, selekteerides fotosid vastavalt esteetilistele, emotsionaalsetele, isiksuslikele ja praktilistele kaalutlustele (IV uuring).

- Noored tõlgendavad visuaalseid enesepresentatsiooni-strateegiaid valides loominguliselt massimeedias ja reklaamitööstuses levinud soo kujutamise trende (I; II; VII; VIII uuring).

III Kuidas konstrueerivad lapsed ja noored sotsiaalsete võrgustike profiilides oma soolist identiteeti?

- Profiilifotode analüüsist lähtub, et visuaalsel enesepresenteerimisel kasutatakse soo-neutraalseid poseerimistaktikaid. Mõlemad sugupooled eelistasid fotode tegevuspaika valides poseerida pigem avalikus kui privaat-sfääris. Enamik noori poseeris fotodel üksi, ilma et fotodel oleks jäädvustatud täiendavaid aktiivseid tegevusi (II uuring).
- Soo-spetsiifilised poseerimistaktikad ilmnisid eelkõige fotodel kujutatud käitumise osas. Neiu püüdis pigem naeratavat pilku otse kaamerasse suunates vaatajaid õrritada ja võrgutada, enamik noormehi seevastu püüdis endast luua ideaalset kujutist, poseerides profiilis, pilk suunatud vaatajast eemale kaugusse. Traditsioonilistele soorollidele vastas fotodel kujutatu ka näoilmete osas – neiu enamasti naeratasid fotodel ja noormehed kujutasid ennast enamasti tõsiste nägudega (uuritud I; II).
- Noormeeste virtuaalse eneseturustamise-strateegiad on nihkunud hegemonilise maskuliinsuse juurest rohkem metroseksuaalidele iseloomulike mõttemustrite poole. Selleks, et võita võimalikult paljude teiste kasutajate poolehoidu, kombineerivad noormehed stereotüüpseid maskuliinseid jooni (näiteks Macho-mehe kuju) hoopis pehmemate, metroseksuaalile omaste maskuliinsuse-tõlgendustega (näiteks Mr. Nice Guy kuju) (VIII uuring).
- Neidude poseerimistaktikad vastavad suures osas ühiskonnas levinud ootustele naise iluideaali suhtes. “Tähelepanuväärsete naiste TOP 100” hulka kuuluvad neiu on tihti pikkade blondide juustega, saledad neidised, keda võib sageli näha poseerimas paljastavas ja napolis riietuses (I uuring).

Kokkuvõtvalt võib väita, et nii tekstiline kui visuaalne *online*-sisuloome, ja see läbi virtuaalne identiteediloome tervikuna, on struktuuri ja agentsuse telge pidi täiendavalt seotud nii spetsiifilisest *online*-väljast kui inimese *habitusest* tingitud eripäradega. *Online*-sisuloome on ühtepidi sõltuv struktuurist, st. nii keskkonna tehnoloogilistest võimalustest ja virtuaalse kogukonna survest, kuid samas mõjutab isiklik agentsus oluliselt nii sisuloome-platvormide kui nendes loodava sisu osas tehtavaid valikuid. Kuna Eesti noored tunnistavad vähest motivatsiooni ja vajadust veebikeskkondades sisu luua, on noorte sisuloome praktikad eelkõige seotud rohkem-struktureeritud veebikeskkondadega nagu sotsiaalne võrgustik rate.ee, foorumid, uudiste kommentaariumid. Märnatavalt

vähem luuakse sisu sellistes veebikeskkondades (nt. blogid ja kodulehed), mis võimaldaks ja ühtlasi nõuaks suuremat loovust ja innovaatsilisust ehk teisisõnu, agentsust.

Rohkem-struktureeritud sisuloome-keskkondade valikut võib täiendavalt põhjendada eakaaslaste hulgas levinud normidele ja ootustele vastamise sooviga. Empiirilised tulemused näitavad, et Eesti noored on väga hästi kursis eakaaslaste kultuuri poolt heakskiidetud praktikatega ning paljuski eakaaslaste survest lähtuvalt konstrueeritakse ka oma virtuaalne identiteet. Erinevates veebikeskkondades suheldes õpivad noored katse-eksitus-meetodil ühiskonnas levinud norme ja väärtusi. Erinevaid identiteedimänge mängides loovad noored nii virtuaalsete kogukondade ümber kollektiivselt tajutavad piirid kui ka toodavad osakesi eakaaslaste kultuurist, mida varemalt loodi avalikel mänguväljakutel (boyd 2008).

Virtuaalses muljekujunduses kasutatavad strateegiad võivad olla seotud erinevate aspektidega – tehtavad valikud võivad tuleneda inimese isiklikust agentsusest ja *habitusest* või konkreetses veebikeskkonnas või ühiskonnas üldiselt käibelolevatest normidest ja ootustest. Väitekirjas pakun välja sotsiaalsetes võrgustikes toimuva virtuaalse muljekujunduse neli staadiumit. Esimeses, raamistavas staadiumis, peavad noored kõigepealt jälgima veebikeskkonnas kehtivaid reegleid ning looma neist lähtuvalt enda virtuaalse muljekujunduse strateegia. Teises, esitluse staadiumis, toimub endale püstitatud eesmärkidest lähtuvalt strateegiline muljekujundus. Kolmandas, jälgivas staadiumis, hinnatakse teiste kasutajate käitumise põhjal enda strateegilise muljekujunduse efektiivsust. Viimases, kinnistavas staadiumis, toimub positiivse tagasiside saamise korral enda muljekujundusliku strateegia kinnistamine; negatiivse tagasiside puhul alustatakse uute strateegiatega otsimist ehk naastakse esimese staadiumi juurde. Noored teevad virtuaalse muljekujunduse strateegiatega valikul kalkuleeritud otsuseid, eesmärgiga luua endale konkreetsele virtuaalsele kogukonnale vastuvõetav ja heakskiidetud virtuaalne identiteet. Näiteks, visuaalse muljekujunduse strateegiatega valikul lähtuvad Eesti noored peamiselt meedia ja reklaamitööstuse poolt loodud „ideaalse mehe“ ja „ideaalse naise“ kuvandist. Kuigi noormeeste visuaalsed muljekujunduse strateegiad viitavad kohati traditsiooniliste soonormide lahustumisele, taastoodavad noored ka uue meedia keskkondades enamjaolt siiski vanemate põlvkondade poolt käibele võetud mõttemustreid ning ühiskonnas levinud väärtus-skeeme ja rolli-ootusi.

Väidan, et uue meedia keskkondadest on Eesti noorte jaoks saanud isotsialiseerumise keskkonnad. Veebikeskkondades levinud tekstiliste ja visuaalsete praktikate kaudu tajuvad noored nii uue meedia väljal kui kogu ühiskonnas eksisteerivaid normatiivseid piire. Samas loob uus meedia võimaluse vanu mentaalseid struktuure aegamööda uuendada. Viimast aga ainult juhul, kui jagub motivatsiooni luua veebikeskkondades uut, innovaatilist ja loomingulist sisu. Just nende, „digitaalsele põlvkonnale“ iseloomulike *online*-sisuloomet kujundavate joonte puudumine ning käibelolevate, vanu väärtusi ja norme taastootvate virtuaalsete enesepresenteerimise strateegiatega kasutamine, ei anna

meile õigust nimetada Eesti noori „digitaalse põlvkonna“ liikmeteks. Eesti noorte seas levinud *online*-praktikaid iseloomustab „ümberehitamine“ (Bolter & Grusin 1999: 45), mille raames noored kannavad vanemates meediuimedes käibel olnud väärtusi, norme ja ootusi enda eesmärkidele vastavalt uue meedia keskkonda ümber. Samas pärsib just vanade struktuuride ümberkohandamine ja ümber-eesmärgistamine uue meedia keskkonna arengut. Ehk teisiti öeldes, selle asemel, et muutuda uute väärtuste, teadmiste ja suhtumise loomise kohaks, kasutatakse Interneti-keskkonda jätkuvalt enamjaolt selleks, et uues keskkonnas vanu väärtus-skeeme taastoota. Olgugi, et Eestis on loodud e-osaluskeskkondi (nt. TOM), kus ka noored saaksid aktiivselt kaasa lüüa uute väärtuste kujundamisel, päädib noorte osalus neis keskkondades sisutühjade postitustega, mis ei aita kaasa avaliku arvamuse muutmisele (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Reinsalu 2009). Lähtuvalt eelpool öeldust väidan, et tõelise „digitaalse põlvkonna“ tekkeks ei piisa ainuüksi tehnoloogilistest edust ning võimalustest ega ka institutsionaalsetest muutustest, vaid vaja on ka muutusi ühiskonnas juurdunud mentaalsetes struktuurides.

„Digitaalse põlvkonna“ liikmetele omaseks peetud joontest (Raines 2002) avalduvad Eesti noortel seni ainult optimistlikkus ja edule-orienteeritus. Enda elule antavates hinnangutes on eestlastest kõige positiivsemalt meelesstatud just alla 20-aastaste vanusegrupp, kellest koguni 87% on oma eluga „rahul“ või „väga rahul“ (Kutsar 2009: 65). Kalmus, Keller, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2009) analüüsist lähtub, et eluga rahulolu, rahaline jõukus ja aktiivne internetikasutus on noorte puhul seotud. Arvestades seda, et noored ei ole leidnud motivatsiooni, et kasutada kõiki uue meedia keskkonna poolt loodud võimalusi, põhineb nende kõrge enesehinnang pigem Interneti kasutamisel kui sellisel, mitte niivõrd erinevate *online*-keskkondade poolt loodud võimaluste kasutamisel. Selleks, et Eesti noorte Internetikasutamise praktikaid võiks hakata pidama „digitaalsele põlvkonnale“ omasteks, tuleb pöörata suuremat tähelepanu noorte digitaalse kirjaoskuse arendamisele. Eelkõige tuleks teha tööd kriitilisusel, loovusel, suhtlemisel ja koostööl põhinevate oskuste parandamisega.

PUBLICATIONS

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

- University of Tartu, 2009, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Journalism and Communication, *Doctor of Philosophy in Media and Communications*, abbr. PhD
- University of Tartu, 2005, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Journalism and Communication, *Master of Arts in Media and Communications*, MA
- University of Tartu, 2003, Faculty of Philosophy, department of Roman languages, English language and literature, *Bachelor of Arts*, BA

Language skills

- Estonian – native
- English – excellent in speech and writing
- German – basic
- Russian – basic

Professional Employment

- 2007 – present University of Tartu, Institute of Journalism and Communication, Research Fellow Extraordinary (0.5)
- 2007 – present Tartu International Literature Festival “Prima Vista”, Advertising Manager
- 2005 – present Tartu Art College, Lecturer
- November – December 2008 Masaryk University, Visiting Lecturer
- 2005 – 2007 Tartu Art College, Development Manager

Special Courses

- November 2008 – February 2009 Visiting graduate study (Doctoral level) at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

- October, 2008. International internet researcher's Doctoral Workshop "Internet Research, 9.0", Copenhagen, Denmark
- September, 2008. International Doctoral School on visual analysis "Analyzing the Visual", Tromsø, Norway.
- November, 2006. International Doctoral School "Feminist approaches to the analysis of visual cultures, Helsinki, Finland.

Scientific Activity

Main research areas:

Young people and the new media: visual and textual self presentation in the virtual worlds; (gender) identity constructions in the virtual environments; usage and self presentation on social networking websites; user-generated content creation practices

Participation in International projects:

Member of the Estonian team in a project EU Kids Online (2006–2009) and EU Kids Online 2 (2010–2012) (www.eukidsonline.net); partner in the project „Construction and normalization of gender online among young people in Estonia and Sweden (GTO Project)“ (2009–2012) in co-operation with the Södertörn University, Sweden (<http://mt.sh.se/gto/>)

Membership in Professional Organizations

Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR); European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA); Nordic Visual Studies Research Network

Additional publications on the topic of the Phd thesis

Kalmus, V., Runnel, P., & Siibak, A. (2009). Opportunities and Benefits Online. In Livingstone, S. & Haddon, L. (eds.) *Children Online: Opportunities and Risks for Children*. London: Policy Press, xx–xx.

Siibak, A. (2009). Online Peer Culture and Interpretive Reproduction in Children's Social Networking Profiles. In Sapio, B.; Haddon, L.; Mante-Meijer, E.; Fortunati, L.; Turk, T.; Loos, E. (eds.) *The Good, the Bad and the Challenging. The user and the future of information and communication Technologies*, Vol. 2. Slovenia: Koper ABS Center, 992–998.

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Siibak, A. (2007). Casanova's of the Virtual World. How Boys Present Themselves on Dating Websites. In Muukkonen, M. & Sotkasiira, K. (eds.) *Young People at the Crossroads: 5th International Conference on Youth Research in Karelia; Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, Russian Federation; September 1–5, 2006*. Joensuu University: Joensuu Yliopisto, 83–91.

Siibak, A. (2006). Romeo and Juliet of the Virtual World: Visual Gender Identity of the Most Remarkable Youngsters in Estonian Dating Website Rate. In Sudweeks, F., Hrachovec, H., Ess, C (eds.) *Cultural Attitudes Towards Technology and Communication 2006*, 580–592.

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Haridus

- Tartu Ülikool, 2009, doktoriõpe, ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituut, meedia ja kommunikatsiooni eriala
- Tartu Ülikool, 2005, meedia ja kommunikatsioon, *Magister Artium*
- Tartu Ülikool, 2003, inglise keel ja kirjandus, *Baccalaureus Artium*

Keelteoskus

- eesti keel – emakeel
- inglise keel – kõrgtase nii kõnes kui kirjas
- saksa keel – algteadmised
- vene keel – algteadmised

Erialane teenistuskäik

- 2007 – tänaseni Tartu Ülikool, Ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituut, meediauuringute õppetool, erakorraline teadur (0.5)
- 2007 – tänaseni Tartu rahvusvaheline kirjandusfestival “Prima Vista”, reklaamijuht
- 2005 – tänaseni Tartu Kõrgem Kunstikool, õppejõud
- November–Detsember 2008 Masaryki Ülikool, Tšehhi Vabariik, külalisõppejõud
- 2005 – 2007 Tartu Kõrgem Kunstikool, arendusjuht

Erialane enesetäiendus

- november 2008 – veebruar 2009 Doktoritõpingud Masaryki Ülikoolis, Tšehhi Vabariik
- oktoober 2008, rahvusvaheline internetiuurijate doktorikooli *workshop Internet Research, 9.0*, Kopenhaagen, Taani.

- september 2008, rahvusvaheline visuaaliuurijate doktorikool *Analysing the Visual*, Tromsø, Norra.
- november, 2006, rahvusvaheline doktorikool *Feminist approaches to the analysis of visual cultures*, Helsinki, Soome.

Akadeemiline tegevus

Peamised uurimisvaldkonnad:

Noored ja uus meedia: visuaalne ja tekstiline enesepresentatsioon veebikeskkondades; (soolise) identiteedi konstrueerimine *online*-keskkonnas; interneti sotsiaalsete võrgustike kasutamine ja sealne enesepresentatsioon, *online*-sisulooje praktikad

Osalemine rahvusvahelistes projektides

Eesti töögrupi liige projektis *EU Kids Online* (2006-2009) ja *EU Kids Online 2* (2010–2012) (www.eukidsonline.net); partner projektis *Construction and normalization of gender online among young people in Estonia and Sweden (GTO Project)* (2009–2012) koostöös Södertörni Ülikooliga, Rootsis (<http://mt.sh.se/gto/>)

Kuulumine erialastesse organisatsioonidesse

Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR); European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA); Nordic Visual Studies Research Network;

Doktoritöö teemal kirjutatud täiendavad publikatsioonid

Kalmus, V., Runnel, P., & Siibak, A. (2009). Opportunities and Benefits Online. In Livingstone, S. & Haddon, L. (eds.) *Children Online: Opportunities and Risks for Children*. London: Policy Press, xx–xx.

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Siibak, A. (2007). Casanova's of the Virtual World. How Boys Present Themselves on Dating Websites. In Muukkonen, M. & Sotkasiira, K. (eds.) *Young People at the Crossroads: 5th International Conference on Youth Research in Karelia; Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, Russian Federation; September 1–5, 2006*. Joensuu University: Joensuun Yliopisto, 83–91.

Siibak, A. (2006). Romeo and Juliet of the Virtual World: Visual Gender Identity of the Most Remarkable Youngsters in Estonian Dating Website Rate. In Sudweeks, F., Hrachovec, H., Ess, C. (eds.) *Cultural Attitudes Towards Technology and Communication 2006*, 580–592.

**DISSERTATIONES
DE MEDIIS ET COMMUNICATIONIBUS
UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS**

1. **Epp Lauk.** Historical and sociological perspectives on the development of Estonian journalism. Tartu, 1997, 184 p.
2. **Triin Vihalemm.** Formation of collective identity among Russophone population of Estonia. Tartu, 1999, 217 p.
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4. **Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt.** Information technology users and uses within the different layers of the information environment in Estonia. Tartu, 2006, 213 p.
5. **Anu Masso.** Constitution of personal social space in A transition society. Tartu, 2008, 212 p.
6. **Kristina Reinsalu.** The implementation of Internet democracy in Estonian local governments. Tartu, 2008, 176 p.