

Audience Research Methodologies: Between Innovation and Consolidation

Edited by Geoffroy Patriarche, Helena Bilandzic, Jakob Linaa Jensen and Jelena Jurišić

- Table of Contents -

Introduction

Geoffroy Patriarche, Helena Bilandzic, Jakob Linaa Jensen and Jelena Jurišić

Part I. Audience Research Methods Between Diversification and Integration

Chapter 1. Audience Conceiving among Journalists: Integrating Social-Organizational Analysis and Cultural Analysis through Ethnography

Igor Vobič

Chapter 2. Audience Research Methods: Facing the Challenges of Transforming Audiences

Miguel Vicente-Mariño

Chapter 3. Triangulation as a Way to Validate and Deepen the Knowledge about User Behavior: A Comparison between Questionnaires, Diaries and Traffic Measurements

Olle Findahl, Christina Lagerstedt and Andreas Aurelius

Part II. Bridging the Gap between the Researched and the Researcher

Chapter 4. Participatory Design as an Innovative Approach to Research on Young Audiences

Christine W. Wijnen and Sascha Trültzsch

Chapter 5. Researching Audience Participation in Museums: A Multi-Method and Multi-Site Interventionist Approach

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Taavi Tatsi, Pille Runnel and Agnes Aljas

Chapter 6. Researching Ethnic Minority Groups as Audiences: Implementing Culturally Appropriate Research Strategies

Marta Cola and Manuel Mauri Brusa

Part III. Studying Online Social Networks

Chapter 7. Exploring the Potential of Creative Research for the Study of Imagined Audiences: A Case Study of Estonian Students' Sketches on the Typical Facebook Users

Andra Siibak and Maria Murumaa-Mengel

Chapter 8. Analyzing Online Social Networks from a User Perspective: A Quantitative-Qualitative Framework

Jakob Linaa Jensen and Anne Scott Sørensen

Chapter 9. Virtual Shadowing, Online Ethnographies and Social Networking Studies

Nicoletta Vittadini and Francesca Pasquali

Part IV. Web 2.0 Technologies as Research Tools

Chapter 10. Digging the Web: Promises and Challenges of Using Web 2.0 Tools for Audience Research

Matthias R. Hastall and Freya Sukalla

Chapter 11. Twitter and Social TV: Microblogging as a New Approach to Audience Research

Klaus Bredl, Christine Ketzer, Julia Hünninger and Jane Fleischer

Chapter 12. An Evaluation of the Potential of Web 2.0 APIs for Social Research

Cédric Courtois and Peter Mechant

Conclusion

Chapter 13. Audiences, Audiences Everywhere – Measured, Interpreted, and Imagined

Klaus Bruhn Jensen

Chapter 7.

Exploring the Potential of Creative Research for the Study of Imagined Audiences: A Case Study of Estonian Students' Sketches on the Typical Facebook Users

Andra Siibak and Maria Murumaa-Mengel

Introduction

In the recent years, researchers have shown growing interest in making use of new creative methods (Gauntlett 2007) in social research. According to Buckingham (2009, 633) such an interest in creative approaches and hence, “a broader move towards ‘participatory’ research methods” has been apparent across a wide range of disciplines, e.g. sociology, psychology, social policy, education and health, and is especially popular while doing research involving children and young people. Creative approaches have also been actively used in media studies, as numerous researchers have asked children and young people to engage in some creative projects either by making drawings (Lealand and Zanker 2006), shooting videos (Gauntlett 1997), making scrapbooks which combine images and texts (Bragg and Buckingham 2008) or collages (Awan 2007) so as to “generate insights which would most likely not have emerged through directed conversation” (Gauntlett 2011, 4). Several researchers (e.g. Perkel and Yardi 2006) have also made use of photo or video elicitation in which creative (visual) material produced either by the participants or the researcher has been used as a basis for carrying out interviews.

Creative research approaches have been deployed to study a wide array of issues. For example, young people’s understandings of computers and related technologies have been studied through children’s drawings (Denham 1993; Levin and Barry 1997), photo-elicitation has been incorporated to analyze online photo sharing practices (Ames and Naaman 2007; van

House 2009), etc. To our knowledge, however, creative research methods have not yet been used for studying young people's perceptions about imagined audiences in social media. In the context where many researchers have been noted to feel the challenge in applying empirical methods in trying to map the new media audiences (Livingstone 1999) we decided to explore the potential of new creative research methods for studying such a phenomenon. Furthermore, we aimed at studying the imagined audiences as the issue of the "audience as presumed, imagined or mythologized" has been suggested to play a key, although often unacknowledged role in the discourses surrounding new media (Livingstone 1999, 63). The debate about "new audiences" has been particularly heated in the context of various social media environments where the users often lack information about their audience and thus "it is often difficult to determine how to behave, let alone to make adjustments based on assessing reactions" (boyd 2008, 36). To complicate things even more, the boundaries between the sender and the receiver are blurred (Napoli 2008) and changes in author-text-audience-relationship are evident, as previously the people, mere passive observers, have transformed in these environments into creative and active participants (Livingstone 2003). In absence of clear understanding of one's audience, participants imagine their audience based on cues they get from the environment (Marwick and boyd 2011). However, these cues could be misread, missed, forgotten or exaggerated and often the sender perceives only a certain small part of the audience as a receiver of the message, or "imagined audience" (boyd 2010; Murumaa and Siibak 2012).

Taking the above-mentioned context into consideration, the aim of the present chapter is to explore the potential of creative research methods for studying imagined audiences in social media. In the first part of the chapter, we will give a short general overview of the approach known as creative methods. The chapter then moves on to describe a case study where creative methods were used to study Estonian high-school student's reflections about the

imagined audience on Facebook. Students' drawings of typical Facebook users, and their own interpretations of these sketches are used as an example for reflecting upon the advantages and possible limitations involved when making use of creative research methods for studying the imagined audiences in new media. The chapter ends with concluding thoughts.

Main Characteristics of Creative Research Methods

Creative methods are located within a broader framework of approaches that are usually referred to as visual research methods, which comprises a multitude of approaches and data (Prosser and Loxely 2008). In comparison to the other action-oriented and visual approaches, the uniqueness of creative methods lies in the fact that research participants are asked "to spend *time* applying their playful or creative *attention* to the act of making something symbolic or metaphorical, and then *reflecting* on it" (Gauntlett 2007, 3, italics in original). In other words, the participants of studies where creative research methods are used are asked to take time to make a visual (drawing, photo, video, collage) or three-dimensional artifact (out of clay, Lego, etc.) so as to provide new information and insight into different aspects of social life that might not be accessible with more traditional qualitative research methods e.g. focus-groups and interviews (Gauntlett 2007, 182, italics in original).

The advocates of visual and creative research methods argue that the act of creating something is not only elemental to the human condition but has also "spanned the evolution of humankind" (Prosser 2008, 32). In this context it is important to note that Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, 2, italics in original) regards creative methods as "an *enabling* methodology", referring to the fact that the main idea of the method is based on the assumption that people have something interesting to communicate and they can do it in a creative manner. Furthermore, creative methods cannot be seen only as a "good new way of building sociological knowledge but also offer a positive challenge to the taken-for-granted idea that you can explore the social world just by asking people questions, in language"

(Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 1). In comparison to traditional research methods where research participants are asked to orally reflect upon a variety of topics and hence to provide instant answers on complicated and sometimes also very personal matters, creative processes take more time and thus also demand greater reflection on the part of the participant.

One of the intentions of creative methods is to actively engage the participants in the study on three different levels. In the first phase of the study, the participants are usually asked to produce something with their hands, i.e. to be bodily engaged in the research. Secondly, as the process of physically creating something – taking photos, making a drawing or forming something out of clay – cannot be separated from the mental processes surrounding such a production, participants also need to be mentally engrossed in the study so as to exercise their agency to the fullest. Hence, Gauntlett (2007) has claimed that creative research methods are built upon the unity of body and mind. The need for the physical and mental harmony in the process is probably most apparent in the third and final phase of such research when all the participants are asked to orally interpret and comment upon one's own work.

In comparison to the visual research methods where the visual assignments undertaken by research participants are usually interpreted and “read” by the researchers themselves, the intention of creative research approaches is to give “voice” to the participants of the study. In fact, according to Gauntlett (2007, 125), researchers should not intend to impose their own meaning of the photos, drawings, videos, Lego constructions, etc. made by the participants as they would be unable to underpin the real meaning behind those works. However, considering the fact that “a picture is a statement” (Arnheim 1969, 137), only the maker of the statement is able to explain and describe the intentions and meanings behind the work. When doing so, the power balance between the participant and the researcher is shifting into a more collaborative model (see Pink 2003; Toon 2008). In this respect, as suggested by Harper (1998, 35), “the researcher becomes a listener” whose intention should be to keep “the consequent interest in

and acknowledgment of the co-construction of knowledge between participant and researcher” (Toon 2008, 22). Such mutually acknowledged co-operation between the researcher and the participant in producing new knowledge would “help sociologists understand how participants see their worlds” (Gauntlett 2007, 107). Furthermore, several authors believe that by giving the research participants an opportunity to take active part in the study they are also able to communicate different kinds of information (Gauntlett 2007, 182) through which the researchers can examine and probe “visible but unseen” everyday behaviors (Prosser 2007, 16).

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that such an ideology behind creative research methods has not been anonymously accepted. Buckingham (2009, 635), for instance, has criticized the “naïve empiricism” and “naïve political arguments” that have been put forward when listing the strengths of the approach. Furthermore, he has reminded the researchers about the fact that the empirical material received through such an approach cannot be taken as objective documentation of reality, but rather a tool for uncovering previously hidden thoughts and feelings (Unsworth 2009). In fact, as admitted by several scholars (Bragg 2011; Piper and Frankham 2007), creative research methods raise a number of unique challenges.

Taking the above-mentioned context into consideration, we decided to employ creative research methods for studying Estonian young people’s perceptions about the imagined audience on Facebook. In the following sections we will give an overview of our case study and use our experiences to elaborate upon the strengths and limitations of such an approach when studying imagined audiences.

Case Study

Background

The present case study was carried out with the aim to study Estonian high-schools students’ perceptions about the imagined audience of Facebook. The sample of our study consisted of

16-20 year old high-school students (N=15), the majority of which attended 10th grade (N=11) and some (N=4) were from the 12th grade. All in all six girls and nine boys (identified here accordingly as F and M) were divided into two mix-gender groups who attended a workshop on two separate dates in the beginning of June 2010.

All the participants in the study had been regular computer and Internet users between 7 and 13 years. All of them also had previous experiences with using different social networking sites (e.g. Orkut, MySpace, Rate), although their Facebook usage experience varied from three months to three years. On average the students in our sample had been using Facebook approximately for a year and two months (1.18 years).

The homogenous sample, based on demographical and age-specific characteristics, was intentionally selected for the study in order to avoid social pressure and to allow the interaction to occur in an environment that is as “natural” as possible (Krueger 1988).

Participation in the workshops was voluntary, but all the participating students received one additional grade in media studies for taking part of the study.

Data Collection

Both workshops were organized in three different phases. In the first phase, the young people were engaged in a group discussion that mainly involved questions about their overall Internet usage practices and preferences. Then the discussion moved on to the topic of social media, namely the use of Facebook. For example, the students were asked to describe the people belonging to their online friends' lists and to classify these persons in accordance to the frequency of their user practices.

The next phase of the workshop was built upon the ideas around creative research methods. The students were given A4 sized papers and pencils and were asked to draw sketches of the user types they considered to be most prominent on Facebook. The aim of this exercise was to

give the students an opportunity to address issues discussed in the previous phase of the workshop from a different perspective and to allow them to express their thoughts creatively. We asked the young people to make the drawings in pairs so as to give them an opportunity to share their experiences with each other and to discuss on the topic before progressing with the drawings. Thus these drawings produced by the participants could be regarded as the product of a consensus. Furthermore, according to Gauntlett (2007, 96), group engagement in creative processes has “parallels with how we come to form understandings in everyday life, through interactions with peers”. This was also one of the reasons why we decided against asking the students to make their individual drawings.

Instead of asking the students to draw just one image per pair, we suggested each pair to produce around five images that would portray their perceptions of the dominant user types in Facebook. Asking the participants to produce more than one image has been considered to be a good idea as people “often have a *range* of thoughts about any particular topic” (Gauntlett 2005, 26, italics in original). So as to illustrate the latter claim, our participants produced 39 sketches of various Facebook user types.

Still, even though Gauntlett (2005, 26) has claimed that participants should be allowed to produce as many images as they like, we believe limiting the number of images is actually reasonable in cases when the researchers need to operate in between certain time limits.

Making a drawing or some other creative artifact is usually considerably more time consuming than giving oral answers to interviewers’ questions, and therefore researchers sometimes need to make harsh decisions regarding their study procedure. For instance, as our workshop lasted a few hours and we also wanted to cover additional topics in a form of a group discussion, we were unable to prolong the drawing process indefinitely. The moderator was monitoring the drawing process and when it was clear that all of the pairs had finished

their drawings, the next phase of the study was reached. Furthermore, it has to be noted that none of the pairs claimed to need more time for finishing their sketches.

Data Analysis

As the relative trustworthiness of image-based research is “best achieved via multiple images in conjunction with words” (Prosser 1998, 106), in the final phase of the workshop each group was asked to present and comment upon their sketches to the others. These short presentations, however, were followed by a more general discussion on the topic of Facebook users. During these discussions all participants of the study were able to ask additional questions, reflect upon their own experiences and comment upon the drawings of others. We asked each group to interpret their own work so as not to instantly impose our own, adult and researcher’s interpretations and meanings (see Gauntlett 2007, 125) to the drawings of the teens. Furthermore, participant involvement has been noted to be especially beneficial for research with teenagers as it can also challenge asymmetrical power relations (Weller 2012).

As “the design rests on the possibility of choice” (Kress 2010, 28), the students in our workshops could delete, add, and modify whatever content they wished while making their sketches. And thus, the young were allowed to depict a multitude of personas in a variety of ways on their sketches. The interpretations of the makers of the drawings followed by the group discussion give us a reason to believe that students’ creative and playful explorations of Facebook user types illustrate their own perceptions, assumptions and beliefs about the users of Facebook. The analysis of the drawings showed that six dominant types and some sub-types of Facebook users – the Eager Beaver (sub-type the Geek), the Show-Off (sub-type Via-iPhone-Dude), the Businessman, the Perv, the Meanie (sub-types the Hater and the Oldster),

and the Habitual User – emerged (see Murumaa and Siibak 2012 for more detailed analyses of the user types).

Gauntlett (2007, 103, italics in original) has argued that one can learn a lot “from the stories that are told and the way they are told” through such creative processes. For example, through combining the drawing assignment together with an oral reflection of the drawing we gained a much more detailed understanding of the Facebook user type classified as the Show-Off.

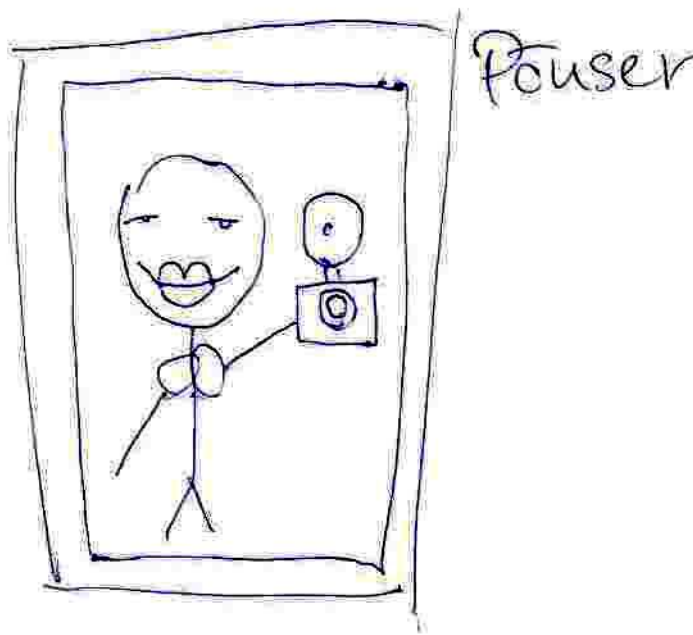


Figure 1: An example of the students’ sketch representing the Show-Off user type. On the sketch labelled as the Poser.

In fact, the drawing helped us to emphasize some aspects that the young people associated with the Facebook users belonging to the Show-Off user type. First of all, an activity that the participants considered to be most characteristic of this user type – photographing – was depicted on the drawing. It appeared from students’ comments that the members of the Show-Off user type are very active in uploading photos on Facebook. Furthermore, students’ interpretations of the drawing also referred to the fact that the members of the Show-Off user type were accustomed to taking photos of themselves, mostly through a mirror reflection.

M6: This is a user type who takes pictures of themselves.

M5: They go home and constantly photograph themselves and upload at least three new pictures daily...

M7: Ten.

M5: Yeah, at least ten.

M7: All the time...

M6: Mostly the pictures are taken in front of a mirror.

The mocking tone and ridiculing manner of the students' comments gave us reason to believe that the young people did not consider themselves to be the representatives of the Show-Off user type. Rather, they were active in voicing their contempt in the above-mentioned actions and Facebook behaviors that they believed to be distasteful. Hence, although creative methods which use visuals have been criticized for sometimes objectifying "others" (Buckingham 2009) we would rather argue that due to employing such an approach we had an opportunity to witness how participants relate to these "others" and position themselves.

For instance, in contrast to the above-mentioned user type, the young participants gave much more positive interpretations of the users belonging to the group of Habitual Users. The drawings depicting this Facebook user type differed quite extensively from all the other drawings as they represented either an androgynous persons or inanimate objects (e.g. flowers and hearts, a cocktail glass with a straw and a lemon slice in it).

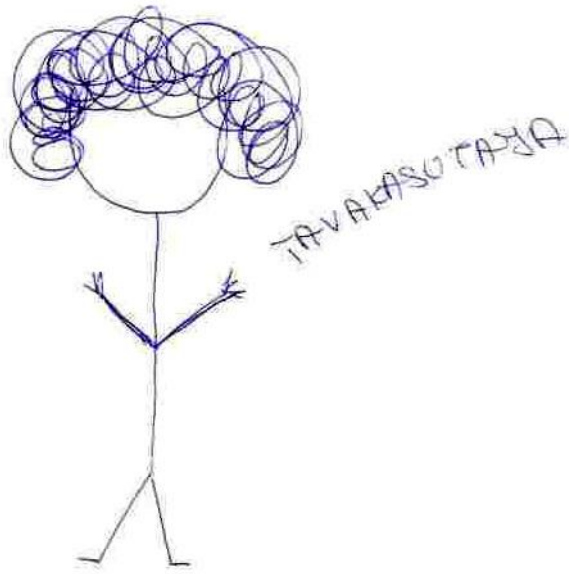


Figure 2: An example of a students' sketch representing the Habitual User

In their comments to their sketches the students claimed to have wanted to represent the fact that the Habitual Users do not release much personal information on their Facebook profiles and their overall Facebook usage activities do not stand out in any way. Furthermore, even though the Habitual Users were also characterized as active and versatile users of the site, the young people wanted to emphasize the fact that such users still had a life outside of the Internet.

M4: Playing games, and...

M5: Looks around, likes a couple of things and...

M2: Does not really stand out over there.

F1: Yes, just is, but isn't really on the background... and uses Facebook usually like, how to say, from time to time. Not sitting there to fight off boredom.

The above-mentioned description, together with the students' self-reports of their Facebook usage indicates that the participants of our study tended to view themselves as the Habitual Users of Facebook. In other words, the creative assignment also served as a mental map for

the young people in order to reflect upon their own Facebook usage practices and behaviors and thus to position oneself in accordance to the practices of all the others, i.e. the imaginary audiences on Facebook.

Reflections about the Method

Advantages of the Method

Researchers who are interested in the lives and experiences of children and youth have quite a long tradition in making use of projective techniques that often combined oral discussions with creative practical assignments involving visual materials (Catterall and Ibbotson 2000). One of the main reasons for deploying such approaches is the fact that young people and children are themselves not only sincerely interested in images but they also seem to take pleasure in the process (Thomson 2008, 11). In addition, according to Freund and Holling (2008), creativity usually helps individuals to maintain their interest in what they are doing. Hence, we argue that similar to the projective techniques (Catterall and Ibbotson 2000), creative research methods actually help to generate respondent curiosity because they differ and thus seem more unusual from the more traditional research methods (e.g. surveys, interviews). The latter was also evident during our study as all the students were actively reflecting upon each others' Facebook experiences, making jokes and posing questions to each other while exchanging ideas for the sketches. In other words, the students participating in our study really seemed to be enjoying themselves during the whole process. All of the above helped us to create a relaxed, care-free but at the same time, task-oriented atmosphere for the workshop.

Furthermore, we believe that by allowing young people to have control over their self-expression, we were able to establish a more equitable partnership between the youth and the researcher-moderator. For instance, in comparison to the interview situations where one's answers are more immediate, creative research methods give youth "greater 'editorial control'

over the material disclosed” (Holliday 2004, 1603). As the students could easily modify and erase one’s drawings, they might have also felt more in control over their own process of expression and more at ease with the need to comment upon one’s own experiences and perceptions.

Our experience also helped to confirm the claims of others (e.g. Gauntlett 2007; Toon 2008) who have stated that the equal partnership between the participants and the researcher is built upon the “fundamental belief in the co-constructed and situated nature of knowledge” (Toon 2008, 25). As the children’s and young people’s drawings often contain a mixture of stereotypes and drawing conventions (see Punch 2002; Whetton and McWhirter 1998) they might seem self-explanatory on the first sight, and hence, some authors have confessed that sometimes they have felt it “to be insulting to ask the children what they had drawn” (Punch 2002, 15). Such an attitude however, is in serious conflict with the main ideas behind the visual research according to which “images are, by their nature, ambiguous and do not in themselves convey meanings which are supplied serendipitally by those who perceive them” (Prosser 1998, 98). Furthermore, Thomson (2008) has argued that the analysis of images in general, and the ones made by children and young people in particular, needs to be a highly conscious activity as young people’s images “may not be amendable to straightforward adult readings” (Thomson 2008, 10). Our experience with the two workshops suggests that researchers need not feel intimidated and uneasy when asking the participants to provide interpretations of their own works. On the contrary, it is only the “picture and words together” (Gauntlett 2007, 107) that would form a meaningful package, which could then be analyzed further by social scientists. However, our experience also gives us a reason to believe that rather than focusing on what the youth have drawn, researchers should be more focused on finding out why they have decided to make such a drawing and what the drawing meant for the maker (Punch 2002, 16).

When starting the group discussion about the drawings students had made, we did not intend to take a role of an “expert” analyst “who can come in and tell you what something ‘really’ means” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 5). On the contrary, each pair was first asked to describe their drawings and such short presentations were then followed by questions and comments from all others. In our everyday social lives, other individuals take active part in constructing our realities. In fact, according to Giddens (1976) we are constantly trying to understand the meaning that others give to our actions. The most important experiences, however, are obtained by communicating face to face, as the other’s subjective reality is available and the present is shared by the participants at the moment of communication (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 44). The following example illustrates how the participants in our study used each others’ drawings as an aid when orally constructing their perception of the reality.

Moderator: Do you accept strangers’ friend requests?

/---/

M5: When an especially beautiful girl adds me, then.

M7: Well yes, but when I see that a dude like that [points at the Perv user-type sketch, Figure 3] adds me, then I don’t want it that much.



Figure 3: An example of the students' sketch representing the Perv user type. On the sketch labelled as the Eastern Dude

In this way, we argue, the group discussion helped us to establish a “community within which meaning was negotiated and constructed” (Toon 2008, 25). It also allowed us as researchers to observe not only how young people give meaning to social experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 1998), but also to witness how participants were encouraging each other to collaborate and to interpret the drawings made by others. It also gave us a possibility to observe the interaction – from whose position the opinions were vocalized, what words were used to express one's attitudes, and how the other members of the group reacted to what was being said. Combining the analysis of drawings with the analysis of interview transcripts also allowed us to trace how the participants of our study “move unconsciously between positions, writing and re-writing themselves” (Piper and Frankhan 2007, 385) as they voiced their opinions. Hence, we argue that while specifying each others' answers and questioning each other's replies, the young were constructing their shared reality.

Furthermore, we agree with others who have made use of action-oriented research methods in order to study some phenomenon in the life-worlds of children or young people, that getting children actively engaged in the research process itself allows the youth to “communicate what was important to them” (Gauntlett 2007, 115) and also to “bring into surface” impressions and feelings of a subject matter that more conventional research methods may not access (Gauntlett 2007, 126).

Limitations of the Method

At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the sketches made by the teens not only reflect their interests but focus also on “the assumed interest of the recipient of the sign” (Kress 2010, 78). In other words, the narratives produced through the sketches

(Weber and

Michell 1996, 304), In this context, it is important to take into account that the main audience for these creative assignments were the other participants in the study, i.e. one’s peers and the moderator. As group affiliation is very important for this age group, it was evident that occasionally individual behaviors and attitudes were sacrificed for group mentality, norms and values imagined to be shared with others. Hence, despite the fact that care-free and joking research environments is believed to help the participants to “overcome the self-censoring of responses” (Catterall and Ibbotson 2000, 249), the students’ (un)conscious need to earn the approval of peers might still have an effect on their joint discussions.

In the light of the above, it is also important to note that individuals do not only have different levels of artistic skills but also different levels of confidence (Gauntlett 2005, 25). In fact, authors (e.g. Punch 2002) have noted that some of the young people may first feel a bit uneasy and more inhibited when asked to produce a creative artifact. This issue was also raised by some of the youth involved in our study who at first seemed a bit uncomfortable

when the drawing assignment was introduced, which is why the moderator needed to encourage the participants to explore the matter through drawings.

Moderator: ... So try to draw them...

F5: But I don't know how to!

Moderator: No, it certainly doesn't have to be a beautiful detailed painting, just think what are the basics that are visible in these types, how do they stand out on Facebook?

F6: I'd rather write...

Moderator: You can write a little bit as well, but try to scribble down some image, too.

Based on this experience, we acknowledge that when introducing creative methods researchers need to lay special emphasis on the fact that the artistic skills of an individual are of secondary value when taking up this creative task. Furthermore, we also agree with Gauntlett (2005, 26) who has suggested that future studies should try not to limit the participants' choice by pre-selecting the materials and forms for their self-expression. In other words, researchers should at least try to offer a variety of choices that allow the participants to exercise their agency and creativity to the fullest.

Our experience in making use of creative methods also suggests that the role of a moderator in such occasions is somewhat different from the moderator's role in case of more traditional qualitative methods (e.g. focus groups). In the latter case, the moderator's role is mostly to stay in the background and to intervene at times when the discussion goes too far from the main focus, when interesting and relevant new subtopics emerge, or when the discussions are dominated by only a few people (Dawson, Manderson and Tallo 1993). When using creative methods, we argue, it is important for a researcher to "go with the flow" sometimes, and to

consider the possible deviations from original research questions in strategic planning of such studies.

Furthermore, we agree with Buckingham (2009) who has argued that when analyzing creative artifacts like drawings, researchers should not focus only on the oral (or written) interpretations of the makers and the group; this would dismiss the visual dimension of their study. Although it might appear very tempting to rely only on the explanations and descriptions made by the participants, Buckingham (2009) warns the researchers not to take everything the participants say at face value. In our study we also found the theory of reading images by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) helpful when interpreting the visual data gathered. However, as there is no “one size fits all’ approach” (Buckingham 2009) when analyzing visuals, we encourage researchers to search for additional theories and ways for understanding the data produced through creative methods.

Conclusion

Authors have claimed that action-oriented research using visual or creative methods can be seen as a “natural extension of ideas of agency, action, collaboration and joint action” (Toon 2008, 19). Considering the fact that new media has changed on a more general level the way how author, text and audience relate to each other, creative research methods, which are built upon the agency and creativity of a participant, offer an interesting alternative to the traditional research methods for studying imagined audiences of the Internet.

The present case study aimed to study Estonian students’ perceptions of the imagined audience on Facebook by implementing creative research methods. Due to the relative invisibility and heterogeneity of the social media audience who is engaged in “continuous mutual surveillance” (Linaa Jensen 2010), such a topic poses a challenging task for a researcher. Although researchers can ask the participants to describe their online-friends or talk about Internet users abstractly during interviews, previous studies have indicated that

social media users are mainly aware of the ideal audience of their posts “which is often the mirror-image of the user” (Marwick and boyd 2011, 7). In the verbal group discussions, the young participants of the present study also named friends, family and acquaintances as the main contacts belonging to their friends’ lists. However, all their intriguing characterizations of the Facebook user types became visible when expressing their thoughts and perceptions through sketches. Hence, with the help of creative methods, we got a fresh perspective and unique sneak peak into teens’ minds on the theme of the imagined online audience – including the nightmare readers and ideal audience members (Marwick and boyd 2011) – as well as a look into how the young people position themselves. In this context, we believe that the oral descriptions the students gave to the drawings and the group discussion that followed both helped to serve as “translations” that provided us with additional detailed information about the imaginary audience of Facebook. We would not have gained such information in any other way. In other words, we argue that the oral reflections about one’s creative project do carry a “metacognitive function” (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994, 160), thus serving as a crucial element in the overall analysis procedure.

Nevertheless, as the personal meanings and perceptions communicated are often ambiguous, obscure and ever changing, the researcher cannot take the role of omniscient expert. Rather, the researcher has to be creative, much like the method. Giving participants plenty of options in the process of creation and accepting deviations from the original plan to follow interesting sub-topics are just a few aspects that can benefit researchers.

According to Gauntlett (2007), creative research methods are based on the idea of interchangeable body and mind. In studies where subjects are asked to work in pairs or small groups, however, the need for harmony goes beyond an individual: sharing experiences, values and attitudes, and negotiating shared reality result in images that are ideally an outcome of consensus.

Based on our experience we thus propose that similar creative approaches could be used to study a variety of imagined audiences – of, for instance, television shows, marketing messages, political movements, and subcultures. Even when potentially threatened by group dynamics, stereotypes, poor skills of oral self-expression, or lack of confidence in one’s own artistic ability, etc., the results of an “enabling methodology” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006) are, indeed, interesting and worth to be explored .

References

- Ames Morgan and Mor Naaman. “Why We Tag: Motivations for Annotation in Mobile and Online Media.” Paper presented at the CHI (Computer/Human Interaction) 2007 Conference, San Jose, California, USA, April 28–May 3, 2007. Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://www.stanford.edu/~morganya/research/chi2007-tagging.pdf>.
- Arnheim, Rudolf. *Visual Thinking*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Awan, Fatimah. “Young People, Identity and the Media: A Study of Conceptions of Self-identity among Youth in Southern England.” PhD diss., Bournemouth University, 2007. Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://www.artlab.org.uk/fatimah-awan-01.pdf>.
- Berger Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1966.
- boyd. danah, m. “Taken out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics.” PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008. Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://www.danah.org/papers/TakenOutOfContext.pdf>.
- “Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications.” In *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Zizi Papacharissi, 39–58. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

- Bragg, Sara. “‘Now It’s up to Us to Interpret It’: ‘Youth Voice’ and Visual Methods.” In *Researching Creative Learning: Methods and Issues*, edited by Pat Thomson and Julian Sefton-Green, 88–103. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Bragg, Sara, and David Buckingham. “‘Scrapbooks’ as a Resource in Media Research with Young People.” In *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People*, edited by Pat Thomson, 114–131. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Buckingham, David. “‘Creative’ Visual Methods in Media Research: Possibilities, Problems and Proposals.” *Media, Culture & Society* 31(2009):633–52.
- Buckingham, David and Julian Sefton-Green. *Cultural Studies Goes to School*. Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1994.
- Catterall, Miriam and Patrik Ibbotson. “Using Projective Techniques in Education Research.” *British Educational Research Journal* 26(2000):245–56.
- Dawson, Susan, Lenore Manderson and Veronica L. Tallo. *A Manual for the Use of Focus Groups*. Boston: International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries, 1993.
Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://www.bvsde.paho.org/texcom/cd045364/focgroups.pdf>.
- Denham, Pearl. “Nine- to Fourteen-Year-Old Children’s Conception of Computers Using Drawings.” *Behaviour & Information Technology* 12(1993):346–58. Accessed November 12, 2012. DOI:10.1080/01449299308924399
- Norman, K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998.
- Philipp Alexander Freund and Heinz Holling. “Creativity in the Classroom: A Multilevel Analysis Investigating the Impact of Creativity and Reasoning Ability on GPA.” *Creativity Research Journal* 20(2008):309–18. DOI:10.1080/10400410802278776

Gauntlett, David. *Video Critical: Children, the Environment and Media Power*. London: John Libbey Media, 1997.

----- “Using Creative Visual Research Methods to Understand Media Audiences.”

MedienPädagogik 4(2005). Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://www.medienpaed.com/04-1/gauntlett04-1.pdf>.

----- *Creative Explorations. New Approaches to Identities and Audiences*. London: Routledge, 2007.

----- *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. London: Polity Press, 2011.

David Gauntlett and Peter Holzwarth “Creative and Visual Methods for Exploring Identities.”

Visual Studies 21(2006):82–91. Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://www.artlab.org.uk/VS-interview-2ps.pdf>.

Giddens, Anthony. *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*. London: Hutchinson, 1976.

Harper, Douglas. “An Argument for Visual Sociology.” In *Image-Based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*, edited by Jon Prosser, 24–41. London: Routledge, 1998.

Holliday, Ruth. “‘Filming ‘the Closet’’. The Role of Video Diaries in Researching Sexualities”. *American Behavioral Scientist* 47(2004): 1597-1616. Accessed November 12, 2012. <http://www.nyu.edu/pages/classes/bkg/methods/holliday.pdf>

van House, Nancy A. “Collocated Photo Sharing, Story-Telling, and the Performance of Self.” *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 67(2009):1073–86.

Kress, Gunther. *Multimodality. A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London: Routledge, 2010.

- Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Krueger, Richard A. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1988.
- Geoff, Lealand and Ruth Zanker. "Dream Worlds and Media Worlds: Using Drawings for Insights into the Lives of New Zealand Children." In *In the Service of Young People? Studies and Reflections on Media in the Digital Age: Yearbook 2005/2006*, edited by Ulla Carlsson and Cecilia von Feilitzen, 117–128. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2006.
- Barbara B. Levin and Sean M. Barry. "Children's Views of Technology: The Role of Age, Gender, and School Setting." *Journal of Computing in Childhood Education* 8(1997):267–90.
- Linnaa Jensen, Jakob. "The Internet Omnopticon: Mutual Surveillance in Social Media." Paper presented at the Internet Research 11.0: Sustainability, Participation, Action Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden, October 19–21, 2010.
- Livingstone, Sonia. "New Media, New Audiences?" *New Media & Society* 1(2003): 59-66.
- "The Changing Nature of Audiences: From the Mass Audience to the Interactive Media User." In *Companion to Media Studies. Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies (6)*, edited by Angharad N. Valdivia, 337–359. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/417/>.
- Alice E. Marwick and danah m. boyd. "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience." *New Media & Society* 13(2011):114–33.
- Maria Murumaa and Andra Siibak. "The Imagined Audience on Facebook: Analysis of Estonian Teen Sketches about Typical Facebook Users." *First Monday* 17(2012).
- Accessed June 21, 2012.

<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/3712/314>

7.

Napoli, Philip M. "Toward a Model of Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences." *McGannon Center Working Paper Series*, 2008. Accessed June 21, 2012. http://fordham.bepress.com/mcgannon_working_papers/15.

Dan Perkel and Sarita Yardi. *Discovering the Social Context of Kids' Technology Use through Photo Elicitation*. California: The Digital Youth Project, 2006. Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/node/15>.

Heather Piper and Jo Frankham. "Seeing Voices and Hearing Pictures: Image as Discourse and the Framing of Image-Based Research." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 28(2007):373–87.

Pink, Sarah. "Interdisciplinary Agendas in Visual Research: Re-situating Visual Anthropology." *Visual Studies* 18(2):179–92.

Prosser, Jon. "The Status of Image-Based Research." In *Image-Based Research. A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*, edited by Jon Prosser, 97–112. London: Falmer Press, 1998.

----- "Visual Methods and the Visual Culture of Schools." *Visual Studies* 22(2007):13–30. Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://publicsphere.narod.ru/VisCultSchools.pdf>.

Jon Prosser and Andrew Loxely. *Introducing Visual Methods*. ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper, 2008. Accessed June 21, 2012. <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/420/1/MethodsReviewPaperNCRM-010.pdf>.

Punch, Samantha. "Research with Children: The Same or Different from Research with Adults?" *Childhood* 9(2002):321–41. Accessed November 12, 2012. doi: 10.1177/0907568202009003005

- Thomson, Pat. "Children and Young People. Voices in Visual Research." In *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People*, edited by Pat Thomson, 1–20. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Toon, Helen. "'Deliberately', 'Explicitly': Redistributing Power. An Argument for Using Visual Research Methods in an Educational Research Project." *Journal of Artistic and Creative Education* 2(2008):3–39.
- Unsworth, Jon. "Book Review: Being Critical and Creative in Qualitative Research." *Educational Action Research* 17(2009):615–17. Accessed November 12, 2012. 10.1080/09650790903220432
- Weber, Sandra and Mitchell, Claudia. Drawing Ourselves into Teaching: Studying the Images that Shape and Distort Teacher Education. *Teaching & Teacher Education* 12(1993): 303-13. <http://educ.ubc.ca/courses/pbl/images%20of%20teachers.pdf>
- Weller, Susie. "Evolving Creativity in Qualitative Longitudinal Research with Children and Teenagers." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 15(2012):119–33. Accessed November 12, 2012. DOI:10.1080/13645579.2012.649412
- Noreen M. Wetton and Jennifer McWhirter. "Images and Curriculum Development in Health Education." In *Image-Based Research. A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*, edited by Jon Prosser, 263–83. London: Falmer Press, 1998.

Acknowledgements

The preparation of this article was supported by the research grant no. 8527 financed by Estonian Science Foundation. Andra Siibak is also thankful for the support of the target-financed project SF0180017s07.

