

Peer Group Network Exploration

Approach to an integrated online-offline-ethnography

I. The research project “Images of Young People on the Web” and its 3 levels of interest

The current research project, “Images of Young People on the Web” (short title), deals with visual self-expressions of adolescents and young adults on social networking sites. In the process, photographs of adolescents are analyzed as media-based contribution to identity work and relationship building that wouldn’t be imaginable without the influence of media communication.

The research project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF); duration from Jan 1st 2008 to Dec 31st 2010.

3 levels of interest

1. Production level
 - Contexts of photo production
2. Product level
 - Patterns of photo design and composition
 - Strategies of photographic self-exposure
3. Reception level
 - Picture passages
 - Picture conversations
 - Traces of media adaption

II. Design of the research method “Peer Group Network Exploration”

4 peer groups

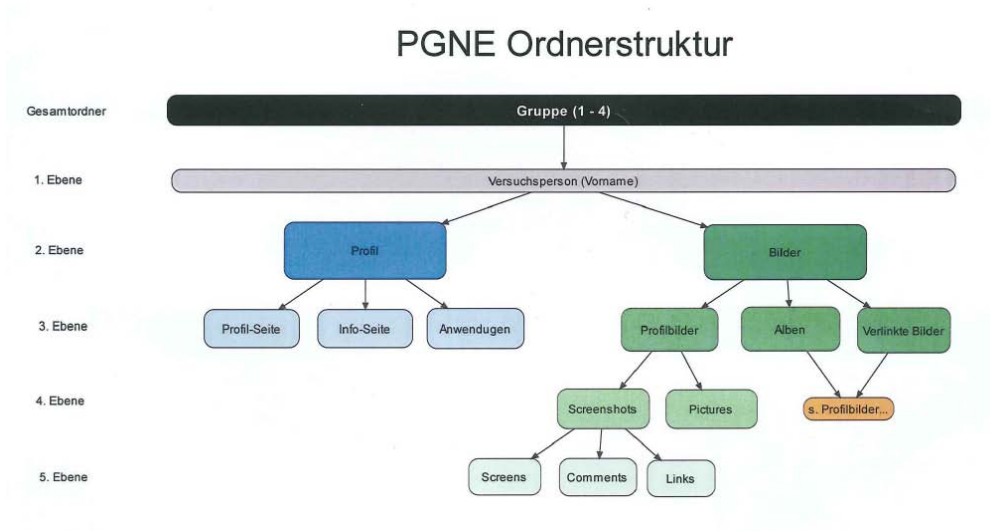
- students, 12-13 years old
- students, 15-16 years old
- students and apprentices, 18-19 years old
- university students, 22-25 years old

4 stages of exploration

1. First profile documentation
2. Multi-level questioning
3. Second profile documentation (revisited)
4. Analysis

III. 4 stages of Peer Group Network Explorations

1. Profile documentation



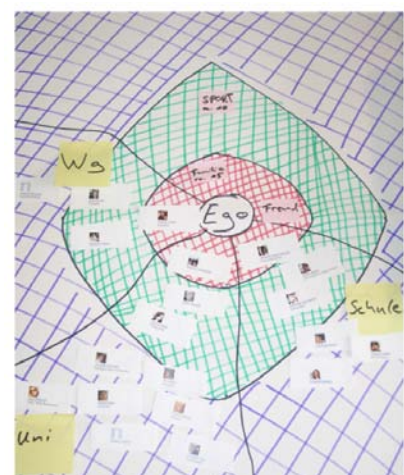
2. Multi-level questioning

2.1 Chart-Interview

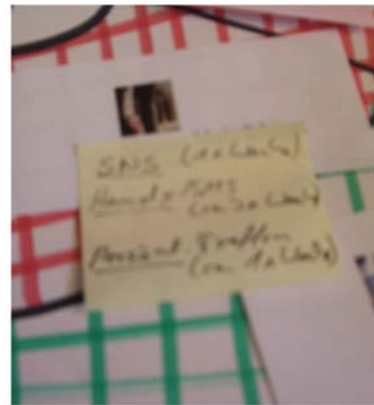
- a. Network analysis: definition and description of subgroups based on SNS-contacts.
Question: Who is missing?



- b. Emotional closeness: close bonds vs. loose contacts in relation to "ego". Visualized with small cards of SNS-contacts and others.



- c. Intensity of contact:
frequency of contact (offline & online, text/sound/image),
active vs. inactive contacts.



2.2 Profile visitation/ Conversation on pictures

- Visitation of the person's profile
- Combination of interview and "think aloud"
- Invitation to spontaneous comments on the activities (newsfeed) and guided interview
- Thematic focus: communication of the peer group/usage of images on SNS

2.3 Communication Diary

One week documentation of communication modes and target subjects in regard to emotional involvement.

SNS/Kommunikations-tagebuch (1. Woche)											
Tag 1 Datum:											
	Zeitraum	IS	Zeitraum	IS	Zeitraum	IS	Zeitraum	IS	Zeitraum	IS	Zeitraum
SNS											
Profilbild aktualisiert											
Profil aktualisiert											
Album erstellt/aktualisiert											
Fotoframe angeschaut											
In Profilern geschaut											
Statusbeitrag verfasst											
Gruppenaktivität											
Personenbeitrag geschrieben											
Nachricht geschrieben											
Vermerk											
Bildkommentar geschrieben											
Statuskommentar geschrieben											
Chatfunktion genutzt											
Sonstiges:											
Handy											
Telefoniert											
SMS geschickt											
Fotografiert											
Telefoniert											
IM/gerichtet											
E-Mail geschrieben											
Persönlich getroffen (privat)											
Sonstiges:											
Beziehungstiefe: sehen und bzw. hören versteht...	sehr häufig regelmäßig täglich	5	oft mehrmals pro Woche	4	regelmäßig alle paar Wochen	3	gelegentlich alle paar Monate	2	selten 1-2 mal im Jahr	1	

3. Profile documentation *revisited*

- Second documentation of the profile after 4 weeks
- Changes/activities of communication/activities about and changes of images
- Comparison with communication diary (conformity/divergences)

4. Interpretation/ Analysis

Focus/Cognitive interest:

- Contexts of meaning (images in the peer group)
- Composition of the contact network
- Role of emotional closeness/distance in communicative interactions
- Role of SNS/image communication in the person's communication portfolio

IV. Conclusion

- Combination: elements of "classical" online ethnography, qualitative network analysis, focus interview and communication diary
- Relation between online and offline through entanglement of different methodical approaches
- Broad comprehension of the horizon of meaning in the different rituals of communication and interaction, particularly concerning the role of images on SNS
- Insight into the structural arrangement of the social relationships displayed on SNS and thus a reference point on the significance of SNS in the communication portfolio of adolescents and young adults

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