Meeting my Friends on Facebook:
New Communication Habits Creating a New Concept of Friendship

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Foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Phil. Annemarie Peltzer-Karpf for supporting me throughout the process of writing this thesis and answering all my questions.

To my friends, thank you for always being there for me. I dedicate this piece of work to you, as you have shown me that it is of most importance to have you in my life.

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1 Introduction

Figure 1: Statement on Facebook-friendship

This user’s quote expresses very well how Facebook has influenced communication and the way we are connected with people nowadays. According to Hruschka (2010: 147), “two things must happen before a pair of individuals can become close friends. First, they must meet. Second, they must have sufficient mutual attraction to continue meeting.” However, in times of online social networks, especially the first component of making a friend, meeting in person, is no longer necessary. Unlike the traditional initiation of friendship and the further process of relationship formation, clicking a button is enough to become friends on social networking sites such as Facebook. Due to this vast change in social interaction, e.g. meeting a person online first, the consequences of online communication related to the concept of friendship will be investigated in this thesis.

Enhanced communication technology has also influenced user behaviour on the internet. Most users log on daily and spend several hours on social networking sites. That means Facebook has become an integral part of our daily routine. In the first part of this thesis, the emergence and development of this new phenomenon will be displayed in order to reconstruct the history of how it has found its way into our daily lives. Moreover, the basic functions of Facebook will be outlined to get a general overview of how users are able to communicate online.

In order to analyse the impact online interaction on Facebook has had on the basic concept of friendship, two age groups, namely teenagers and young adults, will be taken into account to depict a potential difference within these generations. Therefore, the particular motivations as well as the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook usage by each age group will be discussed.
In chapter 4, friendship is discussed in detail. First of all, a definition of the basic concept will be provided, followed by an insight into what it means to be friends on Facebook. In order to examine the changes friendship has undergone since the existence of social networking sites, a survey was conducted among both age groups. In the second part of this thesis, the hypotheses will be determined drawing on the findings of the survey.

I assume that online communication has not let our understanding of friendship unaffected and that there are differences between the two age groups. This is why I intend to prove the following hypotheses in the course of this thesis:

**H1:** Facebook mainly functions as a place to translocate offline relationships to an online space.

**H2:** Users treat connections differently online, depending on the degree of closeness.

**H3:** Facebook basically helps to intensify contacts for both age groups. However, it does not reduce contact to offline friends.

**H4:** Teenagers are much more likely to initiate friendship with strangers online.

**H5:** Young adults are more aware of the artificiality of the virtual community.

**H6:** The need for self-presentation is of more importance to teenagers in order to express individuality.

**H7:** Amongst young adults, online activities have a stronger impact on offline relationships.

**H8:** Teenagers have less the feeling that Facebook has had negative impacts on the concept of friendship, as it has become a part of those friendships.
2 A worldwide (web) phenomenon: Facebook

2.1 Emergence and development

Facebook has become the world's leading online social network, founded by Mark Zuckerberg together with his fellow Harvard University students Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. Its history can be traced back to the year 2003, when Zuckerberg developed its first version Facemash, during his second year of college. Facemash was first put online on October 28, 2003 on the intern net of Harvard University. (cf. Göring 2011: 51) Set up as a type of “hot or not game”, Harvard students, preferably females, could be rated hot or not by comparing pictures of them side-by-side. Therefore, Zuckerberg hacked into Harvard's online Facelbooks of single departments and used the photographs, without the permission of the students or the administration. The platform showed the students' real identities, which was one of the major features and key aspects of what later would become Facebook. Although it counted 22,000 hits within a short period of time, Facemash was shut down by Harvard executives a few days later. Zuckerberg was accused of violating copyrights and individual privacy for stealing the photos of the students. However, all the charges were eventually dropped. (cf. Bellis 2012, online)

In his online journal, Zuckerberg wrote: “Perhaps Harvard will squelch it for legal reasons without realizing its value as a venture that could possibly be expanded to other schools [...]”, already noticing the potential success of his idea. (O'Brien 2007, online) Zuckerberg became aware of people's huge interest in a service that was about people they actually knew in real life. For this reason, he began to work on a legal version in the beginning of 2004, calling it thefacebook.com. The name refers to printed books, handed out by American universities at the beginning of every academic year. (cf. Göring 2011: 52) They consisted of students' photographs and names. The intention was to introduce freshmen to their classmates and help them to get to know each other. Zuckerberg felt certain about the success of an online version of it that would enable users to establish contact. (cf. Göring 2011: 52) “It is clear that the technology needed to create a centralized Website is readily available [...] the benefits are many”, he claimed in The Harvard Crimson. (Hoffman 2010, online)
He continued pointing out the (students') need that he felt existed for setting up a service such as Facebook and the reason for his action by saying “Everyone’s been talking a lot about a universal face book within Harvard. I think it’s kind of silly that it would take the University a couple of years to get around to it. I can do it better than they can, and I can do it in a week.” (Tabak 2004, online)

On February 4, 2004 Zuckerberg launched thefacebook.com, with the basic intention of creating a universal website allowing people around the university to make contact. Its membership was initially limited to Harvard students with a valid university e-mail address. Although they had to register and upload pictures themselves, more than half of the undergraduate students became members within the first month. (cf. Görig 2011: 52-53) In order to make the website grow faster, Zuckerberg enlisted a few of his fellow students. He started to collaborate with Eduardo Saverin, who worked on business, Dustin Moskovitz, working as a programmer, Chris Hughes and Andrew McCollum, who was the graphic artist. (cf. Bellis 2012, online)

After its success in Harvard, the website expanded to the Ivy League, comprising New England's eight most eminent elite universities, with the same reactions. (cf. Bellis 2012, online) Within short periods of time, most of the university students became active users. Due to this enormous demand, thefacebook.com then opened to most of the universities and schools in both Canada and The US. (cf. Holzapfel, Holzapfel 2012: 22)

Although Zuckerberg had never planned to start a business, this is what happened in June, 2004, when Sean Parker, an angel investor, became the company's president. (cf. Bellis 2012, online) The company moved to Palo Alto, California and changed its name to just Facebook, after the domain facebook.com had been bought for 200,000 US-Dollars in 2005.

On September 5, 2006, Facebook introduced one of the most significant features: The News Feed, where all the latest activities of the users are listed. It allows them to keep up with people's new friendships, uploaded photos, comments and applications used by them. Everything that happens on Facebook is visible and gathered in the same place. Although there had been initial protests against the news function, it is Facebook's key aspect nowadays.
Back then, Zuckerberg stated in an interview in *The Time's Magazine* that there was no intention of establishing new connections between people. More importantly, he just wanted to provide new tools to get in touch with people in a new and different way. In other words, Facebook and its News Feed is not a “social network” to Zuckerberg, but only a new technique and possibility for people to maintain contact and socialize with their own (already established) networks. (cf. Görig 2011: 60) This focus is well expressed by a quote taken from Facebook’s own online newsroom:

> Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and share and express what matters to them. ([http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/](http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/))

From September 26, 2006 onwards, Facebook was then no longer restricted to students, but opened to everyone with a valid e-mail address. (cf. Görig 2011: 58) Even though the possibility of verifying the identities of Facebook members was then no longer given, Zuckerberg’s concept turned out to work, as people kept entrusting their personal data on the website. After the number of users had increased up to almost 10 million, Facebook took another important step forward: The company opened its platform to external developers, who introduced so called applications (apps). Thus, users were being offered a growing range of free services, including games, photo management and the possibility of adjusting their profiles with music, film and book preferences, contributing to the growing user number. (cf. Holzapfel, Holzapfel 2012: 22) By the end of 2006, Facebook counted more than 12 million users within the US and kept growing rapidly. As a consequence, it continued its expansion to other countries, namely Canada and the UK.

On October 24, 2007 Zuckerberg sold 1.6 percent of his company to Microsoft, for 240 million US-Dollars. That is, only three years after its business formation, Facebook was worth 15 billion US-Dollars. While in quarter one of 2007, Facebook reached 20 million users, by the end of the year it had a total of 50 million active users. (cf. Holzapfel, Holzapfel 2012: 22) In January, 2008 Facebook launched its first translated version. Henceforth, it was available in Spanish. A few months later, it was also offered in German. As a result, Facebook broke the 100 million user barrier in August, 2008. (cf. Holzapfel, Holzapfel 2012: 23)
At the F8 Developer Conference in 2010, Facebook announced the release of its Open Graph concept, providing an increased interplay between the users' actions on external websites and their profiles. So called Social Plug-ins make it possible to integrate general Facebook functions, such as the Like-button or comments, into external websites (cf. Holzapfel, Holzapfel 2012: 23), thus, promoting Facebook's popularity and making it more interesting for other companies and web-developers, with a result of 500 million active users in July, 2010. (cf. Görig 2011: 66) However, Facebook wanted to increase its number of users. Therefore, Facebook-Places was introduced for smartphones. It enabled users via GPS function to share their current location in order to inform Facebook friends about their activities or to find out whether some of them had already visited a public place as well. (cf. Holzapfel, Holzapfel 2012: 23)

In 2011 Facebook brought the social web to the next level by making profound technical changes and it reached 845 million users. The highlight being the conversion of personal profiles into the so called Timeline, “a way for people to share the story of their life, introduced at f8.” (http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/)

At the beginning of 2012, Facebook announced its stock market launch, which was the biggest of all time within the IT sector. Back then, its market capitalization was valued at around 100 billion US-Dollars. However, Facebook stock tumbled too little over half its initial value within the first six months. Moreover, Facebook made two additional purchases: It completed the takeover of Instagram, a popular photo sharing app, allowing users to post videos and share images directly, followed by the takeover of Tagtile. (cf. Holzapfel, Holzapfel 2012: 24) It was also in 2012 when Facebook broke the one billion member barrier. It was the first social network to reach this milestone, thus getting closer to Zuckerberg's aim of connecting “everyone in the world via Facebook”. (Williams 2012, online)

In its report on the results of the first quarter of 2014, Facebook lists 802 million daily active users on average for March 2014, an increase of 21% year-over-year, and 1.28 billion monthly active users, an increase of 15% year-over-year. (http://investor.fb.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=842071) As of December 2013, Facebook has over 6,800 employees and is conducted by the Board Members Mark Zuckerberg, Sheryl Sandberg, Marc Anreessen, Erskine B. Bowles, Susan Desmond-Hellmann, Donald E. Graham, Reed Hastings and Peter A. Thiel. (http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/)
Concerning the worldwide distribution of Facebook users, most of them are located in the United States, even though approximately 81.2% of all daily users are outside the U.S. and Canada. (http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/) Nevertheless, as of June 2013, the U.S. was still ranked first with 168 million users, followed by Brazil with 76 million users. However, India has already reached the second place by now, with 92 million Facebook users in 2014. (Nayak 2014, online)

According to online statistics taken from allfacebook.de, the other countries remaining in the top-ten list are Indonesia (54 million users), Mexico (46), the U.K. (34), Turkey (34), the Philippines (32), France (28) and Germany (26). Austria, with approximately 3 million users, is listed 54th place as a country. (http://allfacebook.de/userdata/)

### 2.2 Facebook Statistics and the Average User

According to statistics released by Digital Marketing Ramblings in March 2014, to “illustrate just how vast” Facebook’s empire is, as Smith (2014, online) puts it, the total number of monthly active Facebook users is 1.23 billion, whereof 757 million use it daily. That is, 76% of all users login once a day, 40% of which, even check Facebook multiple times a day. As of August 2013, the country with the most active Facebook users is Canada. The gender percentage is rather balanced, with 42% of all Facebook users being male. The percentage of Internet users who are 65 years and older that use Facebook is 45%. 34% of all users are between the ages of 18 and 29. (Smith 2014, online)

According to Statistic Brain, 48% of all 18-34 year olds check Facebook when they wake up, 28% of them even before they get out of bed. (http://www.statisticbrain.com/facebook-statistics/). The average time spent on Facebook per visit is 18-20 minutes and more than 55 minutes per day. (cf. Faerman 2010: 115) During the time spent online, the average user hits the Like-button 9 times a month, comments on 25 posts and becomes fan of 4 pages. (cf. Faerman 2010: 115)

While the average Facebook user has approximately 130 friends, the average number of friends that teens have on Facebook is 300. The average user sends 8 friend requests per month. (cf. Faerman 2010: 115). The total number of Facebook friend connections is
150 billion. (Smith 2014, online). The average number of pages, groups, and events a user is connected to is 80. Thereby, a user averages gets invited to 3 events per month and is a member of 13 groups.

According to Digital Marketing Ramblings, 62% of the Millennials use Facebook to post about what they are doing, where they are and who they are with. In addition, 57% of them use it to coordinate social plans at least once a week. (Smith 2014, online)

2.3 Basic Functions: How Facebook Works

In order to provide some clarification, Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) describe the term Social networking sites as follows in their article:

Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs.

More precisely, Facebook is first of all based on the idea of building social relations among persons who share the same interests and activities in real life. Therefore, users have the opportunity to represent themselves via profiles that give basic information about their lives and personal preferences that function as tie points. Creating a personal profile is the first step to take after setting up an account on Facebook. At a minimum, profiles require a user’s name, gender, date of birth and e-mail address. Thus, Facebook issues instructions for new users to act in a certain way. During this process of profiling, users are required to give their personal details resembling the act of filling out an application form, as Wiedemann (cf. 2011: 167) puts it. That is, this E-form works as a standardized model for describing all users, thus serving as a basis of reciprocal observation, differentiation and evaluation. Thereby, users are constantly called upon to control the “quality” of their profiles in relation to those of their friends. (cf. Wiedemann 2011: 167)
Whereas profiling by filling in given grids leads to homogenization of all users to a certain degree, the application area allows for more individuality. Once users have registered and created a profile, they immediately get confronted with the following status line:

![Facebook status line](image)

**Figure 2: Facebook status line**

By filling in this question, users are able to share their current activity with their friends. However, the line does not disappear after having updated the status, thus constraining users to being constantly active and providing information to the online community. The ongoing reporting can be enriched by photos, links and videos. Wiedemann (2011: 169) indicates that users have to be creative and strategic in order to practice this kind of “Self-branding” successfully. Similar to a daily soap opera, users have to satisfy their audience with every action taken, which requires a high quality of individuality. Taking this into account, Wiedemann (2011: 170) raises the question: *What is considered desirable on Facebook? What are the evaluation criteria?* Wiedemann (cf. 2011: 170) states that users are permanently encouraged to optimise and update the daily documentation of their lives, the economy of attention being based on newness and difference to others. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that the users’ main intention is to be unique and outstanding in order to distance themselves from their friends in a way worth striving for. That is, users have to answer the question *Was machst du gerade?* in a manner that is appealing and attention-grabbing to their audience.

In the chapter *Was denke ich, wenn ich auf Facebook gehe?*, Faerman (cf. 2009: 46) states that users answer this question (*Was machst du gerade?*) by describing their immediate present in one sentence with the intention of making their friends comment on it. He points out that Facebook does not use any ice breaker such as *Wie geht’s dir?*, but asks a direct question, being ambitious about the users’ current actions. The underlying idea is simple: Facebook wants its users to report on all activities in real-time, thus giving their friends the opportunity to engage with it and, at the same time, connecting everyone.

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1 The German expressions are used here, as the thesis deals with Facebook usage of Austrian teenagers and young adults, who use the German version of it.
However, the way this question is answered online differs widely from the way it might be in reality. First of all, the audience is different. Whereas in reality, one speaks to a smaller group of friends when reporting about their latest actions and thoughts, on Facebook one click is enough to inform 130 friends (on average) at once. Furthermore, unlike face-to-face conversation, a status update on Facebook does not necessarily lead to further conversation. Whereas in real-time conversation, a question is generally asked by another person, on Facebook the individual decides to inform the community about recent happenings without being asked.

Aside from this fact, the answer provided online also often varies significantly in content from the one in a natural conversation. Faerman (cf. 2011: 58) outlines that while in a real conversation between friends this question is asked to open a dialogue and might be answered with “Not much….just surfing on the internet”, on Facebook it must not be taken literally in order to make other people react to it in a meaningful way. That is, the answer is basically not directly related to the question. In order to fulfil the purpose of a social network, namely to get connected with other people, users have to formulate their answers in an informative way for those who are interested in their current situation. In order to illustrate that the answers to *Was machst du gerade?* are not taken word-for-word, some actual examples will be provided:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User01</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>☺ hoffnungsvoll - mit 2 weiteren Personen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User02</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>The official clip for “Clap Your Hands”….have a nice day and stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tuned!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User03</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Liebe ist…an jemanden zu denken ohne nachzudenken. &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User04</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Der einzige Unterschied zwischen einem schlechten und einem guten Tag ist deine Einstellung!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3: Examples of answers to ‘Was machst du gerade?’*

To sum up, it can be said that users do not exclusively report about their current actions, but about things that are generally on their minds in a certain moment. Faerman (cf.2011: 62) argues that this area has lost its meaning. It is only used for writing funny, unusual or unique
statements that are thought-provoking to the reader and sometimes lead to a further kind of mini debate via comments below.

All individual status updates are gathered in the so called News Stream or News Feed, which is Facebook’s centrepiece. It includes photos, videos, short messages, videos, links, recommended events, reports and much more. Nearly all digitally available contents can be shared fast and simply via Facebook. In order to make interaction possible in a broad way, all postings can be shared, liked or commented on.

As mentioned above, all users have their own profile, where they introduce themselves to other users, which is also called Timeline. This is the place where users can add a cover photo, jump to stories from their past, view their Facebook activities, add life events, view and add photos, share app activities and see their “highlights” from each month, as mentioned on facebook.com (https://www.facebook.com/help/www/133986550032744?rdrhc). The profile is comparable to a simple white wall which users give a personal touch in order to reveal pieces of their identity to others. In addition, it is also possible for friends to post on someone’s profile, i.e. greetings, comments, photos, videos, links.

Of course, Facebook offers the service of sending direct private messages to and chatting with other users, which is not limited to the list of friends. According to Statistic Brain, 3 million messages are sent every 20 minutes on Facebook, thus having become a remarkable messaging service nowadays. Meanwhile, it is also accessible from every smartphone and is comparable to SMS, making it very easy to get in touch with other people even though they are not currently online. (http://www.statisticbrain.com/facebook-statistics/)

By becoming a member of a certain group, users can make an additional personal statement as the membership will be visible on their profile. Since it forms the virtual identity to a certain degree, users usually only join groups they can really identify themselves with. Within a group, users can meet up and interact with like-minded people who share the same interests. Another possible way to enrich the virtual identity is to become a fan of various organizations, public figures, politicians, stars, bands, restaurants, places etc. via clicking the Like-button. In this way, the users get informed about the latest news, offers or the like directly in the News Feed.
Applications build one of the crucial factors for the success of Facebook, including quizzes, surveys and (social) games. The most popular Facebook game used to be FarmVille, where users established their own virtual farm. Only six months after its launch, FarmVille had more than 80 million users. Very soon, the same provider offered a similar game called CityVille, with more than 93 million users after half a year. (cf. Holzapfel 2012: 52)

Every profile includes an event calendar, where users can organize events and have an overview of their upcoming concerts, parties or trips. Events can either be public or private, depending on the settings of the organizer. Users have the option to either join or decline which is then visible to other people invited, or they might want to think about it and choose maybe.

2.4 Motivations for Using Facebook

The biggest advantage of becoming a Facebook user is the possibility of getting connected with other people and, thus, enlarging one’s personal social network. There is no other place nowadays, where contacts are made more easily and faster than on Facebook. However, there are several other opportunities and digital devices available to get in touch with other people. Therefore, the reasons why Facebook has become so popular and why people use it so frequently, need to be considered. What are the motivations for being part of this phenomenon and making it an integral part of our daily routine? In their article What is the motivation for using Facebook?, Dogruer et al. (2011: 2643) outline that

> the advantages to using Facebook can be various and many such as maintaining contact with friends, developing a network with other people around one, reunite with old classmates or friends, meet people with similar interests, networks for groups and organizations, sharing recent news about a person’s life or getting the latest news […]

Boyd and Ellison (cf.2007: 210-30) sum this up in defining three major capabilities for the use of social networking sites (SNSs): First, the ability to construct a public or semi-public profile; second, the ability to identify a list of other users with whom a connection is shared; third, the ability to view and track individual connections as well as those made by others.
These reasons might be obvious, however, the recent proliferation in use of SNSs must be due to some deeper origin. Based on this idea, Nadkarni and Hofmann (cf. 2011: 243) have proposed a dual-factor model suggesting that Facebook usage is motivated by two basic social needs: (1) the need to belong and (2) the need for self-presentation, whereby demographic and cultural factors contribute to the need to belong, and neuroticism, narcissism, shyness, self-esteem and self-worth refer to the need for self-presentation. The authors (cf. Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011: 243) state that these two motivational factors can either co-exist, or can also each be the single cause for Facebook (FB) use.

Nadkarni and Hofmann mention a study by Wilson, Fornasier, and White (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011), where participants were asked to report on their addictive use of FB. Their findings showed that extraverted individuals report higher levels of SNSs use as well as addictive tendencies. Similar results were found in the study of Orr. et al. (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011). Additionally they reported that shy individuals had fewer FB friends in relation to non-shy individuals. However, shy individuals spent more time on FB and had a more favorable attitude towards it. Furthermore, the results of a study conducted by Ross and colleagues (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) indicated a significant correlation between personality and FB use, whereby extraversion turned out to be a fundamental factor responsible for a high number of FB friends. On the other hand, introverts obviously transfer their social behaviour into the online world.

The results of Buffardi and Campbell’s (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) study revealed a positive association between narcissism and FB use. Users promote themselves excessively through features like FB profiles and photos. Similarly, Mehdizadeh (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) found that people with high levels of narcissism, but also people with low levels of self-esteem tend to spend more than an hour on FB each day. Moreover, they were more likely to post self-promotional photos. Self-esteem has also been identified as a factor in the disclosure of information on FB. Christofides and colleagues (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann) found that the general tendency to disclose and the need for popularity were its only two significant predictors. Hence, they concluded that FB offers an environment where information can be shared proactively because of the site’s influence on a user’s need for popularity. Taking all this into account, Nadkarni and Hofmann (2011: 245) suggest that “a high level of extraversion, low self-esteem, high levels of neuroticism, narcissism, and low levels of […] self-worth are associated with high FB use.”
Furthermore, Nadkarni and Hofmann (cf. 2011: 245) point out that self-worth and self-esteem are closely connected to the need to belong. In this context, the authors refer to a study conducted by Yu and colleagues (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011), who observed a positive correlation between FB use and improvement of self-esteem among college students at an undergraduate institution in China. According to the results of the survey responses, FB use was beneficial for students’ socialization in universities as well as for their social learning outcomes, thus leading to a higher level of self-esteem, satisfaction with university life, and performance proficiency. Nadkarni and Hofmann (cf. 2011: 246) also state that there is evidence to suggest that FB use improves self-esteem by increasing users’ sense of belonging: Kim and Lee (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) investigated the relationship between FB use and subjective well-being in a group of students at a large Midwestern University in the U.S. They examined whether the number of FB friends and positive self-presentation on FB influenced subjective well-being. They found that FB usage validates and enhances users’ self-esteem as it enables the visualization of social connection.

Concerning the need for self-presentation, Nadkarni and Hofmann (2011: 246) make a reference to Back’s et al. (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) idealized-virtual identity hypothesis in order to emphasize the possibility of FB users “to display their idealized, rather than accurate, selves through their profiles.” Back and colleagues tested the extent to which user profiles reflected actual personality rather than self-idealization. Therefore, participants’ self-ratings were compared to observer ratings of participants’ FB profiles. In the case of observers, the surprising result was however, that participants were displaying and expressing “real personality rather than promoting an idealized version of themselves” (Nadkarni and Hofmann 2011: 246). In contrast to these outcomes, Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) found that the identities displayed on the FB environment do differ from those produced in the anonymous online world, due to the reason that the FB selves appear to be “socially desirable identities” that individuals strive to embody, but have not yet managed to implement.

For the reason of evaluating the effect of FB on connection formation, a study by Weisbuch and colleagues (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) was conducted to also explore its impact on impression formation in this context. Therefore, the correspondence between interpersonal impressions made online versus those made face-to-face was investigated. It
was shown that people who were liked by interaction partners were also liked on the basis of their FB pages, as the profiles transmitted valid information about the owner’s likeability in the real world (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011). Another important factor concerning relationships among FB users apparently is their physical attractiveness. Wang and colleagues (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2011) identified the significant effect the look of one’s profile photo has on the willingness to initiate friendship, especially when it comes to the opposite sex. Thus, the profile picture makes an elementary criterion in connection formation, as the visual stimulus is decisive in choosing whom to befriend or not on FB. Taking this into account, the importance of online self-portrayal and the propensity for idealization seem to be reasonable. As a result, Nadkarni and Hofmann (2011: 247) conclude that

FB profiles may reflect the users’ public persona, which appears to be shaped and motivated by the need for self-presentation. This need appears to guide the users’ specific behaviour, such as choice of profile photo and number of friend connections, which are in line with the user’s desired impression formation.

Furthermore, the authors (2011: 247) assume that a person’s offline social behaviour resembles and mirrors the behaviour online, i.e. frequent FB users with many friend connections will also have frequent offline social contact. On the other hand, FB users who do not show a correspondence between offline and online behaviours might want to compensate eventual deficiencies in social contact.

After all, making connections or friends is the core functionality of Facebook and any other social networking site. Establishing a social network online, however, also serves a number of functions in offline life, such as “providing social and emotional support, information resources and ties to other people” as reasons for people turning online, as described by Joinson (2008: 1027, online). Initiating friendship can have different reasons and serve a number of purposes. To point this out, a distinction between the use of FB for” social searching – finding out information about offline contacts, and social browsing – the use of the site to develop new connections, sometimes with the aim of offline interaction” has been drawn by Lampe et.al (as cited in Joinson 2008, online). According to their study among 2000 students, the primary use of FB was for social searching, that is to get information about their offline contacts, whereas the use of social browsing achieved a much lower result. In support of these findings, Lampe et al. (as cited in Joinson 2008, online) bring up the fact that FB may
also serve a surveillance function, enabling users to “track the actions, beliefs and interests of the larger groups which they belong”.

Following this theory, Joinson (cf. 2008: 1028, online) examined the motivations of FB users using a ‘uses and gratifications’ framework, referring to the ‘how and why’ of media use, that is the motivations of specific uses and the satisfaction people gain from it. For this purpose, 137 FB users (Mean age = 26.3 years) responded to the following questions using free text entry:

- What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about what you enjoy most when using Facebook?
- What other words describe what you enjoy about using Facebook?
- Using single, easy-to-understand terms, what do you use Facebook for?
- What uses of Facebook are most important to you?

The main theme with 52 mentions, derived from the descriptive phrases developed by FB users in response to the first question, was keeping in touch, i.e. contacting friends who are away from home, chatting to other people whom users otherwise would have lost contact with. Secondly, passive contact and social surveillance, i.e. virtual people watching was named by 19 users, closely followed by re-acquiring lost contacts, i.e. finding people you haven’t seen for a while, and communication, i.e. private messages, being poked, writing on walls. Other motivational reasons mentioned by FB users were photographs (11 mentions), i.e. being tagged in pictures, sharing/posting pictures, and ease of use (4). Very interestingly, perpetual contact (4 mentions), i.e. seeing what people have put as their status, continuous updates, seeing what friends have been up to today, and making new contacts (5 mentions), i.e. talking to singles, getting new friends, joining new groups, scored relatively low.

Looking at the results of the studies, it can be concluded that the main motivations for FB usage in fact can all be traced back to the dual-factor model suggested by Nadkarni and Hofmann. Due to the fact that FB use boosts users’ self-esteem by increasing their sense of belonging, the conclusion can be drawn that idealized self-presentation and the need to belong inter-depend. That is, users promote themselves via their profiles and photos in order to get social and emotional support and access to the online community. Thus, the need to belong can be satisfied. Moreover, this fact provides evidence that “FB profiles serve an important self-presentation tool” as a means of social capital building gratification, “where Facebook is
used to build, invest in and maintain ties with distant friends and contacts” (Joinson 2008:1034, online). Thereby, physical attractiveness seems to be the most important criterion. In addition to their profiles and photos, users can also present themselves via their activities on FB which are visible for their network, i.e. becoming a fan of a public person.

As the use of FB to keep in touch was most commonly used among the participants of Joinson’s study, the term needs to be defined more accurately. Users obviously keep in touch with people in passive and active ways of usage. First of all, users have the possibility to present themselves, thus staying present in the minds of other users and stating to be an active part of FB. At the same time, posting about one’s life leaves the impression that the ongoing happenings are important enough to be communicated to the online community. Besides self-promotion, users are able to directly contact people and to “keep in touch” via messaging. Another way to see what old contacts and friends are up to is the surveillance function, as introduced by Lampe and colleagues (as cited in Joinson, 2008, online): This virtual people watching enables users to get information about the latest activities of their friends, how they look and develop, and this influences their frequency of site visit.

To sum up, the motivations for using FB can be various, including communication, keeping up with friends, surveillance of peers, enlarging and building social capital and social networking surfing, alongside satisfying the need for self-presentation.
3 Advantages and Disadvantages

3.1 Social Media Use by Teens

Although there are common motives for the usage of social networking sites, the reasons for becoming a user and the usage patterns certainly vary according to different age groups. As the aim of this thesis will be to investigate teens in contrast to young adults concerning FB usage, the following chapter will outline the respective benefits and risks of each age group.

Children and teens nowadays grow up under different circumstances and conditions, as people, who are now (young) adults, used to. Internet, computers and smartphones are technical devices that have become part of our daily lives and children now grow up with new forms of media use. As children and teenagers have access to these devices from an early age in their lives, media socialization takes place on a very different level compared to that of adults. Thus, adolescents have other options to deal with the diversity of today’s digital offering, resulting in different usage patterns. In this context, Albers-Heinemann and Friedrich (cf. 2012: 21-22) refer to digital natives, people growing up with digital media, as opposed to digital immigrants, people who have already lived their lives in a time prior to the digital age. Due to the technical development and the increased opportunities, our society and its communication habits have undergone a remarkable change.

“Being online” has become a natural part of the lives of teenagers, as almost all areas seem to get covered via internet usage. Albers-Heinemann and Friedrich (cf. 2012: 79) point out that the internet is not only a virtual world, but closely related to their everyday (offline) lives, actually an extension of it, involving digital elements. According to Schmidt (as cited in Albers-Heinemann, Friedrich 2012), the motivations for teenagers presenting themselves on the internet, besides peer pressure, can be summarized under three components:

- Identity management, i.e. Who am I? What are my hobbies? How do I present myself? What are my experiences? What are my opinions and point of views?
- Relationship management, i.e. Who are my friends? What contacts do I want to intensify?
• Information management, i.e. What am I interested in? What is happening in my city or country? What music do I listen to? Which films and clips are interesting to me?

According to this model, the benefits of internet usage, including Facebook, can be divided into three sections: Teenagers present themselves, gather information and interact with others. Related to this, communication is a significant element: On the one hand, teenagers communicate with others and, on the other hand, they communicate information about themselves and their interests (Albers-Heinemann, Friedrich 2012: 81) One could argue that these three underlying functions are true for every FB user in general, independently of age. However, the way teenagers deal with every section is different to adults. Thus, the benefits and risks for teens differ from those of adults.

The major benefit teens get from the use of social media is practicing their social skills. As stated by O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011: 801): “Social media sites allow teens to accomplish online many tasks that are important to them offline: staying connected with friends and family, making new friends, sharing pictures, and exchanging ideas.” Additionally, participation can even offer teens deeper benefits that “extend into their view of self, community, and the world […]” (O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson 2011: 801) Thus, it can help teens develop independence by forming their identity, and skills they will need as young adults. Holmquist (cf. 2009, online) refers to a study conducted by the MacArthur Foundation (as cited in Holmquist 2009, online) which revealed that, besides learning important social skills, the structured environment of SNSs gives teens the chance to practice those skills. A major difference to face-to-face communication or a direct conversation on the phone is that teens have time to think about an answer as opposed to having to reply instantly. This is especially an advantage for shy teenagers who might have difficulties speaking to others and initiating conversations. (Holmquist 2009, online)

At the American Psychological Association 2011 meeting, Rosen presented the findings, based on online computer-based surveys of more than 1,000 adolescents, outlining the positive psychological impact of social media use on shy teens (cf. Minuesa 2011, online). He states that SNSs help us change in good ways as we do not feel we need to communicate directly as much, but we are connecting more. Moreover, SNSs help promote healthy social relationships, which is an important developmental step in life. Connecting with other people
enables teens to understand others’ feelings and teaches them “digital empathy, which can spill over into the real world.” (Minuesa 2011, online) Ito and her team of researchers (2008) outline that adolescents learn basic social skills that they need to fully participate in contemporary society. That is, participation in the digital age means more than being able to access serious information, namely finding the way into today’s world by navigating complex social spheres. (cf. Hareyan 2008, online)

Ito et al. (as cited in Minuesa 2011, online) also found that young people are especially motivated to learn from their peers online, for example in connecting with those who share the same interests. One way of learning from others is simply through the surveillance function of FB. They state that by watching and interpreting the online activities of their peers, teens find out passively what is socially appropriate: FB users put filtered information forward that might have been seeped out in everyday communication, making personal statements about themselves in this way. Teens then have to manage these impressions and might get influenced by the content other users share. As a result, other users’ behaviour contributes to their identity formation and helps them foster their individuality.

Relating to identity formation, Boyd (cf. 2007: 13) refers to the expression writing identity into being when it comes to SNSs. That is, teens have to reflect on themselves in order to present a side of their personality that they believe will be well received by peers and people they know offline. Hence, it is necessary to consider one’s whole FB audience in order to present oneself properly: “By imaging an audience, regardless of its accuracy, teens are able to navigate the social situation required in crafting a profile” (Boyd, 2007:15). Because of the connection between their offline and online social worlds, teens will be willing to present an authentic online identity of themselves, which resembles their real personality. As teens are asked to express prominent aspects of their lives for other users to see and interpret when constructing a profile for example, they start considering their main interests and preferences at a very early stage, which contributes to forming their (social) identity and establishing individuality.

Furthermore, FB provides enhanced learning opportunities (cf. O’Keeffe, Clark-Pearson, 2011: 801). It is common nowadays that students create groups in order to be able to connect with one another outside of class. FB allows them to collaborate and exchange ideas on homework or projects in an easy way, as content and files can be shared very fast. In addition,
it is easy for students to catch up on missed information by contacting classmates or addressing the group. As mentioned by Hareyan, who refers to the study of Ito and her research team (2008), a significant difference can be found in the way students learn with the aid of such groups compared to the way teens are asked to learn in most schools. Whereas normally the teacher is in the centre and the source of knowledge, FB gives the opportunity to engage with other students only and complete tasks in a self-directed way. (cf. Ito 2008) That is, FB provides additional space for students to connect and learn from each other through sharing information and ideas online.

In the event that teenagers have interests that are not popular among their local peers, they can connect with people from other places who share their interests. This is an additional feature to staying connected with friends from the offline world. Therefore, two distinctive categories of teen engagement with digital media can be identified: friendship-driven and interest-driven: Whereas friendship-driven participation involves existing friends, interest-driven participation is due to “accessing online information and communities that may not be present in the local peer group” (Hareyan 2008, online). The combination of these two aspects of social network use leads to one major positive effect: decrease of loneliness by perceived social support and the feeling of belonging. Due to a nationally representative quantitative survey of more than 1000 13- to 17-year olds in the U.S., most teens think that social media has affected their social and emotional well-being in a positive way and has mainly helped their friendships. (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/about-us/news/press-releases/teens-on-social-media-many-benefits-to-digital-life-but-downsides-too)

Despite the many benefits of FB usage, researchers and the media have noticed an increased desire to unplug among teenagers. According to collected data from January 2014, -25.3% of 13- to 17-year olds on FB have declined over the last 3 years. (http://istrategylabs.com/2014/01/3-million-teens-leave-facebook-in-3-years-the-2014-facebook-demographic-report/) The reasons for this may be found in the risks FB carries. As adolescents are left to themselves when experimenting with social media, they are exposed to an online world without any limitation by parents or adults in general. As outlined by O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011: 801), “most risks fall into the following categories: peer-to-peer; inappropriate content; lack of understanding of online privacy issues; and outside influences of third-party advertising groups.” Other problems emerging from FB usage include internet addiction and other mental issues.
Posting images on FB very often initiates a conversation among the virtual community. The major intention behind sharing private pictures is to receive some feedback on the content, be it likes or comments from other users. Whereas posting useful information basically leads to the desired positive feedback, posting inappropriate content, due to a lack of understanding and awareness of privacy issues, might initiate bullying and online harassment. However, even non-critical information might evoke negative comments among the community: “Cyberbullying is deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person. It is the most common online risk for all teens and is a peer-to-peer risk” (O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011: 801). In most cases, the reasons for cyberbullying can be found in problems originating in the offline social world. As pointed out by O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (cf. 2011: 801), cyberbullying is very common and can happen to any young person using SNSs. Moreover, its occurrence can lead to depression, anxiety, isolation and other profound mental issues.

Another risk of the improper use of SNSs is distributing or posting nude or semi-nude photographs or videos, which is a phenomenon referred to as Sexting (cf. O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson 2011: 802). This thoughtless use of technology might be caused by a lack of understanding of the scope of the online audience. Even though pictures which are shared via private messaging can be forwarded easily and get distributed in a short space of time. Consequently, inappropriate messages and pictures or videos can not only provoke bullying but also promote child pornography. For this reason, adolescents need to be made aware of the fact that the decision to put something online may have negative consequences and, more importantly, is irreversible.

A further phenomenon proposed by researchers is called “Facebook depression”, which arises when adolescents spend a great amount of time on SNSs, such as FB, and as result, develop classic symptoms of depression (cf. O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson 2011: 801). Although social media facilitates communication with peers, social surfing can be extremely time-consuming and cause addiction. Adolescents who suffer from Facebook depression very often show aggressive or self-destructive behaviours and are at risk of social isolation (cf. O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson 2011: 801).

Even though 90% of the teens who participated in the national survey of the Common Sense Media’s Program for the Study of Children and Media have used some form of social media,
43% of them expressed a desire to disconnect sometimes. 36% stated that they would even wish they could go back to a time when there was no Facebook, which might relate to the 41% who say that they are “addicted” to their mobile devices. (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/about-us/news/press-releases/teens-on-social-media-many-benefits-to-digital-life-but-downsides-too). Besides addiction and the pressure to participate, the need to unplug might be due to negative experiences online, such as bullying or harassment.

One more downside for teens that use FB is the higher risk of showing narcissistic tendencies. Although SNSs are designed to interact pro-socially, some users take this as an opportunity to promote themselves and behave in anti-social ways (cf. Carpenter 2011). People who show narcissistic character traits constantly seek attention from as many people as possible. Therefore, they take advantage of their online audience to receive positive feedback by frequently offering new content, i.e. photos or status updates, and often inappropriate self-disclosure (cf. Carpenter 2011.) Due to their need for self-promotion, such users “are also predicted to accept friend requests from strangers because they would be seeking an audience rather than using Facebook to engage in social interaction with existing friends” (Carpenter 2011).

A recent phenomenon related to narcissism that has been noticed among teenagers on FB is the posting of “Selfies” accompanied by statements. Selfies are pictures taken of oneself, by oneself. The statements are hardly related to the content of the picture, which usually shows a portrait. The main purpose of posting a Selfie is to raise attention among the online community and to earn as many likes and comments as possible. In most cases, other users comment on the picture and the beauty of the person, never on the statement. Thus, the person seeking affirmation by others, perceives social support and the level of self-esteem increases.
3.2 Social Media Use by Young Adults

Whereas teenagers nowadays have already grown up within the digital age with Facebook being an integral part of their lives, adults might have found their way to the usage of the internet at some later point. Therefore, their approach and usage patterns certainly differ from those of adolescents. Moreover, young adults will have more life experience and a fully developed personality as opposed to teenagers. That is, the content found on FB will basically not be extremely influential to them, nor contribute to identity formation as this has already been completed. However, identity management is an important point to consider when it comes to self-presentation on Facebook. Depending on the individual motivations for social network usage, the portrayal of users directly affects the impression of their virtual communities. Depicting an authentic picture of one’s personality is an essential component for successfully interacting with others on FB, regarding the fact that young adults “are crafting on-line lives that seamlessly meld with their off-line world” (Bicen, Cavus 2011: 943). As the basic function of Facebook is to get connected online with already existing social ties, the presented online identity needs to correspond with a user’s real personality. If this requirement is met, the benefits of social network usage can be many.

The main motivation for young adults to use SNSs is relation management. That is, the “formation and maintenance of social capital” (Ellison et al. 2007: 1143). As explained by Ellison et al. (2011: 1, online), “the concept of social capital describes the benefits individuals derive from their social relationships and interactions: resources such as emotional support, exposure to diverse ideas, and access to non-redundant information.” In their article, the researchers (cf. Ellison et al. 2011: 1, online) state that SNS has social capital implications, due to their assumption that Facebook represents an “offline to online” trend in that it originally primarily served a geographically-bound community (the campus)” (Ellison et al. 2007: 1144). In support of their hypothesis, they conducted a research among 800 Michigan State University (MSU) undergraduate students. 94% of which were active Facebook members. The findings of the survey clearly showed that respondents primarily use Facebook involving people with whom they share offline connections, i.e. existing friends, classmates or someone they met socially, and not in order to meet new people. 96% of the undergraduate students included their high school name in their profile suggesting that there is a high motivation for maintaining connections to former high school classmates. Adding the high school name to the profile makes it easy for a user to be recognized by former school friends. Thus, re-
acquiring lost contacts is facilitated by Facebook usage. In this context, Ellison et al. (2007: 1148) point out that former researchers have coined the term “friendsickness”, referring to the distress caused by losing the connection to old friends when moving away to college. Facebook gives young people the opportunity to keep up with their existing social capital from high school after this major life change, whereas they would otherwise have lost this network of friends completely. Considering these points, the conclusion can be drawn that Facebook is used more to maintain and strengthen already existing contacts and that there is an offline to online directionality in the first place.

Further on, young adults moving to college are forced to create a new network there. SNSs provide alternative ways to get connected and may thus be of particular utility for students who have difficulties making new friends. In other words, Ellison et al. (2007: 1148) suspect that “Facebook serves to lower the barriers to participation so that students who might otherwise shy away from initiating communication with or responding to others are encouraged to do so through Facebook’s affordances.” Resulting from the increased social capital, Ellison et al. (cf. 2007: 1163) found a correlation between Facebook usage of students and subjective well-being measures. The interaction effects are due to the benefits provided by bridging social capital, such as increased information and opportunities. Therefore, using Facebook enables students to develop a new network very quickly and to get the most out of their years at university (cf. Ellison et al., 2007: 1163).

The findings of the study depict the strong linkage between Facebook use of students and maintaining relations with their high school friends or acquaintances as they move away. The same might apply to students with their alumni when graduating from university, which could have “strong payoffs in terms of jobs, internships, and other opportunities” (Ellison et al. 2007: 1164). That is, Facebook usage provides benefits including social, academic and work-related opportunities for young adults.

Although Facebook mainly supports the maintenance of existing relationships, it contains many features that can be used to get to know new people, or to put it in other words, to meet complete strangers. Users can message, poke or send friend requests to others they find randomly by browsing profiles, groups, fan pages or making use of social games, such as “FarmVille”. In any case, the possibilities are seemingly endless as every user is part of a different network constellation. Friending a user opens new doors to many more potential
friends at the same time. Ellison et al. (2011: 5, online) introduce the term *latent tie* to describe a “relationship between two individuals that has not been socially activated. These individuals may have passing awareness of one another (or may have even briefly met), but the affordances of the SNS serve to enhance and accelerate the relationship development process.” Thus, Facebook helps activate online ties emerging from some passive offline connection, that otherwise would have remained unestablished. Hence, there is some indication that users have the ability to develop “weak ties” out of “latent ties” and to enlarge their social network this way (cf. Ellison et al. 2011: 5, online).

Another positive aspect of using Facebook is the possibility to gather all connections made offline in one place. Apart from classmates and colleagues who are usually part of the local surroundings, it enables users to keep in touch with people from all over the world. Contacts that would get lost otherwise can be maintained, for example when returning from a semester or year abroad. Users are able to keep track of what other people from a greater distance have been up to not only through the surveillance function and virtual watching, but also through direct contact, i.e. private messaging.

Even if connecting with complete strangers seems to be less common, this feature is not only a great opportunity to find people who share the same interests in general, but also to initiate a romantic relationship with potential partners. In their article, Ellison et al. (2007: 1144) refer to early research with the presumption that online connections very often result in face-to-face meetings. That is, relationships that are formed online rarely stay there and overlap to the offline network at some later point. The option to express oneself through the profile, where information about one’s tastes, backgrounds, networks, interests and political attitudes can be shared, provides multiple chances to engage and develop some connection before the person is met offline. This way, issues of incompatibility are less likely to arise.

On the other hand, Facebook also has its disadvantages to young adults. One of the most obvious downsides is that SNSs can be really time-consuming and cause addiction. Very often people visit the page without any specific purpose, but just to see what is going on. The reasons for this can be various: First of all, the accessibility of the internet has become very easy. People can go online almost everywhere and because Facebook is also available via mobile devices, logging on is possible any time. Furthermore, users turn to the page due to boredom. This might especially happen at times when people are forced to wait for
something. Students log on during lectures and seminars, when waiting for public transport or when they have to queue. Facebook then seems to fill gaps when nothing else is able to catch our full attention. A very common moment to go online for students is during studying. Browsing Facebook and looking at what other people have been up to can cause procrastination, expending lots of precious time which could have been used in a better way, possibly resulting in lower grades.

Facebook also decreases work productivity for people working in offices. (Terehov 2011, online). Employees get distracted easily by the “time-consuming activity called ‘Facebooking’”, by browsing it without using it for any work-related purposes. For this reason, many companies have decided to ban Facebook and to block it completely (cf. Terehov 2011, online)

Another disadvantage of Facebook related to work is the fact that it can be ruining the professional life, for example when applying for a job. Chances to get employed can be dropped according to one’s online presentation. It has become common for many companies to check Facebook profiles in order to find out some private features, before employing a person. Therefore, users have to be very careful about what they share on Facebook and especially with private settings. Public access to private information and inappropriate content can cause many inconvenient situations privately, and in terms of job relations.

Paradoxically, Facebook can make users feel lonely and depressed (Terehov 2011, online). Even though the average user has 130 friends, the user only knows 30 of them, the “other 100 are just to fill up this whole of loneliness […] because we don’t want to feel ourselves alienated” (Terehov 2011, online). SNSs such as Facebook contribute to our loneliness: Although we seem to be surrounded with friends, it is not possible to make lasting borders. Moreover, we see other users experiencing “adventures”, going on holidays, visiting impressive places, getting into relationships and having a good time according to what they post on Facebook and the way they present themselves. All of this possibly affects other users, leaving them with a feeling of exclusion and lower self-esteem as their lives seem to be “unexciting” in comparison.

Furthermore, Facebook is also known to provoke relationship conflicts among couples due to their online activities. In the past years, Facebook has become one of the major reasons for
failed relationships and break-ups. In their study, involving 24 male and 31 female participants from a small Midwestern U.S. university, ranged in age from 18 to 23, about the role of Facebook in romantic relationship development, Fox et al. (2013: 24) claim that it has become” difficult for couples to avoid discussions about the status, expectations, and progress of their romantic relationship”, due to new norms and the “associated social pressure” of going Facebook Official. In other words, any uncertainty about the nature of the relationship must be removed before changing the relationship status online. A male participant stated that “being Facebook official is like a whole other level of the relationship”, followed by a female comment: “Your relationship has to be stable enough to go FBO.” (Fox et al. 2013: 23-24). That is, making an online declaration about entering a new relationship with someone by changing one’s status is also a social statement to the offline world that is directly connected with Facebook. Deciding whether or not to go FBO can therefore cause a lot of discussions right at the beginning of a romantic relationship.

Even though participants mainly stated that Facebook made the “initial stages of relational development less effortful, they also claimed that it was “a curse to romantic relationships”, due to various reasons (Fox et al. 2013: 25). Firstly, participants expressed that there was a new form of social pressure once the network can view the relationship status, as “the relationship becomes shaped by its actual and perceived audience” (Fox et al. 2013: 26). That is, going FBO is making a public commitment to both really close friends as well as weaker ties. In this way, anyone has the chance to “comment on” the relationship and to take side after a break-up. Secondly, one participant argued that “Facebook provided too much information to consider”, which can cause relational jealousy and lots of tension (Fox et al. 2013: 27). The fact that the online actions of the partner can be traced and noticed, intersexual interactions could lead to misinterpretations and incorrect assumptions, resulting in conflicts. Thirdly, recent studies found that “women are more likely than men to express affection over Facebook” (Fox et al. 2013: 33). If the male part of the relationship does not react or respond to the public declaration of love, it could hurt the woman’s feelings who might interpret this as a form of rejection. Moreover, the whole network is involved in this conversation, thus the woman might feel embarrassed “in front of others”.

Besides romantic relationships, Facebook might also cause tension in a platonic friendship, based on jealousy and who is seeing who, for example. According to the survey findings of Pew Research Center, “12% of Facebook users say that someone has asked them to ‘unfriend’
a person in their network” (Smith 2014, online). This apparently is more likely to occur among young users: 19% of 18-29 year olds were requested to either remove a friend (38%) or a former romantic partner (22%) from their Facebook network. Smith (2014, online) states that these types of requests primarily come from other friends (35%), but also from current (23%) or former (12%) spouses.
4 Defining Friendship

4.1 The Basic Concept of Friendship

As defined by the Oxford dictionary, the word friend roots in Old English frēond and is of Germanic origin. It is related to Dutch vriend and German Freund, from an Indo-European root meaning ‘to love’. The fact that the concept of friendship involves the basic feeling of love implies that it is a developed relationship between at least two human beings, driven by emotions, as depicted in the further definition of friend: “(1) A person with whom one has a bond of mutual affection, typically one exclusive of sexual or family relations”. That is, friendship is a form of love, between two people who are (usually) not related by blood. As a matter of fact, anyone can potentially be friends. In other words, the meeting of strangers at any given moment in life can either lead to enmity, a romantic relationship, friendship or it could have no effect at all on both sides. In the case that friendship emerges, it can last for a lifetime as an important aspect of fulfilling human needs, which is well expressed in a quote by Carl G. Jung: “The meeting of two personalities is like two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.” Due to the basic needs of belonging and socializing, friendships are often the most important relationships in the emotional life of adolescents or adults. Vice versa, the lack of friends can leave human beings emotionally damaged. According to Hruschka (2010: 17-18), friendship is

an integrated social and psychological system defined not only by behaviors, but also by underlying feelings and motivations […] In the course of daily life, behaviors such as gift giving and kind acts and words […] Below this visible surface of behavior, psychological processes, such as perceptions, feelings and motivations, play a role in steering actions among friends.

In order to perform such behaviour, “psychological constructs” must precede. These are feelings among human beings including “closeness, love and trust” that are commonly associated with friendship (cf. Hruschka 2010: 18). The mutual communication and recognition of these internal psychological states are an important part of maintaining a friendship (cf. Hruschka 2010: 19).

At first, friendship must be initiated by the act of “making a friend”, a mutual commitment of two persons, also referred to as being “on good or affectionate terms with” by the Oxford
Dictionary. As outlined by Fiebert and Fiebert (1969: 385): “Prior to any form of friendship formation an available pool of individuals with whom interaction can take place must be present. Thus, physical proximity or propinquity is an antecedent and necessary condition […]”

According to the authors, friendship formation can only take place when meeting individuals in person and selecting suitable personalities as friends from a wide range of human beings that one encounters during life. In order to become friends, “the mutual perception of similarity is one of the necessary if not sufficient conditions in friendship formation.” In this process, individuals “actively seek anchoring points of similarity in increasingly meaningful areas.” These include content areas of interests and attitudes, before the progression “moves through general personality traits” (Fiebert, Fiebert 1969: 387). The search for similarity is part of the typical process of friendship formation. In order to identify them, they must be communicated between people in some way. However, it is also pointed out by the authors that some degree of complementary will also coexist and be present in all friendships. To some extent, dissimilarity can even be inspiring for both parts of a friendship. This process can be summarized with Hruschka’s words (2010: 148): “Two things must happen before a pair of individuals can become close friends. First, they must meet. Second, they must have sufficient mutual attraction to continue meeting.”

Moreover, three conditions make the formation of a friendship possible that serve as a basis for the two most important activities among friends, helping and sharing (cf. Hruschka 2010: 19.): proximity; repeated, unplanned interactions and opportunities to share ideas and personal feelings with each other (cf. Williams 2012, online) That is, there must be space and time for interaction and communicating feelings and attitudes. The more proximity provided, the higher the willingness to help and share. On the contrary, the behaviour of helping and sharing is not observed to the same extent among strangers and acquaintances, as stated by Hruschka. As a result, the extent of helping and sharing can vary due to the degree of closeness one considers with a friend. As pointed out by Hruschka (2010: 30), “[…] people often differentiate among friends based on proximity, or closeness. Although someone may have many friends, he or she may consider only a handful to be close.” For that reason, the conclusion can be drawn that the information and details a person shares with its best friends might differ from the information shared with friends a person feels less close to and (distant) acquaintances.
According to Fiebert and Fiebert (1969: 383), two dimensions are considered crucial for the friendship state: “(1) commitment or loyalty which may be viewed as a continuum of resistance to dissolution of the relationship and (2) mutual desire to explore intra-individual behaviors as well as vital aspects of the relationship.” Amongst other things, variables that appear to be relevant to the second dimension involve “a willingness to risk self-disclosure, an attempt to fulfil needs mutually” and a “mutual modification of constructs, attitudes and values” (Fiebert, Fiebert 1969: 384). In other words, becoming friends firstly involves a general agreement on opening up to each other, secondly the willingness to trust one another and to share personal, sensitive information and details beyond the surface in order to reveal common attitudes and to explore the dimensions of this relationship. This is also outlined by Hruschka (2010: 42): “[…] by sharing potentially damaging personal secrets, we demonstrate that we trust a friend and that we expect the relationship will last a long time.” By accepting vulnerability, a mutual emotional basis is formed that provides the feelings of love, closeness, support and the ability to rely on each other.

Even though there have been many scientific attempts to clarify how words used to describe feelings towards friends reflect psychological and physiological processes underlying behaviour in a friendship, it seems to be hopelessly unmeasurable from this perspective (cf. Hruschka 2010: 29) As friendship is something very intimate and can have many forms, it is probably best expressed in personal words as done by many poets, writers and philosophers. One example that depicts the feelings towards friends very well is Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay on friendship (Essay VI Friendship), which is based on the importance and depth of this kind of relation. As the reason for the soul environing itself with friends, he declares that it “may enter into grand self-acquaintance or solitude”. “The instinct of affection revives the hope of union with our mates, and the returning sense of insulation recalls us from the chase. Thus every man passes his life in the search after friendship […]” (Emerson 1841). This thought implies that friendship is a means of fulfilling our basic needs. It enriches the way we see ourselves and provides the opportunity to deepen the understanding of our personalities. Although there is the need for affection, there is also the need to be alone and to reflect. This is a dynamic reoccurring circle. Emerson mentions two basic elements in the composition of friendship, the first being Truth. “A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud.” (Emerson 1841). He states that every man alone is sincere, but as soon as a second person enters, “hypocrisy begins”: “We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds.”
With a friend on the other hand, no one “would think of speaking falsely” or pretending. He concludes that “[…] most of society shows not its face and eye, but its side and its back.” That is, we do not know the real personalities of people who are not our real friends, but only the sides they present to us on the surface. Furthermore, Emerson (1841) points out the superficiality of society and its constant longing for entertainment. On the contrary, a friend can be amusing without putting any effort into it and by showing his/her real character:

Almost every man we meet requires some civility, - requires to be humoured; he has some fame, some talent, some whim of religion or philanthropy in his head that is not to be questioned, and which spoils all conversation with him. But a friend is a sane man who exercises not my ingenuity, but me. My friend gives me entertainment without requiring any stipulation on my party. A friend, therefore, is a paradox in nature.

According to Emerson (1841), the other element of friendship is Tenderness. He states that we are connected to men “by every sort of tie, by blood, by pride, by fear, by hope, […] by every circumstance […]” However, the strongest tie to him is love: “[…] but we can scarce believe that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love. Can another be so blessed, and we so pure, that we can offer him tenderness?” With love being the underlying feeling of true friendship, this relationship is stable to go through “all the relations and passages of life and death. It is for serene days, and graceful gifts, and country rambles, but also for rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty and persecution” (Emerson 1841). This note of reliance and companionship through all good and bad days are the basic essences and the proof of friendship.

However, there seem to be some relations disguised as friendships in order to glorify oneself and one’s connections. Emerson (1841) refers to this as “the prostitution of the name of friendship to signify modish and worldly alliances.” This form of relationship might be respectful and fair in interaction, but remains superficial as there is no love involved. Therefore, the behaviour of helping and sharing might be restricted. However, the relationship often remains as both individuals might profit from this connection in terms of self-portrayal and reputation. It is highly likely though, that both parts are aware of the value of this friendship and consider each other not that close. Emerson summarizes his concept of friendship as follows: “the only reward for virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be one”.

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As virtual communities share many features and characteristics of traditional communities, it will be analysed. In the course of this thesis how the basic concept of friendship overlaps with friendship on SNSs. In the definition of the Oxford Dictionary, friendship is also listed as “A contact on a social networking site”. Obviously, the idea of having online friends – either with an offline connection, or without - has become integrated into the idea of friendship nowadays. However, as there is no physical contact involved in meeting friends online, there are certain differences in the concepts.

4.2 Facebook: The World of Friends

The term friendship in relation to social networks has often been criticized as the question arises: Is it possible to have 130 “friends” or more and what does it mean to be a friend online? A more appropriate way might be to categorize social contacts into colleagues, classmates, acquaintances, family members and close friends. Even though there are obviously differences in quality amongst the friends we have in online social networks, there is one significant factor they share: The place where we meet them. As opposed to face-to-face communication, communicating online means crossing boundaries. That is, there is no physical interaction involved and no need to share the same location geographically. Computer-mediated communication does not include any verbal or bodily language. Even though this might lead to misinterpretations of utterances and actions, the possibility of meeting people online and crossing geographical boundaries, is a huge developmental step, as it enables us to get in touch from everywhere.

Rheingold (1993) introduced the term virtual community to describe the social group we meet on the internet. He states that virtual communities encourage interaction, either focusing around shared interests or just communication. Whereas usually, communities in the traditional sense share a geographical entity, virtual communities lack this feature. However, according to Rheingold, they both provide support, information and friendship through communication and interaction (cf. Rheingold, 1993). Yet, the question arises whether online friendship is comparable to offline friendship.
As Ellison et al. (2011: 4, online) point out: “[…] Facebook supports a wide spectrum of possible connections, ranging from those who share an offline connection to complete strangers who find one another through a variety of features […]” The possibility to connect with strangers, who might also become friends at some later stage, is offered by the way one can “make a friend” online. On Facebook, one click is enough and users are officially friends. This enables them to share information and to have access to each other’s profiles. “Adding” and “confirming” friendship online represents the mutual commitment of becoming friends.

However, as opposed to reality, there is no given opportunity to really search for “anchoring points of similarity” before the act of becoming friends, as mentioned by Fiebert and Fiebert. Therefore, we can directly go to groups of shared interests and find people that are attractive to us:

How does anybody find friends? In the traditional community, we search through our pool of neighbours and professional colleagues, of acquaintances and acquaintances of acquaintances, in order to find people who share our values and interests. We then exchange information about one another, disclose and discuss our mutual interests, and sometimes we become friends. In a virtual community we can go directly to the place where our favorite subjects are being discussed, then get acquainted with people who share our passions or who use words in a way we find attractive. (Rheingold 1993)

However, the term friendship or to be friends does not seem appropriate for meeting strangers online. First of all, love – which is the actual meaning of the word friend –is not involved in this kind of connection, e.g. “being friends” virtual-only. Facebook obviously uses this concept in a superordinate way for all people that are part of our virtual community. As pointed out by Vitak (2008, online), there are four types of social connections among users:

1. Close offline friends
2. Offline acquaintances
3. Online to offline friends
4. Online only friends

Due to the fact that all connections are termed friends on Facebook, sorrows about quantifying friendship and comments on the negative influence of the internet on social relationships have been expressed by the media recently. Nevertheless, the official main goal
of Facebook is to help us connect and share with other people in life. That is, in the first place to cultivate friendship and to make communication more effortless, cheaper and easier. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that Facebook does not primarily serve as a means of meeting new people – which is just an additional opportunity offered - but as a means of technical device, comparable to a telephone, that makes communication among already existing relationships possible from any place in the world. In this way, the bridging of long distances is no longer problem, but also time management gets easier. In other words, Facebook put forth communication technology.

As stated by Williams (2012, online) lack of time is often a factor that gets in the way when it comes to the maintenance of friendships, especially when people get older. Thus, physical proximity is not always possible. Facebook, however, offers the opportunity to keep in touch anyway. Besides proximity, Williams (2012, online) also names “repeated, unplanned interactions” and opportunities to share ideas and personal feelings with each other as crucial factors for the formation of friendships. Facebook provides space for both of them. Thus, long-distance relationships as well as social connections with members of the local community can be maintained. Much like a phone call, another time-saving factor of Facebook is the fact that people do not need to get in touch with each other directly to keep up with the activities of their friends. Being “exposed to more diverse perspectives” is one additional advantage that comes along with this feature (Brooks 2013: 3, online). Yet, direct contact on a frequent basis seems to be one of the most important factors that differentiates close friends from acquaintances, whom we rarely interact with. For this reason, it can be concluded that even keeping up with the lives of our Facebook friends by virtual watching only, does not promote any closeness or friendship, just like in offline relationships. Moreover, love and trust, which are two more important components associated with friendship, cannot evolve online, but must have been developed offline. However, Facebook makes it possible to express love via posting photos or expressing words by either posting on someone’s timeline or via private messaging.

All types of social connections are gathered in the Facebook friends list. That means that we will also find connections amongst it that we share a relationship with that is “disguised as friendship”, to refer to Emerson. As suggested by Adelmann (cf.2011: 138) the number of friends a user has is important for social reputation online. That is, it is not only the impression users make on their profiles that is crucial, but especially the composition and the
amount of friends they have. Adelmann (cf. 2011: 138) therefore concludes that there is an ongoing medial transformation of the term friendship. Popularity and reputation do not emerge from the same factors as they do from face-to-face communication: As opposed to inner values, the relational social network and the list of friends leads to social attractiveness online.

Furthermore, there will be people included on the friend list that we have only met offline once or never. Thus, the behaviour of users will resemble the way they generally act in public and within society, as opposed to the way they act in private or in the presence of a very close friend. In this context, “hypocrisy begins” as soon as we go online, to put it in Emerson’s words. We do not act naturally online due to the fact that we know that there are people watching us. For this reason, we want to be entertaining and we present ourselves in the ideal way by especially being humorous, wise, intelligent, beautiful etc. As pointed out by Adelmann (cf. 2011: 140), friendship on Facebook becomes a favourable monitoring tool or observation instrument. Users even want to be watched. The act of watching thus becomes an essential element of SNSs to realize connectedness. He further says that it is not possible to not watch on SNSs. As stated by Psikorski, professor of Harvard Business School: “Seventy percent of all [SNS] actions are related to viewing pictures or other people’s profiles.” He argues that the high motivation for these actions may be related to showing others that an individual is succeeding in life or enjoying life without having to state this outright, or, on the flipside, the voyeuristic ability to look more deeply into the lives of others without having to ask outright for information in in-person interactions (Silverthorne 2009, online). Göring (cf. 2011: 154) compares this behaviour to life in small towns, where everybody wishes to know everything about the people of the community he is surrounded by.

Even though we have the impression that we are up to date and knowledgeable about the preferences of the individuals in our social network, we are aware of the fact that users tend to exaggerate and to present themselves in an idealized way. Thus, Truth, one of the basic elements of friendship according to Emerson, gets hurt. Within the virtual community, all our actions take place with the awareness of being watched. As a result, we neither act naturally as we would surrounded by our closest friends only, nor do we share details about our lives without thinking about it first. The main purpose of posting statements or updating the status line is to raise attention. This is one way to get affection, self-affirmation and support from the virtual community. Even though this can only be provided virtually, thus being less effective
than it is when it's provided by close friends offline, it goes some way towards fulfilling basic human needs and achieving a feeling of protection. This might especially be helpful for people who lack a satisfying offline community and thus a sense of belonging. Getting used to this attention provided by the virtual community, might lead to increased self-esteem on one side, but to increased narcissism on the other. Although these facts add a very superficial note to Facebook and the way we interact online, it might help us “enter into grand self-acquaintance” through the feedback the online community provides. Another reason for returning to the site frequently is “the instinct of affection” that “revives the hope of union with our mates”, to refer to Emerson again. That is, Facebook gives us the chance to be surrounded by hundreds of “friends” immediately. In this way, the feeling of loneliness can be compensated for a second by logging in.

To summarize, the meanings of the term friend on Facebook can be many and do not always have “traditional connotations”, as stated by Tong et al. (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2012). They declare that the label friend does not “correspond to the label offline, and this difference inflates the potential size of friend networks” (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2012). A wide array of relationship types are represented as friends on Facebook due to several reasons: The social network can easily grow much larger than offline networks because of the fact that the technology of a system like Facebook “facilitates greater connection at some level, and because social norms inhibit refusals to friend requests” (as cited in Nadkarni, Hofmann 2012) Thus, the most barely acquainted people become friends online. However, as Donath and Boyd (as cited in Joinson 2008, online) found, it is easier to maintain a larger number of close ties than people possibly could without accessing SNSs, because such systems gather all the news of their users and allow brief verbal exchanges due to ease of use (as cited in Joinson 2008, online).
5 Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

As Facebook has its tenth anniversary this year, it is considered a relatively new phenomenon. Although research has been done in the fields of communication habits on social network sites and the impact on offline relationships, I have not come across a study conducted among Austrian teenagers or young adults while reviewing literature for my thesis. In order to contribute to the ongoing examinations of this vast change in communication technology, a data collection was undertaken with the help of a survey to find out more about online social interaction and its consequences on offline friendship.

The aim of the study was to compare two age groups, namely Austrian teenagers (age range 15-17) and young adults (age range 21-27), in order to analyse overlapping and differing usage habits. More precisely, the following research questions underlay the design of my survey questions:

**RQ1**: How do the communication habits on Facebook vary with respect to different age groups?

**RQ2**: How does each age group profit from the use of social network sites and which disadvantages/advantages concerning social relationships do they face offline?

**RQ3**: What are the consequences and sociocultural changes due to online communication, with special regard to the concept of friendship?

**RQ4**: What are the general motivations for making use of Facebook and interacting with friends online on a daily basis?

**RQ5**: How does online self-portrayal vary between the two age groups? How does the virtual community react to it?
5.2 Methodology

The survey was conducted at the beginning of June 2014 over the course of one week. It was completed by active Facebook users, whom the link to the website SurveyMonkey.com was sent to, where the questions were provided. All participants belonging to the age group 21-27 were part of my own social network on Facebook. The links were sent out to 120 users, 58 of them took part in the survey. Participants belonging to the age group 14-17 were all pupils of the BG/BRG Köflach. The links were sent out via Facebook by a teacher and former classmate of mine. 79 students answered the questions.

The survey was designed in German in order to guarantee comprehension among all participants, considering age and educational status. The survey was divided into three sections, comprising 39 questions: Firstly, *Nutzungsverhalten* (ten questions), to collect information on basic usage habits, including the amount of time spent on Facebook, personal motivation to use it and attitudes towards the existence of Facebook. Secondly, *Soziale Funktionen* (ten questions), in order to test the dual-factor model, suggested by Nadkarni and Hofmann, with the proposition that Facebook usage is motivated by two basic social needs: (1) the need to belong and (2) the need for self-presentation; and thirdly, *Facebook in Bezug auf Freundschaft* (19 questions), to examine online communication and its impact on offline relationships. Moreover, respondents were asked to answer questions about the concept of offline and online friendship. At the same time, the use of *social browsing* – the use of the site to develop new connections – versus *social searching* – finding out information about offline contacts - was tested. A complete version of the survey can be found in the Appendix.

Both age groups had to answer the same questions to make a direct comparison possible. Except for four multiple choice questions, all questions could be rated with *ja, eher ja, eher nein* or *nein*. After the survey was closed, statistical evaluation was available directly on SurveyMonkey.com. In order to make results clearer, I created diagrams with MS Word in some cases. Discussing all survey questions would exceed the scope of this paper, which is why I chose the most representative ones for each age group and comparisons between them.
5.3 Findings

5.3.1 Facebook usage among young adults

5.3.1.1 User behaviour

According to the responses, 93% of the respondents use Facebook daily (55%) or even multiple times a day (38%). Thus, the data reveal some noteworthy findings: It can be seen how Facebook has become integrated into our daily routine. Only one respondent makes use of Facebook once a week and another one even less than once a month. Due to this result, social networking sites are an important tool in communication technology among young adults these days.
Concerning the time spent online, the majority of users among young adults make use of Facebook one (36%) to two (21%) hours a day. However, 18 respondents (31%) spend less than one hour online, thus being close to the percentage of the average user. Only five respondents (9%) stated to spend three hours a day on Facebook. Two respondents (3%) spend even more than five hours online daily. For them, Facebook obviously is an integral component of their lives. Generally, it can be said that most respondents spend a similar period of time on Facebook each day, even though the frequency of site visits may vary.
Figure 6: The main function of Facebook for young adults

An important aspect is the question of the main function Facebook has for young adults, who are the primary audience of social networking sites. The findings show a clear tendency: As Facebook was created with the intention of serving as a communication tool to stay connected with friends, respondents in the survey reported this to be the top priority of their Facebook usage: *Keeping in touch with friends* was rated to be the main purpose for which they use the
site by 27 respondents (47%). However, this chief reason can be split up into several functions. That is, “keeping in touch with friends” can have different meanings and comprise different ways of interaction. For example, “passive contact” and “facilitated communication capabilities” as well as “reconnecting” or “resuming contact with old friends” and the surveillance function are all components of staying connected. Altogether, 96% of respondents consider communication in its different varieties to be the primary function Facebook serves. Therefore, it can be concluded that the biggest advantage of this SNS is the fact that users do not need to directly contact others, and have several options to stay updated. Interestingly, only one respondent reported to use Facebook to develop new connections. For this reason, it can be seen clearly that Facebook predominantly serves as a means of communication for offline connections who are part of the online social network. Furthermore, the results confirm the expectation of social searching being the primary use of FB as opposed to social browsing.

No obvious correlation could be found between the responses of the participants and the suggested dual-factor model by Nadkarni and Hofmann: Only 2 respondents named the need to belong (Gefühl von Zugehörigkeit und sozialem Anschluss) as being the most important function of FB. However, this seems to be the underlying motivation for the other possible answers. In other words, the need to belong is directly related to the motivation of staying connected with friends. I therefore draw the conclusion that users are not aware of the fact, and that there is a strong correlation.

Even though 93% of all respondents use Facebook daily, 81% (29% yes; 52% rather yes) of them report to become inundated with unimportant information. The question arises, why Facebook has become part of the daily routine of almost all respondents. An approach to an answer can be found with the results of the subsequent question: 59% of the participants state that they would miss out on important information about their friends if they abandoned Facebook completely. Although the result was rather balanced across the respondents, the basic assumption can be made that the importance of the information provided on
Facebook depends on the individual users of one’s network. To put it in other words, there are different types of users who provide a different amount of information. That is, some of the individuals share a lot of content on a daily basis, whereas others tend to share “milestones” and important events of their lives only, as shown by the contrast of these two examples:

![Figure 8: Contrast of status updates](image)

Another remarkable result is connected with the reason for going online. 89% of the young adults who responded to the survey reported that they actually do not have any clear intention when they log on. That is, they just want to keep track of their friends’ actions online and see what is happening right now. In this way, users keep up to date through social searching.

This result goes hand in hand with the findings of the subsequent question: No one (0%) of the participants stated to go online to specifically get in touch with friends. At least 29% expressed a slight tendency to do so. However, the majority (72%) admitted that this was not the main reason.

To sum up, most young adults make daily use of Facebook. The obvious reason is the service and huge advantage of SNSs to keep up with friends not only through direct contact, but
mainly through watching their actions (passive contact, surveillance function). Even though respondents stated to feel overloaded with superfluous information, 42% of the participants do not have the feeling that they waste time on Facebook.

Moreover, the fact that users mainly log on without any clear intention might be the reason for the statement of 40% of young adults who expressed some kind of Facebook addiction.

![Figure 10: Young adults only turning to the site with the intention of directly contacting friends](image)

### 5.3.1.2 Social functions

To analyse the motivations of Facebook usage on a deeper level, personal questions about the feelings towards SNSs and the social functions Facebook serves were put to the participants. A general agreement among almost all participants (95%) could be found concerning the act of making friends: 74% stated that they had no problems making friends at all, 21% answered with rather not. As a result, the high usage of Facebook among young adults clearly does not serve the purpose of making new connections in the first place. Therefore, it can be concluded that Facebook’s primary function is to “translocate” offline relationships to an online space where communication can take place in a different, additional form.

Interestingly, participants negated the assumption that being a Facebook user increased the feeling of belonging: 34% stated a clear no, 31% said that this was rather not the case. However, 10% admitted that Facebook usage does promote their feeling of belonging, 26% answered with rather yes. Even though this is the minority, there is at least a low visible
connection of SNSs usage and fulfilling the need to belong. Due to the fact that Facebook is a rather new phenomenon, this result might increase in the upcoming years.

Nevertheless, participants fully agreed on the fact that Facebook was no obvious emotional support for them: 55% answered with a clear no, 33% stated that they do not feel this is the case. For this reason, it can be assumed that Facebook again serves as a communication tool in the first place and that users consider it as such.

Concerning the testing of the need for self-presentation, no unambiguous result could be found: 40% of the respondents admitted to present an idealised picture of themselves online. This slight tendency of disagreement (60%) is consistent with the result of Back’s et al. *idealized-virtual identity hypothesis*. They tested the extent to which user profiles reflected the actual personality rather than self-idealisation: It can be said that users rather display and express their real personality, due to participants’ self-ratings. However, the other 40%, who state that they (rather) promote an idealised version of themselves seem to be very present on Facebook once a user logs on. Idealisation especially finds its expression through profile pictures, which are very often edited or filtered and very unnatural looking because of unnatural body positions and facial expressions, as shown in the example below:

**Figure 12: Example of a profile picture**

51% (22% yes, 29% rather yes) of all participants admitted that the profile picture was the most important part of their online profiles. The result was extremely balanced, as were the responses to the question whether users want to portray themselves as
particularly successful and happy, with 19% saying yes and 34% rather yes. However, taking these results into account, the assumption can be made that users are aware of the effect the appearance of one’s profile photo as well as self-presentation in general have. This awareness can also be found in the responses concerning self-esteem: A slight majority (17% yes; 38% rather yes) stated that comments and likes of their online friends would increase their self-esteem. The fact that 76% of the respondents stated that they do not present contents in an idealised form on Facebook allows the conclusion to be drawn that users present themselves in a rather natural way online which resembles their real personality. Thus, positive comments and likes of their online friends can be taken seriously and are precious, due to the fact that they are earned through an authentic picture of one’s personality presented online.

Yet, a small majority (19% yes; 36% rather yes) of participants expressed the feeling that there was a sense of “seeing and being seen” on Facebook, metaphorically speaking. That is, users are aware of the fact that their virtual community will interpret the content they share and post as well as the way they present themselves. Vice versa, users get impressions of their virtual community that they interpret and form a picture with. Thus, users make assumptions of others’ personalities. As the majority stated to present an authentic picture online, users tend to assume that the self-presentation of others will be authentic as well. As a conclusion, the footprint that is left online will be directly related to the real (offline) personality.

Moreover, this sense of “seeing and being seen” leads to the conclusion that users are aware of the scope of their virtual community: If there were only close offline friends included in the virtual community, this sense would probably not be given as one can act completely naturally in such an environment. Due to the fact that by far not every online friend who might in case be just an acquainted co-worker will be considered close, one cannot act completely authentic online without considering content at all. It can be seen by the findings that users are conscious about Facebook being an observation instrument and that they are watched by their online community. Taking into account that online presentation affects the way we are seen offline as personalities, identity management online needs to be practiced with consideration in order to manage relationships successfully offline.

Even though users tend to be aware of the consequences online presentation has, self-presentation obviously is not the main motivation for Facebook usage. According to the results of the survey, it can be said in general that the primary function is to manage
relationships online, however, with the awareness that actions online will be interpreted by the virtual community and, thus, affect relationship formation.

5.3.1.3 Offline vs. online friendship

The most important part of the survey is concerned with friendship on Facebook. Therefore, participants were asked to respond to basic questions involving the number of friends and, more importantly, their feelings towards friendship on Facebook.

![Figure 13: Number of Facebook friends](image)

Whereas the average user has 130 Facebook friends, most of the young adults, who responded to the survey, stated to have 200-300 friends (39%). As the responses were quite varying, no clear tendency could be found. What is remarkable though is that a very low percentage of users reported to have less than 100 friends (5%). Yet, people are more likely to have less than 100 friends offline than 200-300. This means users tend to consider a bigger amount of people their friends online than they would offline.
Ich habe v.a. zu jenen Nutzern online Kontakt, zu denen ich auch offline am meisten Kontakt habe.

Figure 14: Facebook as a tool for sharing personal information

However, 62% (32% yes; 30% rather yes) stated to keep their number of Facebook friends as low as possible to make sure that published content online is only shared with people they are also close to in reality. Nevertheless, users reported that Facebook primarily serves as a source of information of their friends (25% yes; 48% rather yes) rather than them seeing it as an opportunity for sharing information about their own lives (34% rather no; 46% no). Due to this outcome, young adults again claimed that they do not use Facebook for presenting themselves, but primarily to access information about their friends which is shared online.

One reason for considering Facebook mainly a source of information about others could be the fact that online actions have had negative consequences on offline relationships in some cases: 44% (30% yes; 14% rather yes) of the participants reported that this has already happened at least once. Considering that almost half of the users have experienced this, the impact of online actions on offline relationships becomes visible. Actions causing negative consequences can involve status updates, online communication with other Facebook friends and especially photos.

Although participants have the opportunity to get updates on their friends’ lives with just one click and scrolling through the newsfeed, 89% of participants stated that Facebook has not reduced interpersonal contact to their friends offline, with 58% stating ‘no’ and 31% saying that this was rather not the case. This clear outcome outlines again that Facebook obviously serves as an additional space to

Figure 15: Young adults who have mainly contact to their closest offline friends on Facebook.
communicate, but does not substitute interpersonal and face-to-face interaction with close offline friends.

Another remarkable outcome was considered with latent ties, as introduced by Ellison et al. This means users have the possibility to activate latent ties emerging from some passive offline connection, which otherwise would have remained unestablished, and transform them into “weak ties”: 62% (16% yes; 46% rather yes) of the participants reported that they managed to intensify already existing contacts. Moreover, 90% of all participants stated that they kept in touch with people through Facebook, whom they would have lost sight of otherwise. For this reason, the conclusion can be drawn that Facebook especially is the place to keep up to date with the lives of “friends” we actually consider acquaintances. We would not miss out on information about our close offline friends, since Facebook does not reduce face-to-face communication, but on information about contacts we neither have such a close relationship to nor contact on a regular basis.

Although Facebook helps us maintain contact to weaker ties, the survey revealed that users mainly interact online with their closest offline contacts. On the other hand, participants stated that they especially make use of the surveillance function when it comes to friends they have rarely or never contact with offline: 35% responded with a clear yes, 40% declared that they rather do so. Therefore, it can be concluded that Facebook serves two main functions: firstly, to provide space for online communication with those who are also our closest friends offline, and secondly, to maintain contact with acquainted people through virtual watching. This implies that users are able to gather their complete social network on Facebook, but treat connections differently. According to the results of the survey, the way of interaction varies according to the degree of closeness we share with our Facebook friends. In other words, users tend to interact more actively with close offline friends and have rather passive contact with people they consider less close.

According to the fact that users expressed an awareness of the scope of their virtual community, which includes different kinds of friends, 78% of the participants stated that there is an essential difference between the concept of online and offline friendship: 67% responded with a clear yes and 11% with rather yes. Therefore, there must be a difference between the concept of offline and online friendship. Users are obviously conscious that the act of making and maintaining a friend online as well as online interaction differ from offline friendship.
There is no need to establish an interpersonal connection before the act of making an online friend. Even though there might be some preceding offline interaction, it is no necessary criterion for committing to a friendship on Facebook. Moreover, one can stay friends forever without putting any further effort into it. In other words, as long as users do not delete a friend, the friendship will remain even without any communication involved, except for passive contact.

Due to this awareness, 40% (20% yes; 20% rather yes) of the young adults claimed that the concept or term of friendship has undergone a change because of the existence of Facebook. 45% (25% yes; 20% rather yes) stated that friendship has diminished in value ever since. The reason for almost half of the participants expressing this feeling might be found in the simple fact that everyone is friends on Facebook, independent of the degree of closeness, from colleagues and acquaintances to close friends as well as people we have never seen in person, who are only online friends.

Moreover, the sense of seeing and being seen might be a major component. Due to the fact that people are aware of being watched by their virtual community, users act unnaturally. We notice it when people we have a close relationship to pretend to be someone else online in order to get attention and earn as many comments and likes as possible. This behaviour will then be considered superficial and not authentic. This assumption is supported by the result of a survey question concerned with sharing content online: 48% (33% no; 15% rather no) of the participants admitted that they do not post content online the same way they would tell a friend. In actual fact, there is some hypocrisy included in posts on Facebook, due to the given circumstance that there are “relationships disguised as friendship” on Facebook, to put it in Emerson’s words. For this reason, users tend to upgrade content and post photos showing them in especially happy, eventful moments to express appealing facets of their personality. The results of the survey proved that users are aware of this fact.

As discussed above, Facebook provides space for users to perform actions that are considered important for offline friendship as well, for example, room for repeated unplanned interactions and the opportunity to share ideas and personal feelings with each other. However, 84% of participants mainly stated that sharing content online does not at all resemble the feeling of telling the same content to a friend offline: 60% responded with a clear no; 24% said that this was rather not the case.
Concerning friendship initiation, participants were asked to rate whether they use Facebook to make new connections or not. Surprisingly, participants almost completely negated this possibility Facebook offers: 31% reported that they rather do not use Facebook to meet new people, 49% responded with a clear no to this question.

This result overlaps with the outcomes concerning friendship initiation for the sake of finding potential partners online. 79% (64% no; 15% rather no) of the respondents stated that they do not actively look for potential partners online with the possibility of meeting them offline at some later stage. This outcome is further proof in support of the assumption that Facebook is primarily a place to interact with friends they already have an offline relationship to.

However, 21% of the participants that do use Facebook for romantic relationship initiation remain. This means that almost a quarter of the young adults have made use of this opportunity, which depicts Facebook’s integrity as a dating website nowadays. The main advantage Facebook offers at the beginning of interacting with a new contact is the easiness of getting in touch, as pointed out by the study of Fox et al. (2013: 13). Participants stated that “contacting someone via Facebook was less direct and ego-protective than the traditional approach of asking someone’s phone number”. Moreover, “a Facebook request is a depersonalized, system-generated message that requires minimal effort or emotional investment.” To put it differently, Facebook communication is considered casual and has become the “primary tool for interaction early in the experiment stage of romantic relationship development”, regardless of whether persons have met offline or not before becoming Facebook friends. Fox et al. (2013: 13) conclude that participants preferred Facebook over the phone due to the lack of immediacy and the allowance for users to save their faces “by using the medium to initiate or pursue a relationship with a target.”
5.3.2 Facebook usage among teenagers

5.3.2.1 User behaviour

According to the survey, 81% of teenagers use Facebook daily (62%) or even multiple times a day (19%). As with young adults, the data reveals how important this communication tool has become for people growing up these days. However, 19% of the teenagers do not log in daily, implicating that they tend to make use of other technological devices as well to get in touch with their friends. In this context, the messaging service What’s App has become an essential part of communication technology. Throughout my research, I have often come across status updates of teenagers, requesting to switch communication from Facebook to What’s App, as provided in the examples below. In comparison, I have never noticed this behaviour among young adults on Facebook.

![Frequency of Facebook usage by teenagers](image)

**Figure 17: Frequency of Facebook usage by teenagers**

According to the survey, 81% of teenagers use Facebook daily (62%) or even multiple times a day (19%). As with young adults, the data reveals how important this communication tool has become for people growing up these days. However, 19% of the teenagers do not log in daily, implicating that they tend to make use of other technological devices as well to get in touch with their friends. In this context, the messaging service What’s App has become an essential part of communication technology. Throughout my research, I have often come across status updates of teenagers, requesting to switch communication from Facebook to What’s App, as provided in the examples below. In comparison, I have never noticed this behaviour among young adults on Facebook.
Concerning the time spent online, the results were distributed more among the possible answers. Even though the majority of teenagers spends less than an hour online daily, 15% of teenagers use 3 to 5 hours and more for Facebook each day. Although they log-on fewer times compared to young adults, due to the results it can be said that they spend more time online per visit.
Die wichtigste Funktion, die Facebook für mich hat, ist

Beantwortet: 78   Übersprungen: 1

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<td>1,23% 1</td>
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Figure 20: The main function of Facebook for teenagers

The results concerning the main function Facebook has for teenagers, extremely resembles that of young adults. 50% of the respondents reported that keeping in touch with friends was the chief reason to make use of the social network site. As with young adults, passive contact (13%) and facilitated communication capabilities (17%) were rated second and third as two alternative ways to get in contact with friends online. Even though the results seem to be similar, one slight difference could be noticed: 9% of the teenagers stated to use Facebook
mainly to make new contacts. This means, the function of social browsing is of more importance. As a result, more online to offline relationships will potentially be initiated. Surprisingly, increasing self-esteem (and the need to belong) scored very low in the survey. This stands in direct opposition to the high number of posting so-called selfies among teenagers, who promote themselves and provoke feedback, a phenomenon I will refer to later.

Even though teenagers tend to spend more time online than young adults do, the data revealed that they feel less pressure to go on Facebook. Whereas 40% of the young adults expressed to feel (rather) addicted, only 14% of the teenagers do so. I therefore conclude that young adults are more aware of potential addiction, whereas teenagers underestimate this. On the other side, it could be assumed that it is generally easier for teenagers to disconnect at times. Another remarkable finding is that teenagers (62%) would not have the feeling to miss out on important information about their friends if they were to leave Facebook for good. Moreover, they expressed a slight tendency of feeling overloaded with irrelevant information (58%) and that the time they use for SNSs could be invested better (58%).

The results of the two age groups overlap fully when it comes to the intention of turning to the site: the absolute majority does not go online for a specific reason, but only to see what is happening on Facebook at a certain moment. However, it could be found during my research that teenagers are much more active online than young adults. Not only do they update their status more frequently, but they also post to timelines more often. In other words, although they go online for no obvious reason, they tend to interact more once they are online. One phenomenon that I have noticed over the past
months is posting adjectives and statements that describe a user’s personality and looks. By doing so, teenagers express affection and describe how they see each other in words they probably would not use or mention in a face-to-face conversation. This phenomenon has remained unnoticed among young adults. I therefore conclude that teenagers are more likely to express feelings towards each other online. It is another way of strengthening friendships on SNSs.

**Figure 23: Example of initiating online interaction**

To initiate such form of conversation or online interaction, a user posts “Für ein Du bist – liken” or “Für ein Du bist – pn”.

Further, everyone who likes this comment or sends a private message will receive a statement from the person who posted this status. Some examples will be provided below:

**Figure 24: Examples of answers on timelines**

Due to the findings of the subsequent survey question, it can be assumed that teenagers mostly come up spontaneously with this kind of online interaction: The answers of teenagers and young adults overlap concerning the question whether they go online to directly contact their friends. Only 26% of the participants said that they

**Figure 25: Teenagers only turning to the site with the intention of directly contacting friends**
primarily go online to converse with friends, only 4% stated a clear yes. Therefore, it can be concluded once more that Facebook serves more functions than just interacting with friends in a direct form. More than that, users might only have the intention to see what is happening at a certain time.

5.3.2.2 Social functions

A vast majority (36% rather no; 45% no) of the teenagers stated that they do not have any problems finding friends. In this respect, teenagers overlap with young adults. Teenagers do not use Facebook for making new connections, but to interact with their offline friends online in the first place. That is, teenagers basically would not need Facebook in order to enlarge their social network due to their ability of making friends easily offline.

23% (5% yes; 18% rather yes) of teenagers reported that Facebook gives them a feeling of belonging. As predicted, this feeling is less marked compared to young adults. On the other hand, 20% of the teenagers reported that Facebook serves the function of giving emotional support, which is a slight majority compared to the results for young adults. I make the assumption here that those who stated that Facebook provides a feeling of belonging also receive emotional support from it, which leads to a quite similar result in these two aspects.

Nearly half of the teenagers (48%) admitted to presenting an idealised picture of themselves on Facebook, with 16% stating a clear yes and 32% rather yes. Nearly the same result was found concerning the profile picture: 49% (28% yes; 21% rather yes) reported that the profile picture was the most important part of their online appearance.

![Chart showing responses to presenting an idealised image on Facebook.](image)

Figure 26: Teenagers presenting an idealised picture of themselves online.
In this context, the popular act of posting so-called “Selfies” accompanied by quotes or statements, amongst teenagers is noteworthy. I have noticed this trend over the past months and categorised it as a form of self-presentation with the aim of getting attention and, thus, self-affirmation. For this reason, the results of the teenagers were rather surprising, with only 38% (18% yes; 20% rather yes) stating that likes and comments of their Facebook friends would lead to increased self-esteem. However, the majority of teenagers negated this assumption, which raises the question of the motivation behind this behaviour. I assume that this result was not so clear due to the fact that gender distribution among participants was rather balanced. That is, I have noticed throughout my research that female teenagers are much more likely to post selfies, accompanied by a statement or quote, which is generally not at all related what is shown in the picture, as presented in the examples below:

![Figure 27: Examples of Selfies accompanied by statements](image)

Although teenagers state that comments and likes of their Facebook friends do not increase their self-esteem, the reason for posting selfies is obvious, as explained by James Franco (2013, online) in a *New York Times* article on “The Meanings of the Selfie”:

[…] attention seems to be the name of the game when it comes to social networking. In this age of too much information at a click of a button, the power to attract viewers amid the sea of things to read and watch is power indeed […] it’s what everyone wants: attention. Attention is power. (Franco 2013, online)
According to Franco (2013, online), attention is the quintessence of posting a selfie and, moreover, the actual reason of becoming part of a social network site. Users have found a way to get attention very easily by their virtual community: presenting themselves in a very personal almost intimate way by posting a portrait of themselves in a specific situation, or as Franco (2013, online) puts it: “[…] the non-celebrity selfie is a chance for subjects to glam it up, to show off a special side of themselves […]”. Further, he states that in a visual culture, a “spontaneous”, authentic picture immediately shows one’s feelings, where you are and what you are doing in this certain moment. Thus, the virtual community becomes part of one’s current experience.

Moreover, Franco (2013, online) interprets selfies as “new tools of communication”: “A texting conversation might fall short of communicating how you are feeling, but a selfie might make everything clear in an instant.” This means selfies serve as instruments of self-presentation, however, they are “more than marks of vanity”, yet they can be vain. To conclude, selfies are a way of communicating ourselves and giving others a sense of who we are.

![Figure 28: Teenagers presenting content in an idealised way online](image)

Surprisingly, 80% (55% no; 25% rather no) of teenagers stated not to present content in an idealised way on Facebook. The majority of teenagers stated to present themselves authentically online. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that there is an awareness amongst young users as well that online presentation will directly be related to their offline personality.

However, 44% (19% yes; 25% rather yes) expressed a sense of “seeing and being seen” on Facebook. Even though this is the minority, teenagers are already aware of a certain degree of artificiality on Facebook. Young users are aware of the fact that what they post online will lead to an impression among their virtual community with potential consequences on their offline relationships. This might be the major reason for the fact that the content of selfies is mostly positive. Users present themselves in a happy, relaxed way that leads to a positive impression of their personality by their online community.
To sum up, teenagers apparently use Facebook as a tool for self-presentation with the awareness that it affects the way they are seen by other individuals. Due to the findings of the survey, the possibility of expressing themselves online seems to be an important motivation for teenagers to become part of social network sites. For this reason, I conclude that the need for self-presentation is the primary function Facebook serves for teenagers and is of higher importance than fulfilling the need to belong. Yet, there is an obvious reciprocity between these two aspects; self-presentation on Facebook seems to be a tool of expressing one’s identity and getting attention. However, not for the reason of receiving self-affirmation in the first place, but to share pieces of their personality with their communities.

5.3.2.3 Offline vs. online friendship

![Figure 29: Number of Facebook friends](image)

The result of the number of Facebook friends among teenagers was balanced, with the exception of only 1 participant mentioning to have less than 100 friends. Interestingly, 18 participants (26%) reported to have 100-200 friends and 200-300 friends, respectively.
63% (23% yes; 40% rather yes) of the teenagers reported that they primarily consider Facebook a source of information. This result majorly overlaps with the number of participants (67%) stating that they do not use Facebook predominately as a place for sharing information about themselves: 28% expressed a clear no; 39% said that this was rather not the case. Due to the numbers, the assumption could be made that Facebook has become an important tool for keeping track of the lives of their friends. However, 85% (63% no; 22% rather no) participants stated that the existence of Facebook has not reduced offline contact to their friends. This means, Facebook might serve as an important communication tool for keeping up to date and having access to news at one click, but – along with the opinion of young adults – it does not substitute the feeling we get from interpersonal, face-to-face communication with a close friend. This decisive result shows clear evidence for the fact that Facebook provides some additional space for interaction and that a lot of communication takes place online nowadays, yet it does not provide the same feelings as talking to a friend in person.

Further, 16 participants (23%) stated to have 300-500 friends or even more than 500 respectively. Even though these are each very high numbers of friends, 70% (23% yes; 47% rather yes) of the teenagers stated to mainly keep their number of friends restricted to close offline connections in order to guarantee that content is only shared with people known in reality. Yet, the results imply some contradiction, as normally, it is not possible to have more than 200 or even more than 500 close connections. For this reason, I take this outcome as a tendency expressed by teenagers to send friend requests to people whom they have some offline connection to (at least passively). The same is true for considering confirming a friend request. Thus, I justify the high number of participants who responded with rather yes instead of yes.

Figure 30: Facebook has reduced interpersonal contact to offline friends

What was supported strongly by the responses of participants was the general intention of Facebook to give the opportunity to intensify already existing contacts: 74% of participants agreed that Facebook has helped them transforming “latent ties” into “weaker ties”: 33% of the participants stated a clear
yes, 41% responded with rather yes. According to this result, Facebook has become an essential instrument for establishing contacts and putting them onto a higher level through computer-mediated-communication.

Moreover, teenagers stated to a high degree that Facebook has offered them the opportunity to stay connected with people they would otherwise would have lost sight of, e.g. friends from school, people they have grown up with, holiday acquaintances. 85% of the participants reported that this has been the case, with 58% saying clearly yes and 25% rather yes. Additionally, almost the same number of participants (77%) declared that Facebook has enabled them to reconnect with people they had not seen in a long time. According to these results, I conclude that teenagers are conscious of the popularity of Facebook, as anyone can be found there, be it on purpose or through the instance of finding someone haphazardly due to the vast dimension of a social network a Facebook user is connected to.

Concerning online interaction, teenagers – just like the majority of young adults – expressed a clear tendency: 73% of the respondents said that they mostly communicate online with the same people they mostly communicate with offline. As private messaging on Facebook works like a short message service, everybody who owns a smartphone, is available in an instant. Moreover, being tagged in photos is more likely to happen with close offline friends, as people generally do activities with them more often than with acquaintances, for example. On the other side, 62% (27% yes; 35% rather yes) agreed to the fact that they primarily keep up with online friends they rarely or never see offline through virtual watching and the surveillance function.

The fact that 24% (16% yes; 8% rather yes) of the teenagers claimed that online activities on Facebook have had negative consequences on a relationship or friendship at least once leads to the conclusion that there is potential for misinterpretations in shared content amongst the virtual community. However, compared to the results of young adults in this context, the
percentage is relatively low. For this reason, it can be concluded that online activities have less impact on offline relationships among teenage users. Furthermore, 71% (39% no; 32% rather no) of the teenagers stated that it was not important to them what other users think about their content shared online, with the potential of possible negative consequences on offline relationships. According to this decisive result, I assume that there are two options to justify this outcome: The majority of teenagers either tends to act naturally and in an authentic way online, so that no misinterpretations can arise, or that the majority of teenagers is not aware of the fact that shared content online can affect offline relationships negatively.

As teenagers delivered such a remarkable outcome concerning the difference between offline and online friendship, with 80% (68% yes; 12% rather yes) stating that the two concepts definitely differ from each other, I have come to the conclusion that the first option is more likely to be true. This means teenagers are convinced that their close offline friends know how to categorise and interpret their online performances. In other words, teenager’s online identities do not greatly differ from their offline identities.

In support of this hypothesis another result was decisive: 65% (32% yes; 33 rather yes) of all teenagers argued that they post content exactly the way they would tell it to a friend offline. This high percentage is in favour of the assumption that teenagers tend to act authentically online to a high degree. Nevertheless, the other 35% stating that this was not the case need to be considered as well: With negating this statement, those participants admitted that there is some artificiality included to the content they share online with their community. The fact that they do not act naturally implies that they upgrade content in order to promote themselves and their online identities. This might be due to insecurity and/or the consciousness of being virtually watched by a huge community, including connections that might greatly vary in levels of closeness. Another reason could be a basic lack of self-confidence and using Facebook as a way of gaining self-affirmation, e.g. through photos and selfies.
Even though more than half of the participants affirmed to post content the same way they would tell it offline to friends, 76% (60% no; 16% rather no) negated the statement that sharing an experience online would resemble the feeling of telling it to a friend in private offline. Interestingly, teenagers tend to update their status more frequently and basically share more information as opposed to (young) adults. Nevertheless, the results of this question are almost the same among the two age groups. I therefore assume that the reason for posting on a more frequent basis is due to the fact that teenagers mainly do not have the feeling that sharing content online will influence neither their offline relationships nor the way they are seen by their offline friends. Moreover, identity management still plays an important role in this age range. Therefore, the need to express themselves and to share content about their lives and themselves might still be stronger and more present than amongst grown-ups.

Another remarkable result is the clearly stated opinion of teenagers that the meaning of the concept of friendship has not undergone any change because of the existence of Facebook: 51% stated that they did not have the feeling, 27% rather not (78%). Moreover, 63% claimed that for them, friendship has not diminished in value ever since. These findings differ from those of the second age group that was taken into account. According to the results of the teenagers, Facebook has basically not had any effect on the way they see the concept of friendship offline. However, I assume that although teenagers are aware of the differences between online and offline friendship, the meaning of Facebook friendship has already found its way into the concept of offline friendship. In other words, Facebook has already become manifested cognitively in the concept of friendship, as a virtual room where interaction with friends takes place. Facebook functions as an additional space to meet up and communicate passively and actively.

Teenagers have not only accepted it as a modern communication tool, but also as an opportunity to enlarge their social network. Unlike young adults, teenagers expressed a stronger tendency to use Facebook in order to make new connections: 45% (17% yes; 28%
rather yes) stated that this behaviour was a matter of fact. Moreover, 24% (12% yes; 12% rather yes) of the teenagers reported that they also use Facebook in order to find potential partners, due to the easiness of getting connected on SNSs. Taking into account that almost half of the participants said that connecting with strangers is something they practiced online, the substantial progress Facebook has undergone in the recent years is revealed: As only 20% of the young adults stated to connect with people they never met offline before connecting with them on Facebook, there has been a great shift in user behaviour up to now.
6 Re-examining the hypotheses

In order to strengthen each statement, the hypotheses will be set in relation to the data examined in the previous chapters. Moreover, a discussion and comparison of the results of the two age groups will be provided.

**H1:** Facebook mainly functions as a place to translocate offline relationships to an online space.

The data revealed that the main function Facebook serves for both age groups is to *keep in touch with friends* or more precisely, with people they know and have an offline connection to. Facebook offers different options to keep track of the activities of friends. Users do not necessarily get in contact directly to be provided with news. I consider virtual watching to be the main reason for the strongly expressed tendency, equally amongst both age groups, to go online without any clear intention. Due to these findings, Facebook has created a new way of connecting with friends by observing their online actions and, thus, receiving more information about them.

Participants of both age groups stated to mainly interact online with the same people that they mostly communicate with offline. This means a lot of communication has been shifted to the digital area. Interaction which previously might have taken place over the phone or in person now happens on Facebook. However, communication on Facebook seems to happen additionally, as both age groups reported that it does not reduce (offline) interaction with close friends at all.

Another overlapping result was found in this context: Both age groups expressed that they reconnected online with people they had lost sight of. Additionally, contact could be upheld with people where it would have been lost without Facebook. In this way, friendships could be maintained, where otherwise no further interaction would have taken place. Moreover, it proves that many offline connections are translocated into virtual space, often due to geographical distance.
H2: Users treat connections differently online, depending on the degree of closeness.

According to the survey conducted, both age groups communicate actively online with their close offline friends. On the other side, teenagers as well as young adults stated to only virtually watch those users, whom they rarely or never see in reality. Therefore, the following conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, Facebook puts forth communication technology and provides additional space to interact with our close friends and secondly, users tend to communicate actively with people they consider their close friends and passively with people they consider less close.

H3: Facebook helps intensify contacts for both age groups. However, it does not reduce contact to close offline friends.

As users have access to (sometimes very personal) information online about people they consider less close, which would probably not be the case without the existence of Facebook, contacts might be intensified which would otherwise remain unestablished. Users are provided with tie points they can (potentially) always connect to and comment on, e.g. photos, life events. This means constantly having access to information about acquaintances provides users with a higher likeliness to connect with them and, thus, to intensify contacts. Therefore, latent ties can potentially be transformed into weak or even strong ties on the long run. This hypothesis was also proved by those statements of participants saying that they could uphold contact with people through Facebook where otherwise no further interaction would have taken place.

H4: Teenagers are much more likely to initiate friendship with strangers online.

Comparing the results of both age groups clearly confirms the assumption that teenagers are much more likely to initiate friendship with strangers online. Thus, the number of online only friends will be higher within the social networks of this age group. The concept of online friendship per se is a new concept of friendship, as it lacks a lot of basic components that are considered the general concept of friendship and the initiation of it. First of all, the “mutual commitment” happens by one click (confirming the friend request). Moreover, the persons
stay friends as long as they do not delete each other from their friends list. For the time the friendship is upheld, no effort is required on either side.

Concerning communication, a lot more differences can be found compared to offline friendship: No face-to-face interaction takes place. Due to this fact, a lot of personality traits will not be transmitted. More than that, computer-mediated-communication is restricted to written language. That is, the presentation of a person’s online identity may differ widely from their offline identity.

The fact that 45% of the teenagers, as opposed to 20% of the young adults, stated to use Facebook in order to make new connections, depicts the vast increase throughout the generations. Therefore, it can be concluded that teenagers nowadays have a different approach to friendship initiation. More than that, connecting with strangers online can also have the main intention of initiating a romantic relationship rather than finding new friends. Due to the findings of the survey, I suppose that the importance of this aspect of social networking site usage will increase in the upcoming years, as it already has.

**H5:** Young adults are more aware of the artificiality of the virtual community.

Half of the participants of each age group stated that the profile picture was the most important part of their online appearance. It can therefore be concluded that users are aware of the importance of their online performance. Online activities and the way we present ourselves lead to the impression that the virtual community relates to our offline personality. Moreover, especially young adults (55%) expressed to have the feeling that there was a sense of “seeing and being seen” on Facebook. This implies that this age group is strongly aware of the scope of their virtual communities and the fact that not only close friends but also weaker ties are included in it. This might also be the reason why a higher percentage of the young adults stated it was important for them to portray themselves as especially happy and successful online. In addition, the comments and likes of their friends online contribute more to the increase of self-esteem amongst this age group.
H6: The need of self-presentation is of more importance amongst teenagers in order to express individuality.

Today’s teenagers have found a new way of expressing individuality, namely, communicating themselves online through many new possibilities: status updates, joining groups, photos etc. They do not only share more content in general, but also have discovered new tools of communication: Through posting personal pictures of themselves, they want to create an illusion of intimacy and, thus, share pieces of their personalities with the virtual community. In other words, teenagers, especially girls, pass on a sense of who they are to their friends online and, thus, want to leave a positive impression of their personality amongst their social network. Although one purpose of this behaviour is getting attention, the chief reason is expressing individuality. By posting selfies, the online community gets a new chance of getting to know a person and to see them in a different light. However, participants stated that their self-esteem basically does not increase through comments and likes of their virtual community. Therefore, I conclude that receiving self-affirmation is not the main intention behind this behaviour. Other than that, teenagers have a stronger need to present themselves, due to the general cultural development that individuality, authenticity and self-determination have become more important in today’s society.

H7: Among young adults, online activities have a stronger impact on offline relationships.

Young adults consider Facebook primarily an information source about their friends more than they see it as a chance to share content about themselves. I have made the assumption that one reason could be the awareness that information shared online impacts offline relationships as well as status. Not only will online actions be associated with a user’s offline identity, but it can have serious consequences. 44% of the participants reported that this has already happened at least once, as opposed to only 24% of the teenagers. Negative consequences might include job-related problems, due to posting inappropriate content, or it might affect interpersonal relationships, e.g. friendships or romantic relationships. It would have been interesting to ask participants to give examples of how their online actions have led to negative consequences in order to analyse this hypothesis in more detail.
**H8:** Teenagers have less the feeling that Facebook has had negative impacts on the concept of friendship, as it has become a part of it.

Even though teenagers tend to have a greater number of friends on Facebook than young adults have, they stated to distinguish between online and offline friendship. As the majority of teenagers reported to use Facebook mainly as an information source, the importance of this communication tool in keeping track of the lives of friends becomes visible. However, teenagers stated that telling an event to a friend in private is much more fulfilling than posting it on Facebook. Nevertheless, teenagers tend to share much more content about their lives online than young adults do. The reason for this might be that this age group does not have the feeling that sharing content online will affect their offline relationships. Moreover, teenagers mainly stated to present an authentic picture of themselves online. This means, the boundaries between their online and offline identities are fluid. The fact that there is no clear-cut line between these two concepts is probably the reason for teenagers being less concerned with the effects of online actions.

I conclude from the results of the survey that interaction and communication on Facebook have become fixed parts of the concept of friendship in general. More precisely, it is not a place that provides feelings we associate with friendship, but simply a communication tool that is an instrument for enlarging social networks offline and strengthen (already existing) ties. Furthermore, teenagers have also discovered the additional opportunity that Facebook offers the possibility to make new connections and, thus, enlarging the social network.

Young adults, on the contrary, stated to a larger degree that they had the feeling that the concept of friendship has been affected negatively by the existence of Facebook and that friendship in its general sense has diminished in value. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of young adults stated that they would miss out on important information about their friends if they left Facebook. Moreover, young adults expressed a higher feeling of addiction than teenaged participants. To conclude, young adults have noticed the many advantages that Facebook offers. However, they are more aware of the scope of the virtual community, including connections with different degrees of closeness, and they have made the experience that online actions in fact can have negative consequences on offline relationships.
Another aspect worth considering is the fact that young adults have not grown up with social networks. Facebook has turned 10 this year and has become extremely popular within the past 5-6 years. Unlike teenagers, young adults know the difference to a life without Facebook. Therefore, they expressed a stronger longing for a life without it. They know what it is like to live without the pressure of online presentation and the risk of negative consequences due to posting inappropriate content.

To conclude, Facebook works as an additional space to meet up with and to catch up on the actions of friends and is mainly considered a communication tool across both age groups, involving more advantages than disadvantages. Drawbacks will only occur when content is shared without considering possible consequences beforehand.
7 Conclusion

Through conducting the survey and analysing the results of each age group, noteworthy findings could be gathered in the context of using Facebook as a means of maintaining a large number of social connections. While the results of teenaged participants and young adults mainly seem to overlap in terms of user behaviour, differences could be found considering the meaning of offline and online friendship and the way they treat their social networks.

While both age groups expressed that there was a great difference between the concepts of offline and online friendship, young adults feel more that Facebook has negatively affected friendship in its general sense. Even though offline interaction with close friends has not decreased, young adults do have the feeling that friendship has diminished in value. This is mostly due to the fact that Facebook makes no categorisations or differences of closeness within the social network: Everyone is friends. Therefore, the concept of (making a) friend has opened up to include any social connection, whereas it was a term to describe only close interpersonal relationships with before the existence of Facebook.

On the other side, teenagers obviously tend to foreground the advantages of Facebook more than young adults do. Although this age group considers this social network site as a communication tool to interact with their closest friends, it has also developed it to be a space to express themselves and to share new parts of their personality with their social connections, which would have remained hidden otherwise. Whether sharing (idealised) personal photos on a frequent basis generally promotes narcissism and increases competition needs to be investigated throughout the upcoming years.

Furthermore, teenagers make a stronger use of the opportunity to meet strangers and connect with new people online. Therefore, the concept of making connections only in the digital space contributed to the extending of the term friendship. Due to the findings of the survey, connecting with people of shared interests and finding potential partners online will gain importance in future.

To conclude, maintaining contact to a wider spectrum of friends can be managed through the existence of Facebook with more ease, as a whole social network, including weaker and stronger ties can be gathered online. Thus, users have access to important information about
their social connections. This time-saving factor of staying updated through virtual watching is highly valued amongst both age groups. However, the lack of physical interaction and direct communication to weaker ties only let users keep track of their actions, but does not necessarily intensify the relationship. In order to strengthen connections, further direct communication needs to be practiced to reach the level of friendship in its general sense, including its basic components (e.g. love, tenderness) and to provide the security of knowing that we act completely authentically.

Yet, Facebook provides users with potential tie points so that they are more likely to interact and communicate than they were before social networking sites. Through its basic functions (e.g. posting comments, sharing photos, poking, private messaging, newsfeed) Facebook offers users a lot of tools that put communication technology onto a higher level. This means, Facebook should be considered as a means of communication with a high potential of enlarging one’s social network through intensifying contacts which otherwise would have remained unestablished. With this awareness, it is unlikely that friendship decreases in value, as no digital device will ever be able to substitute the feeling of having a close friend by your side.
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Appendix
Fragebogen

Teil 1: Nutzungsverhalten

1. Ich benutze Facebook
   □ täglich
   □ mehrmals täglich
   □ einmal pro Woche
   □ mehrmals pro Woche
   □ einmal pro Monat
   □ seltener

2. Wie viele Stunden verbringen Sie typischerweise mit Facebook pro Tag?
   □ Weniger als 1 Stunde  □ 1 Stunde  □ 2 Stunden  □ 3 Stunden  □ 4 Stunden
   □ 5+ Stunden

3. Die wichtigste Funktion, die Facebook für mich hat, ist
   □ mit Menschen, die ich kenne in Kontakt bleiben zu können
   □ Passiver Kontakt (zu sehen, was meine Freunde machen, ohne direkt mit ihnen Kontakt aufnehmen zu müssen)
   □ Beobachtungsfunktion
   □ Kontaktwiederaufnahme mit Menschen, die ich aus den Augen verloren habe
   □ erleichterte Kommunikationsmöglichkeiten (Chat, Private Nachrichten)
   □ neue Kontakte knüpfen zu können
   □ Steigerung meines Selbstwertgefühls
   □ Gefühl von Zugehörigkeit und sozialem Anschluss

4. Ich habe das Gefühl, Facebook überhäuft mich mit Informationen, die ich eigentlich nicht wissen muss.
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

5. Würde ich Facebook nicht mehr nutzen, hätte ich das Gefühl, wichtige Informationen über meine echten Freunde zu verpassen.
6. Ich fühle mich abhängig von Facebook.
   □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

   □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

8. Ich habe das Gefühl durch Facebook Zeit zu verschwenden, die ich sinnvoller für andere Dinge nutzen könnte.
   □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

9. Ich besuche Facebook oft ohne genaue Absicht, sondern nur um zu sehen, was gerade passiert.
   □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

10. Ich besuche Facebook oft ohne genaue Absicht, sondern nur um zu sehen, was gerade passiert.
    □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein
Teil 2: Soziale Funktionen

11. Es fällt mir grundsätzlich schwer, neue Kontakte zu knüpfen und Freunde zu finden.
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

12. Mitglied bei Facebook zu sein, gibt mir das Gefühl von Zugehörigkeit.
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

15. Das Profilbild ist für mich das Aushängeschild meines Online-Profils.
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

16. Ich möchte auf Facebook vor allem erfolgreich und glücklich rüberkommen.
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

18. Ich stelle Inhalte auf Facebook besser dar, als sie tatsächlich sind (z.B. Erlebnisse, Bearbeitung von Fotos)
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

19. Facebook ist für mich eine Art Sehen und Gesehen werden.
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein

20. Auf Facebook zu sehen, was meine Freunde erleben, hinterlässt in mir oft ein Gefühl von Ausgrenzung.
   □ ja  □ eher ja  □ eher nein  □ nein
Teil 3: Facebook in Bezug auf Freundschaft

21. Ich habe auf Facebook:
   □ weniger als 100 Facebook-Freunde   □ 100-200 Facebook-Freunde
   □ 200-300 Facebook-Freunde   □ 300-500 Facebook-Freunde
   □ mehr als 500 Facebook-Freunde

22. Ich versuche die Anzahl meiner Facebook-Freunde so gering wie möglich zu halten und nur auf Personen zu beschränken, die mir auch in der Realität nahe stehen, um Inhalte nur mit jenen zu teilen.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein

23. Facebook stellt für mich in erster Linie eine Informationsquelle über das Leben meiner Mitmenschen dar.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein

24. Facebook bietet mir in erster Linie die Möglichkeit, Informationen über mich weiterzugeben und somit meine Freunde an den Geschehnissen in meinem Leben teilhaben zu lassen.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein

25. Facebook hat mir geholfen bereits bestehende Kontakte zu intensivieren.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein

26. Durch Facebook hat sich der Kontakt zu meinen besten Freunden vermindert, da ich alle Neuigkeiten gesammelt auf Facebook erfahre.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein

27. Aktivitäten auf Facebook von mir oder andern Nutzern, hatten bereits mindestens einmal negative Auswirkungen auf meine Beziehung/eine Freundschaft, z.B. Verlinkung, Foto
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein
28. Es ist mir wichtig, was andere Facebook-User darüber denken, was ich poste, da es Auswirkungen auf unsere offline Beziehung haben könnte.
 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

31. Ich habe vor allem zu jenen Nutzern online Kontakt, zu denen ich auch offline am meisten Kontakt habe.
 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

32. Ich habe vor allem mit jenen Nutzern nur passiven Kontakt (Beobachtung), die ich selten oder nie sehe.
 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

33. Es gibt für mich einen wesentlichen Unterschied zwischen online und offline Freundschaft.
 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

34. Der Begriff „Freundschaft“ hat sich für mich durch Facebook verändert/erweitert.
 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

35. Ich habe das Gefühl, dass Freundschaft durch Facebook an Wert verloren hat.
 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein

36. Ich poste Inhalte genau so, wie ich sie meinen Freunden offline erzählen würde.
 □ ja □ eher ja □ eher nein □ nein
37. Das Gefühl ein Erlebnis auf Facebook zu posten ist für mich gleich erfüllend, wie es einem Freund zu erzählen.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein

38. Ich benutze Facebook, um neue Leute kennenzulernen.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein

39. Ich nutze Facebook u.a. dazu, potentielle PartnerInnen zu finden und diese offline zu treffen.
   □ ja   □ eher ja   □ eher nein   □ nein