Invited article

Social media insecurities in everyday life among young adults – an ethnography of anonymous Jodel disclosures

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses what makes young adults feel insecure when they use social media to socialise and connect with peers.[1] In a broader sense, the paper discusses what it means to grow up in a digitalised world with social media at the heart of youth life. The analysis is based on a two-year online ethnography conducted on Jodel, an anonymous location based social media app. The paper focuses on Jodel users' anonymous disclosures about their social media related insecurities – shedding light on discourses related to social media practices that are often hidden or neglected in interview studies.

The analysis finds that it is often the affordances of the platforms or design choices of apps such as Instagram, Snapchat or Tinder that lead to feelings of insecurity or uncertainty in relational maintenance or in the forming of new relationships. Because of the platforms, young adults sometimes find it difficult to know why peers behave like they do online, resulting in unfounded worries and feelings of insecurity.

Keywords: *social media; affordances; everyday life; growing up online; Jodel*

Introduction

In March 2017 I created a profile on the anonymous location based social media app Jodel. I knew I had an academic interest in the app and that I wanted to explore it ethnographically. But I did not know exactly what kind of research question I would pursue, only that the combination of letting users be anonymous during interactions while at the same time physically close was what sparked my academic interest. At the time, Jodel was gaining in popularity in my home country, Denmark. I heard my students talk about it during class, and the app was the subject of media coverage in

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[1] The paper is a further development of an abstract (Larsen, 2020) presented at The Association of Internet Researchers' annual conference held online in October 2020.

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both local and national news media. Here, I could read stories about young people finding new friends from their local community via Jodel, organising so-called "Jodel hook-ups" at local bars, helping each other, and discussing serious issues such as depression and loneliness.

As a social media researcher, the app caught my attention since it seemed so significantly different from the other popular social media apps and sites used by young people. Features that we normally associate with networked communication platforms, such as uniquely identifiable profiles and publicly articulated list of connections (Ellison & boyd, 2013), are missing on Jodel. The only thing that qualifies as a social network site, according to Ellison & boyd's definition, is the fact that users can "consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user generated content" (2013). As pointed out by Nowak et al. (2018), Jodel "shows that a social network can be structured in a different way and work completely without registration, profiles and friendships. It emphasizes a free and creative exchange between users in the vicinity by granting anonymity."

Jodel brands itself as a "hyperlocal community." The app is location-based and users communicate with people within max 10 kilometres from their current location. According to the app itself it is "aimed at encouraging people to interact with each other locally in meaningful ways" (Jodel, 2020). Originally, Jodel was designed for anonymous on-campus communication, but has gained popularity among various groups of young adults between the age of 18 and 30, in particular. Updates and photos are shared anonymously, and the user has no public profile that links individual posts together. There are no friending or following opportunities. Users can, however, "pin" a post and follow comments to that particular post by receiving notifications when new comments are added.

The app is moderated by users with a large amount of *Karma points*. Karma points are given to one's posts and comments by the other users, and you collect (or lose) points when you up or down vote other people's posts. An algorithm chooses app users with a certain number of Karma points as moderators. Those users will then have an additional feature unlocked where they can view and subsequently allow or block reported postings. Those decisions are made collectively by many moderators (Nowak et al., 2018).

With the app being location based, the participant observations were conducted among posts and replies uploaded from people within a range of 10 kilometres from my hometown, a larger Danish university town. At the outset, the ethnographic study had an interest in the combination of anonymity and hyperlocal communication: What does it mean to communicate anonymously with people geographically close to you? What do young adults reveal about themselves when they know that posts are seen by people within 1 kilometre from their physical location? The observations unveiled that – besides trivial updates about everyday life, jokes, and photos of food, pets etc. – young adults often use the app as a venue for complaints or expressions of insecurities related to other social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat

and Tinder. The ethnographic study ended up focusing on those disclosures. As an ethnographic site Jodel then became a window into some of the uncertainties young adults face when they use social media as part of everyday life, e.g. worries about not receiving "enough" likes, insecurities related to Snapchat scores, read receipts in messaging apps, or matching practices on Tinder.

I observed and participated on the app daily for a period of two years, wrote field notes, took screenshots, and organised relevant disclosures. In the paper I discuss my findings by exploring them in relation to existing social media research. I end the paper with a discussion of social media platforms' role in everyday life: What does it mean to grow up in a digitalised world with social media at the heart of youth life?

Existing research on being anonymous on social media apps

Anonymity plays an increasingly important role on social media platforms, and we are seeing more and more applications, such as Whisper, Yik Yak (now closed) and Jodel, that allow users to stay anonymous (Kasakowskij et al., 2018; Seigfried-Spellar & Lankford, 2018). As affordance, anonymity can prompt users to express themselves in new ways on social media. Previous studies have shown how anonymity can have both positive and negative effects online. Among negative consequences are deviant behaviour and online trolling (Fichman & Peters, 2019; Seigfried-Spellar & Lankford, 2018), identity deception and manipulations (Donath, 1999), or violent language and aggression in general (Kasakowskij et al., 2018). On the other hand, positive benefits of anonymity in online spaces can include people having intimate and open conversations (Kasakowskij et al., 2018), seeking social validation from others (Kang et al., 2016), finding a venue for discussing sensitive topics (Peddinti et al., 2014) or disclosing personal information in a safe space (Joinson, 2001; Qian & Scott, 2007).

It is important to remember that participation online does not operate in a dichotomy between either anonymity or identifiably. As pointed out by Donath (1999, p. 20) there are different degrees of identification on different platforms where total anonymity is "one extreme of a continuum that runs from the totally anonymous to the thoroughly named." This point has been taken up by van der Nagel and Frith (2015), discussing how we should focus on specific practices of identity performance on individual sites, arguing that in anonymous or pseudonymous spaces, people can segment their actions on one site from other behaviour online.

When studying social media platforms, we need to contextualise the level of anonymity and take into consideration how the affordances of the platforms affect the ways anonymous interaction plays out. This is a point made by several authors suggesting that other affordances, besides anonymity, play a central role in how people present themselves and relate to each other in anonymous online spaces. For instance, Kang et al. (2016) point out how the ephemerality that exists on anonymous applications affects the posting habits of users who tend to post very momentary feelings,

because they know posts will not live long on the feed. Also, users seldom go back and look up previous shared posts. This is due to the fact that the ephemeral and anonymous nature of postings makes it impossible to establish a reputation or a history on the apps. Users' identities are simply not tied to the content they create (Kang et al., 2016, p. 368).

Kasakowskij et al. (2018), who studied how anonymity affects user behaviour on Jodel, find that users seek for self-presentation and identification with others and dare to post, comment on and rate content more when they are anonymous. Therefore, they argue that anonymity offers Jodel users "new opportunities to express themselves in a community and to satisfy certain needs that one would suppress under other circumstances" (Kasakowskij et al., 2018, p. 33). This finding is in line with what I experienced as an ethnographer on Jodel: The app was being used as a venue for expressing some parts of the Jodel users' identity that they would normally keep hidden from public discussion; that is, their struggles and feelings of insecurity in relation to social media use in everyday life. In the following section I will explain how I used Jodel as an ethnographic site and how I navigated and selected the anonymous Jodel disclosures that make up the empirical data of the study.

Jodel as ethnographic site

As mentioned, we need to contextualise and understand the level of anonymity when we study anonymous applications. In the case of Jodel, I would argue that users are capable of communicating with each other under full anonymity. As Donath (1999, p. 21) describes a purely anonymous environment, "there is no accretion of personal histories in their interactions: reputation of any kind is impossible."

Even though a user's posts are never publicly linked together (besides in her or his own private archive labeled "My Jodels"), Jodel did add a feature a few years ago making it possible to distinguish between commentators and original posters in one single thread (still with full anonymity, though). Thus, the creator of a post is now labelled "OJ" (Original Jodeler), and all replies from the user who created the initial Jodel are marked with "OJ" in the comment thread (Jodel, 2020). Each commentator is given a number making their replies easy to distinguish. For instance, if commentator number 1 makes yet a reply, they will still be listed as commentator number 1. This change has made it easier to follow discussions.

In Figure 1, we see an example of a Jodel post. OJ posts (in Danish, here roughly translated): "Now I have deleted every single social media app, except Jodel. I am so tired of people." The post has received comments from four other users. Commentator number 1 writes: "You do realise there are people on Jodel, right?" The comment from user number 2 has been deleted, and commentator number 3 writes "I so understand you, @oj." Then OJ replies: "I just think that everything else is too much. I like Jodel. I think it's somehow different from fb (Facebook), Instagram etc." Then a fourth user comments with "I smell an introvert conversion, Welcome my friend 😍."

Figure 1.

During my first two years on Jodel, I created 150 Jodel posts myself and gained approximately 78,000 Karma points. I also experienced becoming a moderator, which helped me understand how users evaluate content on the site. As an ethnographer, I focused on observing the interactions by the other users in my local area as well as using the application myself. I hereby sought to use myself as an informant, following Hine's (2000, p. 65) argument that one's own engagement with the technology is a valuable source of insight. As Hine has stressed (2015, p. 45), "ethnographers can learn from their own experiences of moving around, finding out which moves are easy and which are difficult, what kinds of contact are sanctioned and which are taboo." Thus, I experienced quickly, myself, what kind of posts would spark a conversation, what kind of photos would get attention and receive a great amount of Karma points, and so forth. Based on my status as moderator, I also learned what kind of posts and photos were taboo or sanctioned/reported on the platform.

In many ways, my ethnographic engagement on Jodel is similar to Postill and Pink's (2012) notion of social media ethnography, where practices and routines such as catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting, and archiving are central. Besides

writing field notes and taking screenshots, I could use the app itself as an archive for interesting posts because of the possibility to "pin" Jodels. Those posts appear on an individual tab called "My pins" (unless they are later deleted by their creator). Taking screenshots, writing fieldnotes and pinning posts then became my way of documenting observations from my engagement in the field. I started out focusing broadly on the kind of interactions that took place in my hometown, how people engaged with each other, how anonymity and geo-location played a role in their interactions, and so on. At some point, I could categorise typical posts on Jodel such as: "Pictures of homemade food, junk food, or sweets," "Seeking help or advice from others," "Photos of cute pets," "Jokes and riddles," "Discussing current events (local or national)," "Seeking to meet new people" (e.g. arranging Jodel meetups), and so on.

After more than six months of observing and regularly participating on Jodel, I started noticing a pattern and a category of posts which I called "Social media related posts, complaining about other applications or talking about struggles or insecurities related to other social media use." Examples of such posts are: "When you finally have a great conversation going with someone on Tinder for several days – and then out of the blue you are erased 😔 #IGIVEUP" or "Before, I was often tired and depressed. Then I tried Instagram and felt so much worse." As a social media researcher, I found such disclosures extremely interesting. And from then on, I started concentrating my ethnographic focus on those types of posts and narrowed down my documentation, pinning and archiving practices to include only posts related to that category. This has resulted in approximately 400 screenshots or pins.

Ethical considerations

As an ethnographer, I decided never to reveal my identity or objective of being present on the app. This is very contrary to how I have behaved previously as an ethnographer on social media sites (where I have always openly stated my research agenda). However, in the case of Jodel, I found it most ethical not to seek informed consent or share my research objective with the other users. This is due to the guidelines behind the app where full anonymity is demanded, and self-identifying codes are prohibited. If I were to reveal myself, I would violate guidelines. If I were to seek informed consent, I would be asking users to do so. According to Jodel guidelines, the app does "not allow the disclosure of personal information (and that of others)" (Jodel, 2020). Neither does it allow people to post third party applications and content, such as links or e-mail addresses, making it extremely difficult for me to get in contact with users and possible respondents to thoroughly explain my research agenda. Therefore, I estimated that it would be ethically sound to use Jodel posts – which are already totally anonymous – as background in my study, without informing the (to me unknown) original creators of the posts.

Issues related to obtaining informed consent and securing user anonymity are central in social media research ethics. Some researchers have found ways to secure

anonymity even when informed consent is not possible, for instance when dealing with larger data sets, using API for data collection or ethnographically navigating social media sites with an unknown and infinite number of users (franzke et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2017). Here, it is essential that the researcher makes sure that data and specific social media posts (such as Tweets or status updates) are unlinked from specific individuals (Markham & Buchanan, 2012); that individuals cannot be identified, either directly or indirectly (Sveningsson, 2004). As this is already the case with Jodel posts, I find that the anonymity of the users and their posts is secured and sustained in this particular study. Seeking to obtain informed consent when including specific posts would only threaten that anonymity.

Insecurities in platform specific social interactions

In the following, I will explore different social media related insecurities by emphasising specific Jodel posts that concern other social media platforms and practices. During the analysis it is explored how different disclosures of feeling insecure can be linked to the design of different social media apps that have a somehow negative impact on the user's well-being and overall purpose of using the apps. The analysis is divided into three themes related to social media insecurities that were among the most predominant in the social media category of Jodel posts.

Counting likes: The importance of one click-interactions

> "It is a bit annoying to admit, but I care WAY too much about the number of likes I get on social media 🙄💁 "

> "I posted a photo on Instagram 20 minutes ago and it has only gotten 1 like. I must be pretty annoying."

> "Deep down it hurts to see that my profile picture has only gotten 24 poor likes, while my friend's has gotten 148 in two days. We are equally beautiful. I cannot help but think that there is something wrong with me 😖 "

On social media, one of the most common forms of interaction is the like function. Likes are *one-click-interactions* and can be described as "paralinguistic digital affordances" (Hayes et al., 2016). They are "cues in social media that facilitate communication and interaction without specific language associated with their messages" (Hayes et al., 2016). Quite a fair amount of Jodel disclosures dealing with liking practices were combined with worries over not receiving "enough" likes. Often those worries would be accompanied by feelings of shame or annoyance, as it is also the case in the above examples. The Jodel posts are thus an indication of how design choices (the quantitative counting and public presentation of likes) are linked to feelings of insecurity.

Previous research has shown that social media users perceive the number of likes they receive on a post in relation to both the context of the specific social media platform and the people who normally interact with their content (Hayes et al., 2016; Scissors et al., 2016). For instance, Hayes et al. (2016) show how young people in their twenties perceive likes very differently, depending on whether they receive them on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. On Facebook, people expect a higher number of likes because here, likes are often generously and somewhat coincidentally given. This is in line with another study that argues that young adults sometimes click on the Facebook like button simply as a routine action (Eranti & Lonkila, 2015). On Instagram and Twitter, however, likes are more thoughtfully given, and young people are more attentive to the content of posts before they like (Hayes et al., 2016).

In the Jodel posts it is not always specified which social media platform the feelings of annoyance or insecurity are linked to. In relation to Instagram, which is specifically mentioned in the second Jodel post above, existing studies have shown how users sometimes follow particular rules to get as many likes as possible. For instance, Ross (2019) argues that those rules are shaped by the medium's material constraints and affordances as well as social norms and pressures. He argues that young women's photo sharing practices are strategically and ideologically manifested in Instagram's affordance and the ability to like pictures (Ross, 2019). A realisation that this is the case, might be what is so annoying to young people. In an interview study I conducted in 2020 I got some insight into what feelings of insecurity the counting of likes might entail. For instance, a 26-year-old female respondent explained:

> If I have posted a picture of myself where I for example get only 30 likes in three hours, I might end up deleting it. Because I really worry about what other people think (…) and then I think that they think that it is bad or that I am ugly or something. I might think this and then I find myself deleting it. (…) I am really sick of doing it, because I don't want to be someone who cares too much about what other people think. But I do it because…. I think it is because as soon as it has something to do with me, and it is me who is in front, then it affects me very much if I do not get as many likes as I am used to, maybe. (26-year-old female in Larsen (2021), translated from Danish)

In the quote we see Ross' (2019) point that a photo on Instagram needs to live up to certain expectations that are typically framed by the individual poster. In previous interview studies I have experienced young people referring to their peers as "like hunters" (Larsen, 2013). A like hunter is someone "who tries too hard," who posts photos too often, poses in a certain way, or tags too much (Larsen, 2013). Growing up, young people must balance "not trying too hard" with "not being too disappointed" when they receive a lesser amount of likes than they expect.

A quantitative study conducted by researchers from Facebook (but presented at an academic conference) has shown – using surveys and data logs – that 16% of Facebook users feel bad if they experience not receiving "enough likes" (Scissors

et al., 2016). Typically, those users are linked to having low self-esteem, indicating that people's personality traits determine to what degree they care about likes, and that people who are inclined to compare themselves to others offline are likely to do so on social media as well (Scissors et al., 2016). The researchers also point out that design choices do affect the feelings of pressure that some users experience when engaging in one-click interactions. They suggest that alternative social cues such as one-click actions that are not public-facing could take off some of that pressure, or that an absence of like counts (as is the case with Snapchat) could lead to a shift in focus for users (Scissors et al., 2016). This is in line with previous research on Snapchat showing that young people experience fewer self-presentational concerns related to photo sharing practices on that specific social media platform compared to Instagram and Facebook (Bayer et al., 2016; Kofoed & Larsen, 2016).

The quote from the 26-year-old female above also points towards uncertainties in the perception of what it means to like (or not like) something. A Finnish study (Eranti & Lonkila, 2015) has revealed that likes are equivocal, and that liking is used in a wide variety of ways ranging from regulating conversation to signalling the strength of the tie between users and maintaining a face. Often, a lot of thought goes into the decision to like or not like something – and the recipient of the like is left construing the motivations of the sender. Eranti and Lonkika (2015) argue that the like function thus leads to a growing network sensitivity and refer to a point made by Karakayali and Kilic (2013) that – because of everyday social media use – people become highly inquisitive and observant about their social ties. Online and offline environments are not separated from each other (Karakayalai & Kilic, 2013) and our online decisions (such as the decision to like or not) will reflect our offline relationships.

Being left on read: Small signs with great importance

> "We have seen each other ONCE and we have a coffee date next week. I haven't answered a snap in 10 minutes when I see snap number 2: 'I can see your snap score changing without you answering me.' I didn't know that was a thing people paid attention to 😳"

> "The girl who left me on *read* 1.5 weeks ago: Hey! How are you? Should we never go out? 😜
>
> Me: Judging from your sudden contact, I assume that you found another guy who has now dumped you. Am I right? 😛
> Her: 😅
>
> #Busted"

Whereas likes are very visible on social media platforms, there are other design characteristics that more subtly affect young people's relations and feelings. The above

Jodel posts deal with what could be labelled auto-generated feedback; that is feedback automatically provided to social media users from the platform, without users being able to change or control it. Examples of such auto-generated feedback include timestamps, *read receipts* or so-called *seen notifications*, informing the sender if a message has been opened, or the *someone is typing*-indicator in messaging apps (usually indicated by three blinking bubbles). The latter design feature was originally intended to make online conversational turn-taking easier, but in return it paves the way for anxiety among online conversational partners (Crair, 2014; Jones, 2018).

In the first example the Jodel user tells a story about a future date with whom he or she is communicating on Snapchat. On Snapchat each user has a publicly displayed *snap score* that changes according to the user's activity on the app. The score is based on both interaction with other people's content and the user's own sharing of messages or pictures. Thus, if other users pay attention to the score number, they will be able to tell whether the user is actively using the app or not. In the example the Jodel user becomes aware that the future date is paying attention to the score and uses it to question why he or she is not answering their snap more promptly. The emoji in the post indicates the Jodel user's shock or disbelief that this is something "people pay attention to." Paying attention to snap scores or the *Snapmap* (where a user's physical location might be depicted) could be understood as lurking, surveillance or even stalking practices. When Snapchat added the Snapmap feature in 2018, I noticed many Jodel posts where users were complaining that they involuntarily checked the physical location of their peers and started interpreting that information; they felt that the technology had turned them into stalkers or that they had too much information to pay attention to.

What we are seeing here is interpretations or even over-interpretations that can be connected to the feedback that the platform provides the users with: "Oh, (s)he is actively using her/his Snap account, so (s)he has decided NOT to answer my snap" seems to be the interpretation from the conversational partner in the above example. These kinds of thoughts are only made possible because of the platform's decision to include and articulate certain information (in this case changes in the snap score that indicate active Snapchat use).

The second Jodel post refers to the common phrase "being left on read." To be "left on read" means that a message is read, but not answered.[2] The reason a user will interpret that he or she has been left on read is the messaging app's inclusion of read receipts or seen notifications. Though they might be different in design, they are common features on most platforms such as Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Snapchat, and the iMessage app on iPhones – thus affecting the everyday lives of young people. In Figure 2 is an example of a seen notification on the iMessage app.

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[2] The practice of being "left on read" is something I take up in a new research project together with Jette Kofoed from Aarhus University under the headline "Mixing up platform-generated feedback with relations: Teens' affective attunement to social media notifications."
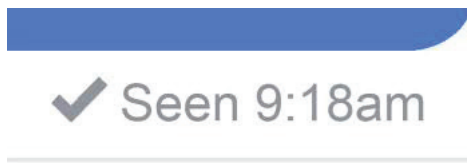
Figure 2.

While the "seen" function might provide transparency over the course of a chat conversation, it also intensifies the users' awareness of their chat partners (Mai et al., 2015). In apps such as iMessage and Facebook Messenger it is impossible NOT to notice the small notification that indicates "seen" or "read." However, the sender does not know whether the receiver has actually read the text (and decided not to answer, thus leaving the conversation partner "on read"). Technically, it is only an indication that the message has been opened (by someone). Research indicates that senders experience a range of emotions when their message is not read, or is read but not answered immediately (Hoyle et al., 2017). They might come to the conclusion that they are being "purposely ignored" or start second-guessing how the receiver has interpreted the message (Hoyle et al., 2017). Often, users experience anxiety when awaiting a response from senders. Especially in dating contexts, read receipts may be seen as having a role in "mind games" (Lynden & Rasmussen, 2017). This also seems to be the case in the above examples. In the second Jodel post both parties seem to be aware that the female part left the user "on read" and her "sudden contact" 1.5 weeks later indicates that.

   Lynden and Rasmussen (2017) find that users spend less time interpreting the "read" receipts in fixed relations and when they feel certain about their communication partner (them being for instance family or long-term partners). However, in the beginning of a new relationship, the impact of read receipts are at its strongest. The authors point out that "the production of negative attitudes and emotions brought about by read receipts seems to come out of the fact that this feedback is *automatic*" (Lynden & Rasmussen, 2017). They argue that this kind of automated feedback provided by the platform does not take into account that users not merely interpret it as a "got it" stamp. The recipient might have good reasons for not responding (being busy or occupied with other things), but that insight is not accessible to the sender. Thus, as the Jodel posts also indicate, the auto-generated feedback from the platform might carry with it feelings of insecurity, unfounded worries or even misinterpretations among peers.

Ephemeral matching: Dating in times of ghosting

   "First match this year where I manage to write to her. No answer and she unmatches. 😅😂"

   "Hi girls, why do you just stop writing without telling why (on Tinder)? It is freaking annoying not to know why."

The third empirical finding I wish to highlight is specifically related to dating practices and the search for romantic relationships. In Denmark, use of the dating app Tinder is widespread among young adults (Sjöberg & Valdimarsson, 2019) and a predominant part of the social media related Jodel posts revolved around Tinder. Insecurities over being *unmatched* or feelings of being *ghosted* (the act of ignoring or suddenly ceasing all communication without warning) were especially common. Those feelings can be linked directly to the design of the app. On Tinder, users are algorithmically connected through location-based technology and orientation filters set by users. Tinder revolves around users swiping and matching with possible romantic partners. If you swipe right you are interested in someone, and if you swipe left you are not. If two people both swipe right on each other, there is a match, and the app will unlock a chat section for the users to communicate. However, users always have the ability to "unmatch" any time, which will cut off all communication options. In the first Jodel post, the user tells a story of finally matching with a female user who, however, immediately unmatches after the Jodel user's first attempt of contact. In the second post, the user complains about girls employing ghosting practices instead of turning down a match or ending a nascent relationship. The two examples indicate that it is the technology that foils the connection before it even has a chance to develop.

Existing research on Tinder has pointed out that initiating a relationship on the platform can be difficult because users have multiple motivations for using the app that might not match even though there is "a match." Some might use the app for pure entertainment rather than actually wanting to connect or build up relationships (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016), or they might be using the app as a group activity together with friends – with the phone sometimes even connected to the TV (Sobieraj & Humphreys, 2022). Also, the design of Tinder (with the swiping and matching features) resembles video games and slot machines thereby inviting users to "mechanically play" Tinder as a game, where potential relationships serve as bets, currencies, and rewards (Garda & Karhulahti, 2021). Sobieraj and Humphreys (2022) found that some male users even describe Tinder as a "conquest or competition game," where matches are the key currency of the game, while some female users tend to make fun of other users for group entertainment. Narr (2021) suggests that instead of intimacy, Tinder users encounter "anxious text games exacerbated by the widespread practice of ghosting." He argues that the algorithms employed by dating apps cultivate particular feelings and moods (such as anxiety) and links this with the platform's business model where "social relations are as likely to be sold as things, especially when they vanish as quickly as they appear – like ghosts" (Narr, 2021).

This point is supported by Stoicescu (2020), who argues that users' expectations of intimacy "are driven by a commercial technological product primarily designed for profit," which redefines the expected scenarios for forming new relationships. It is argued that it is the socio-structures developed by designers that have brought with them changes in dating practices (such as fast, but uncommitted interactions). Thereby apps such as Tinder affect the emotional wellbeing of especially young

adults, who are prone to using digital tools for communication and social interaction (Stoicescu, 2020).

Thus, it seems that the affordances of swiping and matching have made long-term connection difficult. The possibility of being unmatched or ghosted anytime or having to question other users' motivations causes insecurity among users. Therefore, we can understand matching on Tinder as ephemeral. It is a small window opened; a possible connection that – with a quick tab on the screen – can be closed again, leaving no explanation for the abandoned part.

Growing up with social media at the heart of youth life

When I initially logged on to the anonymous social media platform Jodel I did not expect to gain so much insight into other social media platforms. In the comfort of anonymity, however, it seems that the young Jodel users found a venue for expressing concerns, insecurities or anxieties related to their everyday digital life. Through the anonymous disclosures I found something I seldom hear when I interview young people about their social media use: That they worry about receiving "enough likes," that they pay attention to small signs and platform-generated feedback in order to interpret the (missing) actions of their peers. Or that they get frustrated when technology enables easy rejections or complicates long-term connection. Through the examples of Jodel posts it can be seen that young adults sometimes struggle to find meaning in other people's online behaviour and turn to the social cues made visible by the platform (such as likes, snap scores, timestamps, read receipts, etc.) to interpret the actions of the peers.

As the analysis has explored, different disclosures of feeling insecure can be linked to the design of the different social media apps that have a somehow negative impact on the user's well-being and overall purpose of using the apps: human connecttion. As van Dijck and Poell (2013) argue, "social media have changed the conditions and rules of social interaction." Because of datafication being so central to business models of platforms, connectivity is shaped by a certain social media logic (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Van Dijck (2013) talks about a shift from networked communication to "platformed sociality." Many of the habits that have become permeated by social media used to be informal manifestations of social life. Now casual actions such as talking to friends or checking on a friend's well-being have turned into formalised inscriptions which take on a different value on social media (van Dijck, 2013, p. 6). Connectivity is now a resource and platforms make sociability saleable (van Dijck, 2013, p. 14). Bucher (2013) calls this "programmed sociality" and talks about "the algorithmic friendship." She argues that social media platforms "want friendships to be activated, and activated in specific ways" (Bucher, 2013, p. 480). Algorithms and social software are active co-players in users' networked relations and actively shape the way users relate to themselves and others (Bucher, 2013, p. 480). Today, friendships are "put to test," Bucher (2018) argues:

> With more friends than the news feed feature allow for, friendships are continuously monitored for affinity and activity, which are important measures for rendering relations visible. Friendships in social media are programmed forms of sociality precisely because they are continuously measured, valued, and examined according to some underlying criteria or logic. (Bucher, 2018, p. 7)

It is not easy for young people to see through algorithms as co-players; how they evaluate the value of their connections in order to provide them with a relevant personalised news feed (Johansen & Larsen, 2019). Certain content is highlighted at the expense of something else. Does the user who experiences not receiving "enough likes" know this?

Thus, growing up with "platformed" or "programmed" sociality, young adults do not have total control over their social relations. We see some of the consequences in the Jodel posts. It seems that the codes of everyday actions become a bit unclear and different expectations as to the affordances of social media platforms result in diffuse interaction orders (Goffman, 1983) in various situations. Young people do not know what to expect from other users, how they should respond or interpret certain online interactions.

Having studied social media for more than 17 years, I learnt something new about social media practices from my years as ethnographer on Jodel. Young people do enjoy and benefit from social media, and I am convinced that few would go without. However, as this paper has demonstrated, they also sometimes struggle and spend a lot of time worrying about the kind of feedback that is enabled by various platforms and apps. We need further studies into these struggles and how technology shapes the well-being and social relations of young people.

Author biography

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