Using social media

Beata Jungselius
Department of Applied Information Technology
IT Faculty

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Abstract

The rise of social media platforms has changed how people interact. Mobile technologies with built-in, high-quality cameras offer new possibilities for people to document and share their everyday activities. Many consider these interaction-mediating devices to be important tools for facilitating people's social life through use of social media. The aim of this thesis is to describe what constitutes social media use in a world of smartphones with cameras, why and how social media use is meaningful as a category of activity, and to contribute with new insights on how social media skills and perceptions change as practices and platforms develop. Drawing upon data collected in 2012 and 2017, this thesis provides empirical findings from four papers. By returning to the same informants, conducting stimulated recall interviews five years apart, the data provides insights on how social media use has developed over time. In this thesis, social media use is understood as the social practices that people engage in when they plan, produce, post, and take part in social media interaction. As levels of engagement in social media vary from active involvement, such as producing and interacting with content, to more passive ways of planning and monitoring social media, a revised conceptualization of social media use is argued. The focus of this thesis is on a specific and central part of social media; social photography (i.e. how people produce, share and interact around pictures) in social media, especially through the use of the social photo sharing application Instagram. When engaging in social photography activities, users rely upon modal, technical and social affordances and develop particular idioms of practices. Each social media platform engenders its own expressions and idioms, and its own platform vernacular, which users learn in order to interact on it fluently. People develop new skills through social participation within their community of practice on one or more platforms. As people learn how to engage in social practices, developing skills for particular idioms of practice and platform vernaculars, they become competent members of these social media communities. Based on data collected five years apart, this thesis highlights that despite many relatively stable aspects to the ways that users approach social media, four prominent categories of factors have had an impact on changes to social media use over time: changes in life and time management, changes in technical capabilities, changes in privacy preferences, and changes in modes of engagement.