Managing Imagined Audiences Online: Audience Awareness as a Part of Social Media Literacies

# Details

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## Language

English

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## Type

PhD Thesis

## Topics

* Literacy and skills
* Content-related issues
* Researching children online: methodology and ethics

## Sample

Study I and II: high school students (n=15); study III: ten 12th grade students aged 17–20; study V: Estonian teachers (n=21).

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore how people perceive and construct their imagined audiences on social media and which social media literacies are central to the process. In addition, the methodological approach of creative research methods and researcher’s role in studying sensitive topic is analysed. Due to living in technologically mediated continuous mutual surveillance we have witnessed the rise of problematic cases that have sprouted from situations where one has misjudged the size and expectations of their online audience, ending in massive online public shaming and negative consequences in private or professional sphere. When sharing information on social networking sites, people tend to focus on the expectations and anticipated reactions of the „ideal readers“ of their imagined audiences, those perceived to be similar to ourselves. However, „nightmare readers“ who usually decode the messages significantly differently, will also have access to this information. Two groups’ perceptions – the young and their nightmare readers, the teachers – are at the heart of this thesis. For the young, technologically saturated sociality is the new norm, including the disclosure of various types of information about themselves and inevitability of making mistakes online. Interviewed teachers have difficulties in understanding these new norms and label the youth as a „digital generation“ with superior digital skills. At the same time they express juvenoia, the classic „youth is doomed“, based on young people’s online behavior. When teachers have mostly made use of privacy protecting strategies that are based on self-censorship, moderate use and trying to control the spread of the information, the repertoire of strategies for the youth is noticeably wider, often aiming to hide the meaning of the information (e.g. social steganography, shift of responsibility, data obfuscation) rather than information itself. The social media literacies necessary for successful navigation of imagined audiences include being aware of different audiences and their shifting norms, the knowledge and use of audience management strategies and the reaction and restriction of self as audience.

# Outcome

"Researching perceived audiences can be a vague and abstract subject for participants, and creative research methods offer a great possibility to concretize the topic and “hook the thought” onto something more comprehensible (Study I). On the other hand, if we need information about something specific (e.g. a certain type of nightmare readers, Study III), creative research methods can help to “zoom in” on the phenomenon and its intricate details (Study II)." (Murumaa-Mengel, 2017, p. 61). "The information that is shared on SNS varies greatly – some content is humorous, some informative, some utilitarian and some emotional (Study I,
Study V). The young tend to disclose more diverse information (Study I), while the teachers perceive their educator’s role as they cross over from classroom to SNS and therefore disclose more information that could be called “hidden pedagogics” and which I informative (Study V)." (Murumaa-Mengel, 2017, p. 61).