Doing Identity on Facebook: A discourse analytic study of posts shared among older Greek-Cypriot users

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Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Language and Communication

2023

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Abstract

While older adult users of the internet account for a significant and steadily increasing proportion of Facebook's user base, our understanding of how these users communicate on their Facebook timelines and construct identities online remains limited. The broader objective of this thesis is to advance our knowledge on this topic and, in doing so, to contribute to the growing body of research on digital media and identity performance, which has so far focused predominantly on younger adult users. More specifically, this thesis aims to examine: (i) what identity aspects older users project through their Facebook wall posts, and (ii) how such identities are projected through a range of linguistic and other semiotic resources.

The data collection and analysis of the posts follows the broader framework of digital discourse analysis (Vásquez, 2022). For the purposes of this study, 2845 Facebook posts from 13 Greek-Cypriot Facebook users aged over 45 were collected over a six-month period in 2018. Drawing on content analysis, this study initially analyses the posts in terms of the communicative functions they fulfil and their potential for identity construction in the context of Facebook timelines. This analysis has revealed that the majority of the posts were used by the participants either to express humour or to communicate an opinion, highlighting the significance of humour and opinion-giving in identity construction by older users on Facebook. For this reason, the study undertakes a more detailed qualitative discourse analysis of posts expressing humour and opinion, with an emphasis on the linguistic and other semiotic strategies deployed by the participants in these messages.

The findings of the study foreground the use of several discursive, linguistic and other semiotic tools for identity purposes, especially the strategic use of language and script choice, (in)directness, pronouns, storytelling, polyphony, non-standard punctuation markers and emoticons. With respect to the range of identities identified, hetero-normative gender identities and place identities are particularly prevalent in the sample and discussed in more detail and in relation to the concept of 'age'. The study also contributes to the wider volume of research that argues that the online sphere and any practices developed there are not separate from offline discourses, practices and communication.

Acknowledgments

Completing this PhD thesis in Language and Communication has been a marathon, and I would not have been able to reach the finish line without the aid and support of numerous people who contributed in various ways.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and give my warmest thanks to my supervisor Dr. Tereza Spilioti who guided, mentored and motivated me. Her feedback and patience have been extremely valuable during this journey and allowed me to grow, not only as a PhD candidate and a researcher, but also as a person. I appreciate that she was always willing to provide detailed feedback on improving and refining my research, even during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This thesis would certainly not have been possible without her continued support and guidance. Our long discussions about this thesis have been invaluable and made this journey less lonely. I feel extremely honoured to have worked with her and I will always consider her my mentor in my academic journey.

I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Frances Rock and Dr. Sara Pons-Sanz for reviewing and providing their feedback on parts of this thesis. I will always value their feedback, support and long discussions on how to improve my writing skills and critical thinking.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Yiangos Papanastasiou for our feedback sessions and moral support. Despite his lack of knowledge in linguistics, our discussions helped me better comprehend and appreciate my work and think of ways to improve my thesis. This thesis would not have been possible without the financial support from my father, Lefteris, during the first year of my PhD. I would also like to thank him for the moral support during my PhD journey. He has always been an inspiration for me to achieve my goals. I would also like to give my warmest thanks to my grandpa, Paul Vassiliou for being an inspiration and a source of great motivation to begin this PhD journey. He will always be my mentor in English Language Teaching and a great inspiration to always aim high in my professional life.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this PhD thesis to my goddaughter and niece, Ariadni, and my little niece, Lucy. Ariadni's unconditional love, laughter, kisses and hugs have made this journey a little less challenging and lonely. Spending time with her,

playing, drawing, painting, and role-playing during my breaks from writing or studying, has been a great source of emotional support and motivation to keep going. Little Lucy's fight with AMKL Leukemia during the final year of my thesis has taught me several life lessons and made me see life through a different lens. Even though she is only one year old, she taught me the importance of never giving up when fighting challenging battles in life. She also taught me that sometimes you may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.

To little Lucy who passed away on November 10th 2023.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Motivation

Over the last two decades, a growing body of research has examined the use of digital media and discourse in relation to identity performance (e.g. Benwell and Stokoe 2006), especially on Facebook (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014; Tagg and Seargeant 2015; Chau and Lee 2017; Georgalou 2016; Procházka 2018). A notable feature of the existing literature on digital media and identity performance is its focus on young adult users of the internet (e.g. Hargittai and Hinnant, 2008; Spilioti, 2009; Sophocleous and Themistocleous, 2014; Thurlow, 2003; Wei, 2011). This is especially the case for studies focusing on Facebook (e.g. Nazir 2012; Chau and Lee 2017; Yang and Bradford Brown 2016) which had been popular primarily among younger users in the 2000s and early 2010s. Although the platform had indeed been popular among young users in the past, these users have now moved on from Facebook to a large extent, turning other social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok. By 2018, a surge in older users had already been detected on Facebook (Sweney, 2018) and by 2021, even internal Facebook discussions admitted that 'most young adults perceive Facebook as a place for people in their 40s and 50s' (Heath, 2021). According to recent reports, users over the age of 35 already account for 43.9% of Facebook's total user base (Statista 2023a).

Despite the fact that older adults account for a significant and increasing part of what remains the most popular social media platform in the world (approximately 3bn users in 2023), scholars of language and identity online have remarked that work on 'any specific and self-conscious generational cohort, other than the 13–17 and 18–22 age groups, still remains relatively scarce' (Georgalou, 2015, p.26). Notable exceptions include the work by Page (2012) and Page et al. (2013), who have studied Facebook users over 50 years old identifying, among other findings, the rise of "networked narratives," as well as the work by Kern et al. (2013), who examined the practice of mourning in memorial pages, suggesting that Facebook is a site for collective memory. Although there is scarcity of literature on older users of Facebook, Georgalou (2015, p.32) has also touched on issues of age and investigated 'how Facebook users

construct themselves in time, namely how they think and talk about time and age'. Georgalou (2015, p.32) found that her participants were involved in various processes, 'such as sharing songs, copying lyrics, liking, writing and receiving comments,' and that 'participants evoked certain periods of life; recollected memories; appealed to experiences; recalled past tastes; generated past and present individual and collective identities; argued about time's impact on appearance; evaluated and expressed humorous attitudes to ageing'. Despite the similar focus, a significant distinction between this study and Georgalou's (2015) is the average age of participants: whereas the mean age of participants in Georgalou's (2015) study was 28, the mean age of participants in this study is 56.

Closer to the age group considered in this study, Lin et. al. (2004, p.261-266), examined 'how age identities are presented in an on-line discussion forum for older adults' and found that 'aging is experienced as a struggle or dialectic between declining mental capabilities/health and satisfaction at being able to control one's life' (note that although the age of the participants in the study is not explicitly indicated, the sample was collected from a forum for older adults). While Lin et. al. (2004) is closer to this study with respect to the focus on older users; this study's focus on Facebook remains rather unique, as it is a platform that, compared to discussion forums, allows users significantly different tools and multimodal ways of expression. As a result, this study aims to contribute to a developing area of research which, together with the aforementioned studies, attempts to examine the use of digital media by older users. Notwithstanding the above research, our understanding of the identity performance of older users on social media still remains relatively limited.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature that focuses on identity performance in digital media, by advancing our understanding of how *older* users use these media to construct their identities. More specifically, this study will examine how Facebook users aged over 45 construct a range of identities on their timelines through different, using a selection linguistic and other semiotic resources.

Apart from its contribution to the academic literature, this study also aims to enhance the understanding of professionals in media, communications, and marketing, with respect to the identities towards which older Facebook users gravitate as well as

the methods through which these users construct their identities online. For example, a general understanding of the identities that appeal to users over 45 can help marketers in a broad array of settings to customize their messages, content, and communication strategies to effectively target these audiences. Moreover, in the more specific context of Facebook as a marketplace, understanding the content preferences, communication methods, and engagement patterns of older users on Facebook can be valuable in terms of optimizing the placement of advertisements to achieve maximum engagement.

1.2 Objectives and Questions

Building on previous literature on identity performance, this study aims to examine issues of identity and how identity is constructed on the Facebook platform by older Facebook users.

For the purposes of this study, 'older users' are defined as people who are aged between 45 years old and 65 years old. Choosing this age group was motivated by the fact that these generations born before 1973 (at the time of data collection) have encountered computer-mediated communication as adults, as well as the fact that according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2023) middle age is defined as 'the period of life between young adulthood and old age, now usually regarded as between about forty-five and sixty'. The rationale for focusing on this particular age group is twofold. First, as described in Section 1.1, users belonging to this age group represent a growing portion of the Facebook community, and the lack of relevant literature leaves a large proportion of Facebook communication underexplored. Second, the fact that generations born before 1973 or so have encountered computer-mediated communication as adults, implies that these users' online practices may differ to those of younger users, as they may transfer skills from early computer mediated communication, such as texting, to the way they produce their posts on Facebook. Additionally, the age of the participants may affect the identities they wish to project on Facebook; for example, older users are likely more established professionals in their fields and, as a result, their professional or other identities may be more prominent.

This study aims to examine: (i) what identity aspects older users project through their Facebook wall posts, and (ii) how such identities are projected through a range of

linguistic and other semiotic resources. In examining how identities are constructed, this study will investigate the linguistic and other semiotic tools employed by older Facebook users taking into consideration the 'multimodal' nature of the platform, in order to capture the fact that each post could include 'a mixture of language, images, sound and/or music or of sub-types of these modes, e.g. writing (language) mixed with static or dynamic images (images)' (Bolander and Locher 2014, p.18).More specifically, this study will explore identity construction by collecting and analysing posts from a sample of older Greek-Cypriot Facebook users living in Cyprus. Through its focus on the specific cultural context, this study wishes to contribute to existing literature on the use of digital media and language in Cyprus. For instance, when analysing the posts, the study will also examine the language and script choice of the participants in relation to the identities they project, which can shed light on language use and, by comparing with previous literature, indicate potential differences in language choice between age groups of Greek-Cypriot users. This comparison is relevant not only as it relates to Greek-Cypriot users in particular, but also to other populations that have been found to exhibit similar linguistic patterns of behaviour (e.g. Themistocleous 2009; Tseliga 2007; Allehaiby 2013; Lee and Jang 2022).

1.3 Structure Overview

After this brief introduction to the study, its motivation and aims, chapter 2 reviews the previous literature on the topic of digital media and identity performance to which this study contributes. The link between language and identities has been explored in sociolinguistic research by several scholars (e.g. Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Georgalou 2015; Coulmas 2013). According to Coulmas (2013, pp.189-191), 'a basic tenet of sociolinguistics is that language displays its speaker's identity' and 'it cannot be denied that language is experienced as a marker of identity'. This chapter also discusses identity issues that arise in online platforms as well as self-presentation online.

The methodology and research design of the study is discussed in Chapter 3. The data collection and the criteria for choosing a specific sample for the purposes of the study are presented in this chapter. Moreover, the participants of the study are introduced along with some background information for each one of them such as their

age, profession, marital and parental status, educational background and when they joined Facebook, the number of friends they have on the platforms and the number of posts collected. The challenges and issues faced during the recruitment of participants and the data collection are also discussed in detail. These methodological issues include challenges related to ethics and ethical considerations when collecting data online, focusing on the public and private dichotomy and the multimodality of the data. The chapter also discusses challenges related to the use of mixed methodologies in online/offline settings, while also drawing on Androutsopoulos' (2013) distinction between screen-based and user-based data collection. The chapter concludes by discussing the data analysis and other methods that are used in the study.

Chapter 4 of the thesis presents the quantitative analysis of the posts based on their communicative function, drawing on Lee's (2011) classification of status updates on Facebook, and adapting it to the needs of the study by adding and excluding certain categories. The quantitative analysis of the posts in terms of their communicative function provides the basis for the qualitative analysis in the following chapters. The key topics and themes that emerge from the quantitative analysis point to the type of identities the participants make relevant and wish to project to their friends while posting on their Facebook timelines, such as humorous identities, professional identities when advertising their work online, identities in relation to social matters, identities related to opinion-giving or expressing their emotions, among others.

Motivated by the finding in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 focuses on a qualitative analysis of the posts belonging to the humour category. The focus on humorous posts is further motivated by the fact that previous literature has often characterized online discourse as playful, humorous and creative (Vásquez and Creel, 2017, p.59). Before proceeding with the qualitative analysis, the humorous posts are categorized in terms of their format i.e. whether they are participant-generated (posts that are produced and generated by the participants), re-shared (posts that are produced by someone else and are re-shared by participants on their timelines) or a combination of the two (re-shared posts produced by someone else which also include a caption that had been generated by the participants). This chapter also examines the discourse strategies that Facebook users exploit in order to communicate humorous content on their Facebook walls, with a focus

on both linguistic and other semiotics resources that may be used by the older Facebook users participating in the study.

Similarly, motivated by findings in Chapter 4, Chapter 6 analyses posts that express opinions of the participants. Focusing on opinion-giving posts is also motivated by previous literature which indicates that opinion-giving is a common practice online (Papacharissi 2002b, p.18) and more specifically on Facebook (e.g. Georgalou 2017, p.172). Initially, these posts are categorized based on their format, similar to Chapter 5, followed by a qualitative analysis. The various identities constructed when participants express their opinion on their Facebook wall are further examined in the qualitative analysis of the chapter. Furthermore, Chapter 6 also focuses on the linguistic and other semiotic resources which may be employed by users to construct identities in relation to opinion-giving.

Finally, chapter 7 discusses the findings of the study in relation to the two research questions, their interpretation drawing on previous literature, and their potential implications. Drawing on intersectionality theory, which urges researchers to acknowledge the complexity of examining identity performance and the various dimensions and circumstances involved (Block and Corona 2016), several interpretations are provided of the findings of the study in relation to why certain identities are more prevalent. Furthermore, the various linguistic and other semiotic resources employed by participants for constructing various identities were divided into two broad categories; non-technologically associated resources and technologically associated resources. Non-technologically associated resources include language choice, directness and indirectness, use of pronouns, storytelling and polyphony. Technologically associated resources include the format of the posts, script choice, non-standard punctuation markers and the use of emoticons. Chapter 7 also discusses the contribution of the study in the field of sociolinguistic research on digital media and discourse in relation to identity performance. Finally, potential limitations of the study are provided and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

1.4 Positionality

For over a decade, I have myself been a social media user, and more specifically a Facebook user. More than half of my awaken life, similar to numerous people around the world, is spent in front of a screen scrolling through my social media pages, interacting with other people. These people may include old classmates, colleagues, acquaintances, family members, close friends and vary in terms of their age goup and their socioeconomic, professional, academic, cultural backgrounds. This thesis was inspired in 2016 while observing the activity of my Facebook friends. I realised that more and more people my age (then in my 20s) were shifting their focus from Facebook to Instagram and that more and more people belonging to the age group of my parents (in their 50s) created Facebook accounts and posted regularly on their walls. This observation, along with a comment from one of my students who argued that Facebook is for old people, whereas Instagram is for young people, sparked my interest in examining Facebook use by older people.

Being a Greek-Cypriot also played a role in examining this particular community in terms of their Facebook use, since examining a community I belong in had numerous advantages for me as a researcher, but most importantly on a personal level, it motivated my interest in the research. One of the advantages of belonging to the Greek-Cypriot community was that it was easier to understand the cultural references and culture-specific behaviour, such as humour, which as we will see was rather central in the analysis of the posts. Moreover, access to participants was easier both in terms of convenience and snowball sampling, since I could acquire participants both from my social circle, but also ask my social circle for their help in order to invite more participants to take part in my study.

Nevertheless, certain perceived ideas and biases also exist since I am also a member of the community examined in the study. In order to avoid these biases when analysing the posts of the participants, I was open to peer-feedback and critique during the process of the PhD and presentations of my work to non-Greek Cypriot audiences in order to ensure my biases and perceived ideas did not interfere with how the posts were analysed. In addition, my research was data-driven and bottom up, letting the data speak and trying to derive categories from the data, rather than imposing them on the

data a priori. Finally, when analysing the data, certain personal biases and perceived ideas were challenged. For instance, before data collection, I assumed that the language used by the participants would be more mitigated and less face-threatening given their professional status and their age. This idea was challenged when further analysing the posts since numerous examples include face-threatening discourse as well as words with negative connotation and non-mitigated language use, especially by male participants. In addition, thematically the posts differed to some extent to my perceived ideas of what older Greek-Cypriot users would post. Even though I anticipated that politics would be dominant in the participants' posts, I did not expect religion and humour to be prominent, due to the age of the participants and taking into consideration that their Facebook friends list includes people from their professional background who belong to other cultural, religious backgrounds. Thus, taking all the above into consideration, being conscious of my own stances, biases and perceived ideas seemed the first and most vital step in order to overcome them when analysing the posts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to set the theoretical background that informs my research and discuss the most relevant literature in the area. The chapter will initially explore how identity is defined in the literature in relation to essentialist and non-essentialist approaches to identity. Moreover, different approaches to identity research will be discussed in relation to language and sociolinguistic research. Furthermore, since this study examines identities on Facebook, this chapter will also discuss previous literature that has examined identities on digital media and Facebook. Finally, this chapter will acknowledge and discuss previous literature which focuses on linguistic and other semiotic strategies in relation to identities and digital media. These include language choice, script choice, non-standard linguistic structures, non-standard punctuation, the use of emoticons and emojis, politeness/impoliteness and storytelling. Even though identity has been examined in relation to a wide range of linguistic and other semiotic strategies, for the purposes of this study the strategies discussed in this chapter were selected, drawing on the data collected and analysed in the study.

2.2 Identities

Scholars have identified numerous ways in which identity is constructed and the notion of identity has changed throughout the years. According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.18) 'the first recorded use of the word 'identity' appears in 1545, which according to the (OED 2023) refers to 'the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness'. In line with this definition, certain approaches to identity, which have been called 'essentialist' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006), consider identity as something concrete and absolute that one possesses. On the other hand, other approaches often referred to as non-essentialist define identity as fluid and as something people construct and project depending on several variables. This section will discuss approaches belonging to both essentialism and non-essentialism.

2.2.1 Essentialist approaches to identity

Early theories of identity have viewed identity in a more essentialist manner. They consider identity as something that is rigid and stable and, as a result, as something that individuals carry within themselves. This is particularly evident in early theories of identity in the 16th century, which viewed identity as 'a self-fashioning, internal, project of the self' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.17). Moreover, Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.18) continue by arguing that in the past 'the notion of identity as a unified, internal phenomenon has its roots in the word's etymology, and the everyday meaning has not changed much since its first use'. Essentialist approaches to identity have faced criticism throughout the years, especially in social sciences. The main concern towards essentialist approaches has been on attributing fixed identities to people, practices, and other social phenomena and correlating these with the production of fixed, uniform outcomes (Sayer 1997, p. 457). Non-essentialist approaches challenge this notion due to its 'homogenising, deterministic and repressive' nature (Sayer 1997, p.454).

Despite criticism towards essentialist approaches to identity due to their rigid, uniform and deterministic nature, they may still be evident in some fields, even though non-essentialist approaches have emerged. For instance, in anthropology and genetic research there is still room for essentialist approaches to identity, as genetic findings support the notion of identity as being 'an inborn, natural, and unalterable quality' (Brodwin 2002, p.323). Drawing on previous literature (e.g. Fuss 1990; Sayer 1997) it seems that employing fixed categories or descriptions that belong to the essentialist approaches to identity are still relevant in identity research since categorising to some extent is unavoidable and necessary. It seems that the key difference between essentialist categories to non-essentialist categories is that the former seem to share an underlying structure, to be biologically based, and to have well-defined, objectively-determined boundaries, in contrast to the latter which have subjectively-determined boundaries (Rhodes and Gelman, 2009, p. 267).

Taking all the above into consideration, despite the concerns towards the deterministic nature of essentialist approaches there may still be room for their maintenance. Even though nowadays essentialist notions of identity seem to have been dismantled, political reasons exist for their maintenance such as the sense of subjective

security and the collective self-identifications (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 28). More specifically, Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 17) propose that in fact researchers may wish to examine the processes 'by which people orient to consistency in their accounts of themselves and other people (underpinning the view of identity as 'fixed'), whilst simultaneously showing that identity is contingent on the local conditions of the interactional context'. Thus, it seems that essentialism still has some value in linguistic research, especially when researchers need to categorise data for analytical purposes or to examine how people orient to collective social identities through discursive work. Nevertheless, the challenge of considering which categories and when there is a need to apply some essentialist thinking for analytical purposes still remains. Therefore, there is a need to be reflexive and critical of any categories we assign as analysts.

2.2.2 Non-essentialist approaches to identity

In more recent work within the non-essentialist paradigm, identity is treated by scholars as something 'fluid, fragmentary, contingent and, crucially, constituted in discourse' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.17). Identity research in the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century belongs to the modern era or also known as 'late' 'high' or 'post' modernity (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.22). In this era, globalisation digital media and the consumer society we live in have affected the ways in which people position themselves and have led to a virtual commodification of the self, as argued by Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.22). Furthermore, non-essentialist approach to identity theory exists in this modern era as the fluid and fragmentary nature of identity play a vital role leading to positive or negative perspectives of this new reality of identities we live in.

The constructionist framework to identity is grounded in theory that suggests that

> 'phenomena typically considered as internal (e.g. knowledge, intentions, agency, emotions, identity) or external (varying widely from more obvious constructions such as marriage, money, and society to less obvious ones such as location, event, and continuity) have their reality in an intersubjectively

> reached agreement that is historically and culturally negotiated.' (Bamberg et.al. 2011, p.178).

Therefore, identity is understood as something that is not fixed and is subject to constant renegotiations. According to Bamberg et. al. (2011, p. 178), various forms of discourse play an important role in how identity is negotiated. The constructionist approach to identity shifts the focus from essentialist views of identity, which examine what identity is, pursue examining identity in terms of how it is constructed in discourse, negotiated among speakers in social contexts, and 'as emerging, in the form of subjectivity and a sense of self' (Bamberg et. al. 2011, p.178). Bamberg et. al. 2011, p. 178) indicate that constructionist approaches to identity shift from considering a person as having an identity to viewing identity as something that is done, made or constructed in discursive activities and focus on the processes in which identity is done.

Georgalou (2017, p. 10) also adds that social constructionists such as social psychologists as well as conversation analysts, anthropological linguists and ethnomethodologists, maintain that 'identity is not the product of individuals' minds but is consistently in flux and alters on the basis of particular beliefs, values and possibilities available to them in their social, historical and cultural context'. Erving Goffman's (1956) work, according to Georgalou (2017, p. 10) 'introduced that the self performs multiple different roles in daily life and therefore cannot be understood as a wholly unified entity'. Social constructionism also considers that discourse shapes identity (Georgalou 2017, p. 10). Therefore, a discursive and constructionist approach to identity moves away from the essentialist approach to identity. They view identity as a discursive performance or construction of identity in interaction (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, pp. 30-31, Bamberg et. al. 2011, p.178). A key advantage of this approach to identity is that identity categories such as age, gender, occupation, class, are accessed through the theorizing of how various forms and meanings are used, by examining language and other communicative means in text and context (Bamberg et. al. 2011, pp. 178-179). Furthermore, a discursive approach to identity considers narratives and life stories as key strategies for identity construction (Schiffrin 2006, p.104). This

approach to identity recognizes and further examines the relationship between language and identity.

2.3 Language and identity

As previously mentioned, identity has also been examined in relation to discourse and language, especially in different fields of linguistics, such as sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis. Several scholars have argued that identity and the way we present ourselves are closely linked to language and that language is one of the key ways in which self-presentation is achieved (e.g. Joseph 2016; Coulmas 2013; Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014). In terms of sociolinguistic research, Coulmas (2013, p.189) also discusses the connection between language and identity by arguing that 'language serves instrumental and symbolic purposes' and that 'among the latter, the manifestation of identity sticks out as a topic that has inspired a great deal of sociolinguistic research'. Moreover, he continues by arguing that in sociolinguistic research it is believed that language is in fact a marker of identity and indicates its speaker's identity (Coulmas 2012, pp.189-191).

Taking all the above into consideration, it seems that the relationship between language and identity is in fact widely accepted in linguistic research. Several scholars have also attempted to define what aspects of identity one conveys through language. It has been argued that when we speak, we also reveal key characteristics of ourselves including the place we grew up, our gender, age, the group we belong to and our station in life (Coulmas 2013, p.191). Language is also a means through which people index their beliefs, attitudes, values, meanings, lifestyles, likes and dislikes (Barker and Galasinski 2001; Joseph 2016). Joseph (2016, p.19) also acknowledges that 'such indexing can have both positive and negative consequences'. Thus, the ways in which one presents themselves through language can project a positive or negative face, borrowing Brown and Levinson's (1987) words. Therefore, since the notion that language is one of the central means through which identity is conveyed has been widely accepted in different fields of linguistics, various essentialist and non-essentialist approaches to examining language and identity have emerged throughout the years.

2.3.1 Essentialism and Language

Earlier studies on language and identity followed essentialist approaches. For example, variationist sociolinguistics focuses on the relationship between language and identity and highlights the importance of concrete social factors, as variables to how identity is expressed. The early phase of sociolinguistics, as captured by the variationist school and the sociology of language, mainly focused on social factors like social class, sex, age and ethnicity, which were tied to linguistic variation and were considered as fixed categories that remained stable. According to Jones and Themistocleous (2022, pp.55-56), people in any society can be categorized in different groups and people these groups that people are associated with are referred to as social variables. In variationist sociolinguistics the main aim is to comprehend 'the relationship between social variables and linguistic behaviour' (Jones and Themistocleous 2022 p.56). More specifically, variation in language was understood 'as being conditioned by these factors, understood as permanent properties of speakers, and varieties were seen as encoding speaker identities based on social category membership' (Coulmas 2013, p.197). Hence, social variables were correlated to or had a causal effect on linguistic behaviour (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.26). In variationist sociolinguistics, according to Drummond and Schleef (2016, p.50), researchers may examine 'variable linguistic features, such as saying *fink* instead of *think*, or the variable use of different varieties, which may be dialects, languages, accents, styles and so on'.

The first and most influential representatives of this type of research include Labov (1963; 1972) and Trudgill (1974). Labov's (1963) study of Martha's Vineyard investigating variables of the pronunciation of specific words in a specific community, followed by another study in 1972 investigating the /r/ variable in New York (Labov 1972) have been very influential in variationist sociolinguistics. In his 1963 study, Labov found that certain features of the islanders' speech, like the pronunciation of certain vowels, varied depending on their attitudes toward island identity. The study is significant because it demonstrated how language variation is not just random but can be influenced by social factors like identity and community. It helped pave the way for further research into sociolinguistics and the understanding of how language reflects and shapes social dynamics. His 1972 New York study on the other hand, Labov

observed that speakers from different socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicities exhibited distinct patterns of pronunciation regarding the postvocalic "r." He found that speakers from higher socioeconomic classes tended to use the standard pronunciation consistently, whereas speakers from lower socioeconomic classes often exhibited non-standard pronunciations, such as dropping the "r" sound in certain contexts. More recently, Mather (2012) replicated Lavov's (1972) study using his rapid and anonymous interview data collection method in order to examine the /r/ variable in two department stores. The rapid and anonymous method in Labov's (1972) study involved asking the same question to the group of people which was being investigated to elicit responses with the /r/ variable. Another key representative of variationist sociolinguistics is Peter Trudgill (1974) who explored whether the way people in his area, i.e. Norwich, England, pronounced the –ing suffix was associated with social class, using sociolinguistic interviews. Trudgill found that there was a correlation between the pronunciation of the "-ing" suffix and social class. Speakers from lower social classes tended to use the pronunciation "in" instead of "ing." For example, they might say "walkin'" instead of "walking." In contrast, speakers from higher social classes tended to use the standard pronunciation "ing." This study contributed to the understanding of how linguistic features can be associated with social factors like social class. It highlighted how language variation is not random but can be influenced by sociocultural factors, including social identity and group membership. Sociolinguistic interviews in Trudgill's (1974) study, involved engaging informants in several linguistic tasks in order to produce the variable(s) which were examined. Apart from social class, Trudgill also categorized his participants based on their gender, hence examining another social variable in comparison to Labov's (1972) work. Their studies are considered as revolutionary until today and provided a basis for linguists to comprehend how small differences in the way people talk can have important social meanings (Jones and Themistocleous2022, p.62).

The essentialist undertone in variationist sociolinguistics is also pointed out in Eckert's (2012) work on the three waves in the area. The first two waves follow a more essentialist approach to identity theory whereas the third wave follows a non-essentialist approach to identity theory. According to Eckert (2012, p.88) the first wave, similar to

variationist sociolinguistics, has been largely influenced by Labov' (1972) study of the Social Stratification of English in New York City. The focus of linguistic research belonging to the first wave lies on identifying language variation and change in communities as well as the linguistic and social barriers of this variation (Drummond and Schleef 2016, p.51). Within the first wave, identity is theorised in terms of macro-sociological labels which are stable, unified and essential 'as they would be based on membership of individuals in specific social categories' (Drummond and Schleef 2016, p. 51). Therefore, early studies in variationist sociolinguistics belong to the first wave if we consider Eckert's (2012) categorisation.

The focus of variationist sociolinguistics in the 1980s shifted by examining social networks instead of social categories and how these networks affect linguistic behaviour (Jones and Themistocleous 2022, p.62). Social network theory by Milroy (1987) which was interested in the social relationships of people in a community led to ethnographic research which involved interaction with people in a specific community by spending time in the community being investigated (Jones and Themistocleous 2022, p.65). Ethnographic research by Milroy (1987) therefore, attempted to comprehend locally specific communities and variables accounting for other social factors and acknowledging the complexity of social dynamics in a community. This type of research reflects Eckert's (2012) second wave of sociolinguistic research. The second wave 'began with the attribution of social agency to the use of vernacular as well as standard features and a focus on the vernacular as an expression of local or class identity' (Eckert 2012, p.91). In the second wave, there is a shift in focus from the macro-sociological categories to locally relevant categories, as well as naturally occurring speech (Drummond and Schleef 2016, p. 52; Eckert 2012, p.92). Nevertheless, similar to the first wave, the notion that identity is stable and fixed still prevails in the second wave, which also indicates its essentialist notion of identity (Drummond and Schleef 2016, p.52). Studies in the second wave examine the ways in which language is used in various contexts to construct several identities by focusing on shared repertoires, values and practices (Drummond and Schleef 2016, p. 52). Nevertheless, similar to studies in the first wave, studies in the second wave also focused on static, fixed categories and 'equated identity with category affiliation' (Eckert 2012, p.93).

Early variationist studies belonging to the first two waves have been challenged mainly due to the causal relationship between social identity and linguistic behaviour (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.26). Bucholtz and Hall (2004, p. 376) also add that one of the greatest weaknesses of previous identity research is 'the assumption that identities are attributes of individuals or groups rather than of situations' which echoes similar criticism towards essentialist approaches to identity in the past. They continue by noting that circumstances of each social situation may affect identities and, hence, identity expression is reflected in social actions rather than in people (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, p.376). Social constructionists have criticised the essentialist nature of the variationist approach as they consider labels assigned to people as 'crude and monolithic, usually defined by biology (for example, sex and age) and imposed by analysts (for example, social class), rather than being provisional identities that people themselves negotiate in talk' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.27). Nevertheless, the descriptive nature of categories such as gender or occupation has not been challenged, but rather criticism lies in the assumption that these social variables always operate to define the identity of people (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.27). Jones and Themistocleous (2022, p.62) also acknowledge criticism towards the variationist approach to identity and early variationist studies by arguing that their greatest limitation is that the categories and labels assigned to the participants are in fact the researcher's choice based on what they consider as important, rather than the social categories that are more relevant to the participants themselves.

In ethnography and anthropology, in order to account for these two perspectives they refer to the emic perspective as 'one that favours the point of view of the members of the community under study' whereas the etic perspective is one which is instead 'culture-independent and simply provides a classification of behaviours on the basis of a set of features devised by the observer/researcher' (Duranti 1997, p.172). Even though such social categories may play a role to how people negotiate their identity, scholars should be cautious when making claims related to these social categories. The situation and circumstances in which language occurs should be taken into consideration, as well as the community being investigated and locally situated factors which may also affect linguistic behaviour.

2.3.2 Non-essentialism and Language

More recent studies on language and identity follow non-essentialist approaches. This is also reflected in Eckert's third wave of variationist sociolinguistics which moves away from static categories and their correlation with identity. Work by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Bucholtz (2010) and Irvine (2001) are indicative of the third wave which moves away from the notion of variation as an indication of social identities and categories and shifts the focus 'to the linguistic practice in which speakers place themselves in the social landscape through stylistic practice' (Eckert 2012, p. 94). Therefore, in this wave, there is the assumption that 'linguistic features index social meanings' and aims to examine these meanings in relation to a particular variable in context and the ways n which these are achieved (Drummond and Schleef 2016, p.53). Therefore, even the word *index* to refer to how linguistic features may indicate social meanings reflects the evolution of how language is analysed in relation to identity and moves away from strict, static correlations and causal effect between the two.

The person who introduced this notion of indexical meaning is Charles Peirce (1977). Drawing on his work, Jones and Themistocleous (2022, p.43) explain that indexical meaning can be achieved through icons, symbols and indexes. Icons refer to signs that get their meaning 'from the fact that they resemble what they are referring to'. Symbols get their meaning because of an 'arbitrary association that has been decided on by people in society and reinforced over a longer period of time' (Jones and Themistocleous 2022, p.43). Finally, indexes are signs that acquire their meaning by 'pointing to something in the external environment' which may include the social or cultural environment such as 'social groups, identities, activities, or collective stories or memories' (Jones and Themistocleous 2022, p.43). Thus, the use of particular words may point to specific social identities (Jones and Themistocleous 2022, p.43). Taking all this into consideration, Eckert's (2012) third wave considers language and other social practices which may index certain social identities and are considered as means through which identities are constructed, rather than being a mere reflection of social identities.

In the third wave of variation, the central property of variables is their indexical mutability, which is achieved through stylistic practice with which speakers reinterpret,

combine and recombine variables (Eckert 2012, p. 94). Silverstain's (2003) indexical order explains the mutability of indexical signs. Eckert (2012, p. 94) explains indexical order in the following extract:

> 'At some initial stage, a population may become salient, and a distinguishing feature of that population's speech may attract attention. Once recognized, that feature can be extracted from its linguistic surroundings and come, on its own, to index membership in that population. It can then be called up in ideological moves with respect to the population, invoking ways of belonging to, or characteristics or stances associated with, that population. Such an index can be used by outsiders to call up stereotypes associated with the population.' (Eckert 2012, p.94)

Silverstein's (2003) indexical order establishes a new relationship between language use and social moves which lead to new social categories and meaning. These meaning-making processes also lead to stance-taking practices. Thus, the third wave positions ideology as central in language and in the construction of meaning (Eckert 2012, p.98) and moves away from essentialist approaches to identity and strict correlations between language use and identities. In the third wave, stylistic and linguistic practices index social meanings and these meanings are further examined and interpreted taking into consideration (but not restricted to) the various factors associated with the social or cultural environment of the population which is examined, such as stereotypes, ideologies, age, gender, attitudes, linguistic background etc.

2.4 Approaching identities in the context of this study

Taking all the above into consideration, in this study identity is approached in a rather non-essentialist way i.e. as something that is fluid, can be constructed, reconstructed and negotiated in social spaces. Thus, the relationship between identity and certain social categories is bidirectional, meaning that who we construct ourselves to be in discourse is shaped and at the same time shapes our social reality. Moreover, drawing on previous literature (e.g. Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Jones and Themistocleous 2022)

and the limitations of an essentialist approach to identity, this thesis acknowledges that identity is not something concrete, stable or unchanged; instead depending on social context, situation or circumstances identities can be expressed in various ways and through linguistic and other semiotic practices. Furthermore, a person can project several identities depending on the social spaces both offline or online and these identities may be constructed through discursive practices or strategies. As argued by Tabouret-Keller (1997, p.324), people may be composed of various identities which enable them to shift between them, and associated language use, for different social contexts. Finally, drawing on Selverstein's (2003), Peirce's (1977) work and Eckert's (2012) third wave, language and other social practices may index certain identities. Thus, language and stylistic practices are considered as central means through which identities are indexed, constructed, reconstructed and negotiated.

Nevertheless, this study presupposes some locally relevant groupings, as it considers the participants of the study as belonging to the Greek-Cypriot community living in Cyprus. Similar to Sophocleous and Themistocleous (2014, n.p.), this study adopts the premise that people may use certain linguistic behaviour in order to index their belonging in social groups, and as a result, construct social identities. As Tagg and Seargeant (2015, p. 343) point out, a constructivist view of identity 'views people as actively and repeatedly co-constructing and negotiating their identity (within the constraints afforded by various social and individual factors), and thus presenting themselves in different ways depending on the particular contextual circumstances'. The focus of the study is not only on the identities users choose to construct on their Facebook timelines, but also on the ways in which they employ different linguistic and other semiotic tools in the construction of these identities. Coulmas (2013, p.197) argues that the real challenge that follows from a dynamic view of the identity of individual speakers, of speech communities and of their languages/varieties is to examine how, and motivated by what, speakers exploit the mechanisms of linguistic identity display strategically. It is this type of identity work that this study will attempt to explore in more detail.

2.5 Identities and Digital Media

Identities have been examined in relation to Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and later on in relation to digital media due to the emergence of the internet. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has been defined as 'any communicative transaction which occurs through the use of two or more networked computers' (Leppänen and Peuronen 2012, p.384). Due to the advances of technology, new terminology emerged in order to acknowledge these technological affordances such as new media and digital media. The former emerged in 2000 as the preferred term to refer to 'a range of practices that employed computer-mediated technologies' especially in the fields of education and cultural policy (Dewdney and Ride 2013, p.21). Due to technological advances and the emergence of the cyberspace which 'encompasses interests in the human-machine interaction and in the human presence within computer data systems', the term digital media emerged (Dewdney and Ride 2013, p.26). Digital media is a term directly associated with the cyberspace and the internet and refers to 'the media and cultural practices of working with computers' (Dewdney and Ride 2013, p.26). Examining identities in relation to digital media has resulted in new terminology to differentiate identities in the online space compared to the offline space such as 'virtual', 'digital', 'online' identities.

In the past, virtual identities have been associated with not being real, of being inauthentic to some extent, 'more unstable, more fluid, more performed' or symbolic or providing a potential identity rather than an actual identity, which is mainly due to the 'anonymity, freedoms of space and time and absence of audio-visual context' on the internet (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, pp.244-245). The notion that the internet provides a more fluid, free space for people to express themselves, their views and construct various identities online in a playful and creative manner has been argued by several scholars. For instance, according to Papacharissi (2002b, p.18), who draws on Poster (1995), identities online are more fluid and the internet provides a mobile space for people to express their opinions. As a result, she continues that dissent is encouraged in the online world and thus, status markers are eliminated. Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 243) also add that on the internet space, people have the ability to manipulate or present themselves as whomever they wish to be, due to the fact 'identity on the

Internet is playful, creative, impressive and limitless, and (so popular discourse would have it) an entirely different proposition from identity in the 'real world''.

Nevertheless, the notion that identities online differ to offline identities has been challenged. Nowadays, especially with the rise of social media, the online world plays a crucial role in the daily lives of people, which has led to a merging between the online and offline spaces. This merging has been even more evident, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to 'a compression of offline into online spaces' (Bolander and Smith 2020, p. 835). Bolander and Smith (2020, p.836) argue that the engagement between offline and online spaces has changed, which has affected our sense of time. As a result, various people have a feeling of being online and offline at the same time in different roles in their everyday lives. Thus, there is a shift in how the dichotomy between the online and offline worlds is perceived in recent research, due to 'the bleeding of the offline into our online spaces' as it is referred to by Bolander and Smith (2020, p.542) or the 'blurring' between the two (Bolander and Locher 2020, p.1). Jones (2004, p.24) has also found that most users did not find the offline and online spaces as being different and the online space is not currently understood as a 'virtual vacuum'. In fact, users 'exploit the affordances of an increasingly multimodal set of technological resources to engage, communicate, and negotiate ideas and relationships in their daily lives' (Bolander and Smith 2020, p.842). Thus, the online space in the 21st century is connected to the offline world. Similarly, Androutsopoulous (2013, p.239) proposes the conceptualisation of online spaces as 'discursively created spaces which are dynamically linked to offline activities'. Therefore, the way in which people present themselves and construct various identities online is not restricted to the online world, since online identities are closely linked to the offline world and to activities of people in their daily lives. Examining how people present themselves on their social media platforms in terms of the identities they construct is therefore approached not as something that is separated from their daily activities and interaction with their offline social network.

2.6 Gender, Identities and Digital Media

Gender identities, roles and representations have been explored by scholars examining digital media, platforms and contexts. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from media studies, communication, sociology, gender studies, and technology studies, scholars have identified several key themes relating to gender in digital media. For instance, gender representation in digital media involves the analysis of how gender is depicted and portrayed across various media forms, including advertising, entertainment media, news media, and social media platforms. For example, Gill (2007) presents various findings regarding gender representation across different media forms. Gill (2007) highlights, among others, the frequent use of stereotypical portrayals depicting women as passive, nurturing, and focused on appearance, and men as assertive, dominant, and rational, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, the objectification and sexualisation of women, but also instances of alternative narratives that challenge traditional gender roles, such as feminist media activism, subversive media texts, and counter-narratives.

Work on gendered discourses and language use in digital media explores how language perpetuates or challenges gender norms and power structures in online interactions. In the past, studies (e.g. Lakoff 1975; Jespersen 1922; Trudgill 1972; Herring 1994; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999) focused on the differences between genders both in offline and online contexts, often portraying gender as binary and distinguishing between masculinity and femininity or men and women respectively, therefore following a rather essentialist approach to gender (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002, pp.4-7). As a result, previous research has focused on normative representations of gender and people orienting to normative role behaviour which is 'collectivistic that delimits individual freedom and tie them to predetermined rights and duties as well as expectations' (Hussain et. al. 2015, p.1). Normative roles 'are closely associated with the development of stereotypes that are predetermined notions or images, which define various spheres of activities including gender' (Hussain et. al 2015, p.1), resulting in differentiating males and females.

More specifically, in relation to online interactions, Herring (1994) discusses the nuanced ways in which gender manifests in online interactions, finding that women

frequently employ politeness strategies, such as expressing gratitude and using courteous language, whereas men are more prone to engaging in aggressive or confrontational behaviour, a phenomenon referred to as "flaming". This type of research has shed light on the ways in which language shapes and reflects gender dynamics in digital spaces. Furthermore, the study of online identity and self-presentation in digital media examines how individuals construct and perform gender identities online through the creation of online profiles, avatar selections, username choices, and self-disclosures. For example, Ellison et al. (2006) use quantitative analysis to highlight how gender influences self-presentation strategies in online dating. They find that online users construct idealized or aspirational self-images, where they emphasize their most attractive qualities while minimizing potential flaws. With respect to the role of gender in particular, they find that men and women may adopt different approaches, with men often emphasizing status and achievement, while women focus more on attractiveness and warmth.

Nevertheless, according to Cover (2018, p.1) ‘digital media has in recent years enabled people, including particularly younger people, to engage creatively and interactively in defining their own sense of identity’. As a result, new, diverse ‘labels’ or ‘categories’ of sexuality and gender identity have emerged, as well as definitions of relationships (Cover 2018, p.1). These labels may include terms like ‘heteroflexible, non-binary, asexual, greysexual, sapiosexual, demisexual, ciswoman, transcurious, maverique’ among others (Cover 2018, p.1). Social networking sites have welcomed new youth digital cultural practices, which include announcing, rating and ranking this variety of gender and sexuality labels which have become popular in both online and offline contexts, as well as announcing preferred pronouns i.e she, he, they, ze, by ‘expanding the selection of gender and sexual categories used in drop-down menus and lists of self-identification’ (Cover 2018, p.1). This new taxonomy of gender and sexuality as referred to by Cover (2018, pp. 1-2), ‘challenges authorised and institutional knowledge on identity and social practices’ as well as older homophobic/misogynistic practices, by embracing more ‘liberal-humanist perspectives of tolerated LGBT identities and post-feminist gender identities’.

Taking all the above into consideration, it seems that the dichotomy between essentialist and non-essentialist approaches to identity has also been reflected in gender research and digital media. Even though gender studies in the past (e.g. Ellison et al. 2006; Herring 1994; Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002) adopted a binary approach to identity focusing on differences between men and women, it seems that more recent research acknowledges the new perspectives on gender and sexuality, as suggested by Cover (2019), following a more non-essentialist approach to identity (e.g. Cover 2018; Bailey 2022; Hines 2017; Lawson, R. and Coffey-Glover 2023). This non-essentialist approach to identity and gender acknowledges the fluidity of gender identities and sexualities and views identity as something people construct and project depending on several variables. One could also argue that a non-essentialist approach to gender and identity is also reflected, welcomed and enabled by the platforms' affordances, which now allow users to choose their pronouns and gender from a list of suggestions.

Nevertheless, back in 2018 when the data for this study was collected, only three pronouns were provided by the platform for users to choose from, more specifically he/him, she/her or they/them (Baron 2014, n.p), whereas now it also provides the option for users to choose from a longer list of pronouns and genders or write their preferred choice moving towards a new 'post-binary sexualities and genders' digital era, as characterized by Cover (2019, p.1). Therefore, it seems that when the data was collected for the purposes of the study, despite the fact that they/them was being used as a gender-neutral pronoun and was offered as an option by the platform in 2018, the spectrum of genders and sexualities was not reflected by the platform's affordances and potentially by its users. The turning point according to a BBC article was when the artist and singer Sam Smith identified himself as non-binary in 2019 and asked his fans to use pronouns they/them instead of he/him, which caused a debate online (BBC, 2019). Although gender research in digital media now illustrates gender as a spectrum, in 2018 when the data was collected, participants did not include their pronouns on their timelines. Instead, they identified themselves as male and female through other linguistic and semiotic means. These means will be further analysed in chapters 5 and 6. This analysis may include examining the content of their posts and the identities they constructed on their timelines in relation to gender. Additionally, in the cases of posts

written in Standard Greek and Cypriot Greek, gender was inferred by the suffixes of adjectives and nouns indicating gender.

2.7 Social Media and Identities

Social media research is part of digital media research, which focuses on how users exploit and use social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, blogs among others, or in the past, personal pages like My Space or hi5. Page (2013, p.5) highlights the difference between social media and other digital media. She refers to social media as 'internet-based applications that promote social interaction between participants' and she highlights that what distinguishes social media is that content is delivered 'via a network of participants where the content can be published by anyone but is still distributed across potentially large-scale audiences' (Page 2012, p.5). According to Papacharissi (2002a, p.643) 'growing numbers of people develop and maintain personal web pages to present aspects of their personalities online' and this early observation still holds true, as social media provide the possibility for users to create personal pages. Thus, identity and the ways in which people present themselves online, provide a space where online communities can be formed and different audiences can be addressed.

Research on identity in social media often focuses on the user's self-presentation i.e. the ways people present themselves on social media using various tools. This line of work has been influenced by Goffman (1959) who approaches self-presentation as being achieved as 'performance'. Goffman (1959) examined self-presentation in everyday life in which he defined a 'performance' as 'the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants' (Goffman 1959, p. 8). He views the presentation of the self as an ongoing process in which one gives expressions or expressions are given off. The latter seem to be more 'theatrical and contextual, usually nonverbal, and presumably unintentional' whereas the former are typically easier to manipulate (Papapcharissi 2002a, p. 644). This information game that is staged by an individual and the impressions formed about him/her due to the ability of the person to control the expressions given and given off is referred to as 'performance' (Papapcharissi 2002a, p. 644). Goffman (1959, p.8) also

argues that by taking the performance of a specific person as a reference point, those who contribute the other performances can be referred to as 'the audience, observers, or co-participants'. Self-presentation online, and more specifically on social media, is achieved by constructing various selves or identities in order to address different audiences on their social media platforms.

The ways in which people present themselves on social media have been in the centre of social media research for several reasons. As argued by Tagg and Seargeant (2015, p.343) examining performances of identity on social media and more specifically on Facebook, are

> 'sociolinguistically interesting for two main reasons: first, because the resources which people have at their disposal differ markedly from those typically associated with identity construction in face-to-face spoken contexts; and second, because the online context of Facebook allows for a high degree of selectivity in how people present themselves' (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.343)

The use of text-based visual tools such as discourse, typography and the combination of several scripts differs to face-to-face communication as facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and accent are less notable, if at all accessible (Tagg and Seargeant 2015; Tagg and Seargeant 2012). Moreover, practices on Facebook include posting, sharing photos and other media which are also significant in the way users construct various identities on their timelines (McLaughlin and Vitak 2011, p. 306). According to Tagg and Seargeant (2015, p.343), Facebook is based in offline social networks, as a result, it cannot afford anonymity or complete freedom for users to 'reinvent' themselves on the platform but rather to 'foreground certain aspects of their identity and present themselves in ways appropriate to the new online situations in which they find themselves'.

In addition to the ways in which people present themselves on social media, the ways in which they address various audiences have also been examined in previous literature (e.g. Tagg and Sergeant 2014, 2015, 2017; Androutsopoulos 2014a).

According to Tagg and Seargeant (2015, pp.242-243), the concept of audience design draws on the connection between self-presentation and the building and maintenance of networked relationships. Drawing on Bell's (1984) work, Tagg and Seargeant (2015, p.343) argue that the concept of audience design, which refers to 'the way that speakers' perceptions of the people they are addressing shape what they say', is related to the ways in which an individual forms several communities on Facebook. Therefore, the ways in which the platform is used and how users present themselves are largely affected by the several audiences from the various communities on Facebook each user wishes to address, build or maintain. Nevertheless, the semi-public nature of Facebook, i.e. the fact that users can choose who to add on their friends list but cannot be entirely sure who will read or respond to a specific post, leads to the argument that Facebook users imagine their audiences into being as they are largely unseen, unknown and invisible (Tagg and Seargeant 2015; Marwick and boyd2011). Moreover, audience design becomes even more complex on Facebook since a user's friend list includes people from several aspects of their life; otherwise known as context collapse (e.g. Tagg and Sergeant 2016) since audiences from various aspects of one's life collapse into one. This realisation may in turn affect the different posts they share on their timelines and the various linguistic and semiotic practices used to target various audiences and construct various selves at the same time. In other words, users draw on several audience design strategies in order to target or exclude specific audiences (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, pp. 346-347).

In order to manage context collapse users may employ several audience design practices such as choosing specific topics or language practices or self-presentation strategies (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.347). According to Tagg and Seargeant (2015, p.347) 'audience design entails drawing on what are perceived to be shared practices, and at the same time enacting and elaborating upon these practices' (i.e. code-switching or style shifting). Thus, audience design is an important aspect in the community of Facebook, as well as in other social networking sites or digital media, and a user's perceived communicative practices are affected by audience design strategies and the decisions made in terms of 'style, language choice, topic of conversation and so on' (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.347). Therefore, the perceived identities constructed

by Facebook users on their timelines are related to audience design strategies and language practices employed by users to achieve audience design.

2.8 Doing Identity on digital media

The ways in which people construct various identities on digital media, and more specifically on social media, has been of great interest by scholars, (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014; Ng and Lee 2019; De Fina 2016; Giaxoglou and Georgakopoulou 2021; Georgalou 2015, 2017). This section discusses relevant literature focusing on linguistic and other semiotic means through which identities are constructed on social media.

2.8.1 Language choice in digital media

The fact that there is a connection between language and identity has been argued by several scholars in the past (e.g. Joseph 2016; Coulmas 2013) and is now considered as something undisputed. In early studies, the focus was on multilingualism and the range of linguistic codes used to construct various identities on the internet, such ase-mail communication or online forums and chats (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2006b; Warschauer et. al. 2002, Warschauer 2003). More recently, research has turned its focus on identity construction, language choice and multilingualism on social media platforms (e.g. Lee 2014; Page 2013) including Facebook (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014; Page 2013; Biró 2019; Tagg et.al. 2017).

In previous literature, English has been found to be a dominant language on the web, due to the fact that the emergence of the internet started in the United States during the1960s and English was the only language used initially (Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014, n.p.). Furthermore, in the 1990s, the majority of websites and internet users were English speaking (Androutsopoulos 2006a, p.420, Leppänen and Peuronen 2012, p.385). Nevertheless, throughout the years, the internet has ceased to be a monolingual environment and became multilingual (Danet and Herring, 2007), even though 'English remains the strongest language online' (Deumert 2014, p.57). In fact, this linguistic diversity online together with the broader informality of the internet as an unregulated writing space (i.e. writers may not follow writing conventions (Sebba

2007, p.44) that, resulted in the appearance of non-standard language varieties on the web. In fact, several studies (e.g. Androutsopoulos and Ziegler, 2004; Danet and Herring, 2007; Rajah-Carrim, 2008; Sophocleous and Themistocleous, 2014; Themistocleous 2009, 2010; Climent et. al., 2003) show that non-standard language varieties, which are mainly used for spoken rather than written communication (e.g. regional speech features in German, Mauritian Creole in Mauritius, France, Catalan in Spain) are used for online communication. An example of these varieties is Cypriot-Greek. Standard Modern Greek and Cypriot-Greek are the two linguistic varieties used in Cyprus. The former is the 'prestigious variety used in education, administration, the media and in writing', whereas the latter is 'the non-prestigious variety that is only accepted in informal, oral communication' (Karatsareas 2018, p.412). Cypriot-Greek is considered as a minority language variety as it is only spoken in Cyprus by approximately a million people in the Republic of Cyprus (Themistocleous et. al. 2012, p.262). Cypriot-Greek has been examined on the web (e.g. Themistocleous 2010, 2009, 2015) and on Facebook (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014) in relation to identities and language choice.

Language choice and issues of code-switching (i.e. switching between two or more linguistic varieties) have been in the centre of studies examining multilingualism on the web (e.g. Paolillo, 2011; Themistocleous, 2015), and on Facebook (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous, 2014). In these studies, English has been examined, in addition to other 'local' languages (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.347). According to Lee (2015, p.120), research on language choice and code-switching online is 'concerned with the codes or linguistic resources available to web users and how they negotiate their choice when communicating online with people with or without shared languages'. Moreover, she explains that communication online allows people to write using minority languages and varieties which do not have any standard writing system in offline environments (Lee 2015, p.120).

After several decades, the terms 'languaging' or 'polylingual languaging' were introduced in the field of sociolinguistics, and more specifically in the field of bilingualism and multilingualism research. According to Jørgensen (2008, p. 169), 'languaging' or 'polylingual languaging' refers to practices where 'language users employ whatever

linguistic features are available at their disposal with the intention of achieving their communicative aims'. This notion entails that 'languagers', meaning all people who use any language, sometimes use languages that they have a limited knowledge of. Adding to the notion of *languaging* or *polylingual languaging*, the term *metrolingualism* was also introduced, which focuses on 'ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language; [...] not on language systems but on languages as emergent from contexts of interaction' (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010, p.246). They continue by adding that metrolingualism is a product of modern, urban interaction and does not make assumptions about the 'connections between language, culture, ethnicity, nationality or geography, but rather seeks to explore how such relations are produced, resisted, defied or rearranged; its focus is not on language systems but on languages as emergent from contexts of interaction' (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010, p. 246).

Recent research has also explored the practice of translanguaging in digital media which broadly refers to integrating multiple language forms within online communication and content creation. More specifically, it has been defined by Wei (2011, p. 1222) as 'both going between different linguistic structures and systems and going beyond them'. He continues by arguing that 'it includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users for purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships'. As a result, this language practice reflects the multilingual and multicultural nature of digital communities and allows online users to express themselves more effectively and creatively (e.g Wei 2011). Some examples of work in this field include Zhao and R. Flewitt (2020) who investigate how young Chinese immigrant children utilize their multilingual repertoires and employ translanguaging strategies, such as code-switching, language mixing, and transliteration, to communicate with their friends and family members. Another example would be Ren and Guo (2024), who study how individuals employ translanguaging practices to express self-praise on social media platforms, by mixing multiple languages to construct and convey positive self-images in their online posts and interactions. Finally, Tzirides (2021) explores the integration of

translanguaging practices and digital technologies in language learning contexts, focusing on how learners utilize digital tools and platforms to engage in translanguaging to enhance their language acquisition and proficiency.

Some studies have also explored code-switching and language choice in relation to the Greek-Cypriot community. For instance, Themistocleous (2008, 2010) found that the Cypriot-Greek is widely used in online chat, especially among teenagers and young adults. Moreover, Themistocleous (2015, p.293) examined digital code-switching between Cypriot–Greek and Standard Greek and showed that both codes are used due to the medium- and social- specific characteristics of Internet Relay Chat, such as its synchronicity and its 'speak-in-writing' character, since Cypriot-Greek is mainly associated to oral communication (Katsareas 2018, n.p.). Moreover, the findings in Themistocleous (2015, pp. 293-294) demonstrated that both varieties of Greek are combined for different effects and allows Greek-Cypriot users to project different roles. Furthermore, Sophocleous and Themistocleous (2014, n.p.) examined code-switching between Standard Greek, Cypriot-Greek and English on Facebook. It was illustrated that switches to Cypriot-Greek were used to create a humorous tone and to express solidarity and informality; Standard Greek was reserved for official statements and was preferred by mature internet users, whereas English was used 'with expressions of affect and evaluative comments'.

Beyond the Greek-Cypriot cultural context, one of the early sociolinguistic studies of online multilingualism is the one by Androutsopoulos (2006b) who investigated the online linguistic practices of immigrants in German-based diasporic web forums. His findings showed 'how code choices are tailored to the requirements of different modes within a website, and how various codes are creatively employed to display and negotiate identities that are related to the diaspora and its virtual discursive spaces' (Androutsopoulos 2006b, p.520). Considering the aforementioned Facebook specificities about context collapse and audience design, Tagg and Seargeant (2015, p.347) argue that language choice is considered as a 'salient aspect of an audience design strategy in the interactive construction and maintenance of communities on Facebook'. Given that belongingness to communities is achieved through identity claims

one could infer that language choice also affects the way in which users construct and maintain several identities online.

2.8.2 Script choice in digital media

Due to new affordances of digital media and more specifically the Unicode (which enables users to use various scripts online), different scripts have also made their appearance on the web. Therefore, after the introduction of the Unicode in 1991 (Unicode org, 2023a), studies have not only focused on language choice, but also script choice in relation to several linguistic varieties (e.g. Tagg and Seargeant 2012; Tagg and Seargeant 2014; Androutsopoulos 2013; Spilioti 2014, 2019). Due to the fact that English was the language of the web in the past, users used the Roman alphabet to transliterate minority or local varieties (e.g. or non-standard linguistic varieties such as Cypriot-Greek) in an attempt 'to represent features of their spoken language in their online writings' (Themistocleous 2010, p.155). According to Androutsopoulos (2011, p.153) 'vernacular Romanisation has been shown to follow different spelling patterns, which vary between transcription (i.e. phonetic representation of native spoken language) and transliteration (i.e. visual representation of native script)'. Despite the introduction of the Unicode which offers the possibility of using a range of scripts online, previous literature suggests that a common practice among users was the Romanisation of language varieties such as Arabic, Cantonese, Greek, Thai, Egypt Arabic and Cypriot-Greek (Androutsopoulos 2009; Danet and Herring 2007; Allehaiby 2013; Themistocleous 2009; Tseliga 2007; Tagg and Seargeant 2012; Palfreyman and Al-Khalil 2007; Warschauer et. al. 2002).

This practice has caught the interest of researchers as the Romanisation of languages is no longer a constraint on the web but a choice that users make in certain contexts. Previous literature (e.g. Warschauer et. al. 2002; Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou 2003) suggests that social attitudes towards the dominance of English online considered it as a threat to local linguistic varieties. Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou (2003, n.p.) further analysed this practice as 'an attempt by users to participate in the global, taking into account their local identity', as a result of glocalization (a term proposed by Robertson (2005) to account for this negotiation

between the global and the local in online spaces). Androutsopoulos (2013, p. 188) has argued that Romanisation may either involve 'technological constraints, a lack of acquisition of the respective non-Roman script, or a more or less conscious script choice in discourse'. In the case of Cypriot-Greek and Standard Greek (which are considered as the two varieties used in the Greek-Cypriot community) for example, users can employ either the Greek alphabet (even though the spelling of Cypriot-Greek with Greek characters is not formally standardised) or the Roman alphabet.

The Romanisation of linguistic varieties on digital media has been examined in previous literature. Examples of this type of work include studies which examine the Romanisation of Arabic (e.g. Allehaiby 2013; Panovic 2018; Warschauer et. al. 2002; Palfreyman and Al Khalil 2007), Cantonese (e.g. Zhang and Ren 2024; Yeh 2009; Leung, 2009) and Thai (Tagg and Seargeant, 2012). Research examining the Romanisation of the Arabic script includes Allehaiby (2013) who provides a sociolinguistic analysis of the Romanisation of the Arabic Script (also referred to as "Arabizi"), which is widely used in digital media and social networking sites, and discusses the historical emergence of the practice and the social contexts in which it is utilized. In addition, Panovic (2018) investigates the combination of letters from Arabic and Roman scripts within a single word, highlighting the prevalence of the practice among young Egyptians on Twitter. Similarly, Palfreyman and Al Khalil (2007) highlight and explore the use of Romanisation of the Arabic language in instant messages and discuss its influences from computer character sets, from different varieties of spoken Arabic, from the Arabic script and finally, from English orthography. Moreover, Warschauer et. al.'s (2002) findings suggest that among young professionals in Egypt, web browsing and formal email correspondence are primarily conducted in English, whereas informal email discourse and online chatting often involve the use of a Romanized form of Egyptian Arabic.

Similarly, Yeh (2009, p. 70) examined the Romanisation of Cantonese, concluding that it was used daily by Cantonese speakers online who also invented new Romanized versions of words, which did not exist before. Leung (2009) also studied the language practices of Hong Kong university students in blogs and found that Romanisation of Cantonese was used by the students. It was found that each of the respondents 'made

sure to specify with an equal sign exactly which meanings they meant after each romanization', therefore indicating their awareness of potential confusion that may occur among their audiences (Leung 2009, p.48). More recently, Zhang and Ren (2024, p.164) also examined how Chinese dialects, including Cantonese, are used in the popular digital platform bilibili.com and found that 'when it comes to stylising spoken dialects in digital texts, Bilibili users are remarkably resourceful in adopting various linguistic strategies', which also included the romanisation of letters and phonetic transliteration. They highlight that 'Bilibili users utilised Romanised letters to facilitate their formation of written Chinese dialects, mostly for euphemism' (Zhang and Ren 2024, p.159).

Tagg and Seargeant (2012) examined the bilingual practices of a community of English-speaking Thai nationals on two online platforms, Facebook and MSN. Their study concludes that certain forms of orthographic variation occur in English, Romanised Thai and Thai written in the Thai script. Tagg and Seargeant (2012, p.195) also argue that 'in the absence of paralinguistic cues online, the participants are drawing on all the semiotic resources available to them— including those supplied by different writing systems— in performing identities as modern, internationally-oriented Thais'.

The Romanisation of Standard Greek and Cypriot Greek on the web have also been examined by scholars in the field (e.g. Themistocleous 2009; Androutsopoulos 2009; Spilioti 2009; Chalamandaris et. al 2004; Chalamandaris et. al. 2006). For example, Spilioti (2009) investigated alphabet-choice in Greek-text messaging. Her findings highlighted a non-standard graphemic choice, the use of both Greek and Roman characters in the encoding of a single message. The analysis showed that this marked choice is a means of indexing the participants' 'cultural affiliation to global youth cultures' (Spilioti 2009, p.409). Furthermore, Sophocleous and Themistocleous (2014, n.p.) have also found that mature participants reported that they accept the Romanisation of Standard Greek in digital media but prefer to use Greek fonts in their digital writing. They also stated that they do not write in Cypriot-Greek, either in online or offline contexts, and they expressed strong negative attitudes towards the Romanisation of Cypriot-Greek outside the domain of digital writing (Sophocleous and

Themistocleous 2014, n.p.). This finding echoes research by Themistocleous and Sophocleous (2012), in which it was found that older users preferred Cypriot-Greek with Greek fonts. Taking the above findings into consideration, it appears that the ways in which users employ Greek and/or Roman fonts for these varieties are associated with the language attitudes towards these varieties and the age of the users, as well as the identities they wish to construct in relation to youth culture.

Thus, previous literature suggests that despite the affordances of digital media and the Unicode, which offers the possibility of using a range of scripts online, the Romanisation of language varieties is still prevalent in digital media, especially among younger users, as suggested by previous literature (e.g. Leung 2009; Spilioti 2009; Warschauer et. al. 2002; Panovic 2018). Therefore, it seems that script choice may be used strategically by digital media users to construct various identities and to achieve several communicative goals.

2.8.3 Non-Standard spelling, linguistic structures and punctuation in digital media

Early CMC research focused on the language of the internet, referring to this variety as 'Netspeak' (Crystal 2001) or later on as 'Textspeak' (Crystal 2004) to account for the textual character of language online. Previous research suggests that non-standard linguistic structures and punctuation markers in digital media, and social media, is also evident (e.g. Naradhipa and Purwarianti 2012; Busch 2021). According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.263), a challenge faced by scholars examining language on the web was that 'it has often been noted that it is difficult to distinguish genuine errors (occasioned by the demands of quick typing) from deliberate deviations which contribute to a kind of argot or sociolect'. Nevertheless, digital writing practices attracted the interest of scholars with Danet (2001, p.17) proposing a list of nine common features of digital writing which included: multiple punctuation, eccentric spelling, capital letters, asterisks for emphasis, written out laughter, descriptions of action, 'smiley' icons, abbreviations, and the use of all lower case. Her work inspired more research examining digital writing practices (e.g. Nishimura 2007; Crystal 2001; Baron 2008; Bieswanger 2013). Bieswanger (2013, p.464) further categorized these micro-linguistic

features of CMC into four broad categories i.e. 1) Emoticons, 2) Non-standard spelling and creative use of writing systems, 3) Abbreviation, 4) Non-standard punctuation.

Non-standard spelling has attracted the interest of several scholars examining CMC communication (e.g. Bieswanger, 2013; Danet and Herring, 2007; Crystal, 2001; Thurlow and Brown, 2003). Establishing whether unconventional spelling was intentional or not has been a challenge for researchers (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Bieswanger, 2013) leading to acknowledging typos or misspellings as different kinds of non-standard spelling (Thurlow and Brown, 2003). Nevertheless, Herring (2001, p. 617) maintains that most non-standard forms are intentional, by arguing that:'although computer-mediated language often contains nonstandard features, only a relatively small percentage of such features appears to be errors caused by inattention or lack of knowledge of the standard forms'. She continues by explaining that 'the majority are deliberate choices made by users to economize on typing effort, mimic spoken language, or express themselves creatively' (Herring 2001, p. 617). Hence, Herring (2001, p. 617) argues that economy in effort seems to be the motivating factor in non-standard spelling.

Abbreviated forms of language or also referred to as 'shortenings' (Bieswanger 2013, p.474) or 'deletions' (Herring and Zelenkauskaite 2008, pp. 82–84) refer to 'lexical forms that are made up by fewer characters than the full form of a word or a combination of words' (Bieswanger 2007, n.p.). According to Bieswanger (2013, p.474), there are various forms of abbreviated forms such as initialisms such as 'lol' for 'laughing out loud', vowel deletions such as 'ovr' for the English word 'over', contractions such as 'don't' and letter/number homophones such as 'b' for 'be'. Abbreviation was evident in CMC texting practices (Crystal 2001; Thurlow and Brown 2003; Deumert and Masinyana 2008) which has led scholars examining the frequency of these shortenings across different language varieties on the web, such as English, German and Italian (e.g. Bieswanger 2007; Kessler 2008; Herring and Zelenkauskaite 2008). Scholars concluded that abbreviations were used on purpose by its users for various reasons such as economy in effort (Herring 2001, p. 617), or for language play and creativity purposes, as well as creating a sense of familiarity and intimacy in the online community (Lee 2007, p. 201).

Another online practice that has been found to be similar among online users is non-standard punctuation (e.g. Busch 2021; Bieswanger 2013; Tseliga 2007; Danet 2001; Page 2012). Non-standard punctuation features include either the absence of punctuation, the use of multiple punctuation marks or capitalization (e.g. Page 2012; Crystal 2001; Danet 2001; Tseliga 2007; Bieswanger 2013; Busch 2021). According to Busch (2021, p.4), the use of multiple or exaggerated punctuation marks one after the other, i.e. exclamation marks, multiple dots, indicate a shift to the interactional principle in digital writing. According to Busch (2021, p. 1) non-standard punctuation establishes 'a graphic means of communicative and social contextualization in digital interactions'. Moreover, multiple punctuation marks are also associated in the literature with playfulness and informality (Tseliga 2007, p. 121) and with emotional involvement (Luginbühl 2003, p. 74). According to Bieswanger (2013, pp. 477-478), like other micro-linguistic tools associated with CMC contexts and hence digital media, non-standard punctuation shows variation. However, drawing on previous literature (e.g. Baron 2008) it seems that 'in contrast to the use of shortenings, [...] the occurrence of non-standard punctuation seems to depend more on the social background of the user and the mode used than on the language of the interaction' (Bieswanger 2013, pp. 477-478).

Non-standard linguistic structures are also evident in CMC and digital media contexts (e.g. Soffer 2012, p.1092; Darvin 2016, p.536). Previous literature suggests that the influence of oral communication on digital media is evident. According to Darvin (2016, p.536), linguistic structures have evolved in the digital age due to the limitations of space and the speed in which texts can be delivered online which has led to the 'merge of the written and the spoken'. Page (2012, pp.81-83) who examined storytelling styles on Facebook found that linguistic structures on digital media included an affective discourse style which is marked with the use intensification devices such as capitalization, repeated exclamation marks, repetition, exaggerated quantifiers (e.g. 'all', 'everyone') and frequent use of boosters (i.e. 'very', 'really' and 'so'). According to Darvin (2016, p. 536) the social network structures in digital media connect people on a global scale and therefore provide users with 'opportunities for multilingual encounters and translingual practices, revitalising languages and asserting new identities'. As

already discussed in previous sections, users form new linguistic structures which may include more than one linguistic variety that deviate from the standard, leading to translingual and multilingual practices.

2.8.4 Iconographetic communication in digital media

Due to the nature of digital media, facial expressions and non-textual social cues such as paralanguage, prosody and gesture are not present in online communication in the traditional sense (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 263). Nevertheless, research has shown that it is possible to communicate nonverbal signals online, through the use of hyperlinks, emoticons, animations, other technological conventions (Papacharissi 2002a, p.644). These non-verbal features add to how users construct identities on digital media conveying an extra layer for research which is resulted from the multimodal nature of digital media nowadays.

Emoticons (i.e. the term originating from the blend of the nouns 'emotion' and 'icon' (Bieswanger 2013, p.470)) have been very popular in CMC contexts, especially when users employ them as non-verbal indicators of emotion and feelings (e.g. Crystal 2001; Rezabek and Cochenour 1998; Dresner and Herring 2010; Bieswanger 2013). Emoticons 'have an important interpersonal function, conveying to the hearer how the messages should be read and avoiding possible offence' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.263). Nishimura (2015, p.22) defines emoticons as 'a visual element embedded in text in digital communication, most typically faces created by combining punctuation and typographic symbols to express a notion'. In research related to emoticons the relationship between gender and the use of emoticons has also been explored. In previous research (e.g. Witmer and Katzman 1997; Wolf 2000; Baron 2004; Herring 2003) it was found emoticons were used more often by women in comparison to men. Dresner and Herring (2010, p.250) add that emoticons cannot only be used to express emotions but can also be a 'textual indication of illocutionary force', identifying three functions of emoticons i.e. (a) 'emotion, mapped directly onto facial expression (e.g. happy or sad); (b) non emotional meaning, mapped conventionally onto facial expression (e.g. a wink as indicating joking intent; an anxious smile); and (c)

illocutionary force indicators that do not map conventionally onto facial expression (e.g. ‘a smile as downgrading a complaint to a simple assertion)’.

Nevertheless, throughout the years emoticons are readily available on users’ keyboards in the form of Emoji. Sun (2019, p. 511) defines Emoji ‘a series of visual emotional symbols representing facial expressions and some other items frequently appeared in life and people's communication’. Users can either use punctuation markers to form emoticons or select emojis from the available keyboard by Unicode (Unicode org, 2023b). Emojis have been in the centre of linguistic research in digital communication as suggested by previous literature (e.g. Logi and Zappavigna 2021; Siever 2019; Zappavigna and Logi 2021; Ferrari 2023; Sun 2019; Hasyim 2019; Wagner et. al. 2020) focusing on the ways emojis are used along with language for meaning-making purposes. Similar to emoticons, emojis have also been considered as capable of conveying emotions, and as a result of people’s desire to demonstrate these emotions (Sun 2019, p.378; Ferrari 2023, p. 120). According to Ferrari (2023, p. 116), both semantics and pragmatics research have focused on emojis with the former considering an emoji as a sign, and the latter being ‘concerned with the sender’s communicative intention and the receiver’s reaction’. Previous literature, has also examined emojis in relation to identities (e.g. Robertson et. al. 2021; Wagner et. al. 2020; Ge 2019; Li et. al. 2020). According to Wagner et. al. (2020, p.306), representing thoughts, feelings and even identities through the use of emojis is an ongoing demand that keeps growing, and it seems that emojis have become important in the digital culture regardless of the user’s age. In the digital age, emojis have enabled a more direct and effective communication, replacing words and expressions with signs, while at the same time enriching language use and giving the impression of users who are less cold, distant and more sensitive to their environment (Wagner et. al. 2020, p. 306). In addition, emojis have led to new ways of communication online which is ‘supposedly more entertaining, more transparent and less time-consuming in a society in which people’s desire is to communicate without any constraint and where interaction with others is achieved faster’ (Wagner et. al. 2020, p.307).

Taking all the above into consideration, it seems that the aforementioned graphological and iconographetic features have often been associated with the playful

and creative nature of digital media and internet discourse (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.265; Tseliga 2007, p. 121; Lee 2007, p.201). Herring et. al (2013, p.8) argue the common features of language use online such as abbreviation, unconventional spelling, acronyms, emoticons and other features 'represent the inherently ludic character of language use on the Internet' and have been associated with ludic and playful identities on the internet.

2.8.5 Storytelling in digital media

Storytelling, according to De Fina (2016, p.473), is among 'the most common forms of discourse in human communication' and there has been a great interest in storytelling in digital media (e.g. De Fina 2016; Page et.al 2013; Georgakopoulou 2007a, 2007b, 2022; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Georgalou 2015; Jin et. al 2015). Early research examining storytelling in CMC focused on 'what types of stories are told, how, and in which CMC environments' (Georgakopoulou 2013, p. 691). Initially, the focus was on fictional stories and representations in CMC contexts (Georgakopoulou 2013, p. 691). Examples of this type of studies include Ciccoricco (2007) and Bell (2010). Examining narratives in various media has been the main focus of this line of work (Ryan and Thon 2014; Ryan et. al. 2004).

Throughout the years research has focused on digital storytelling, emphasizing the possibilities that digital media offer 'for the co-production and wide distribution of stories' often focusing on self-presentational practices (Georgakopoulou 2013, p. 693). More specifically, small stories have been in the centre of digital media research whose definitions are 'are much looser and more fluid' and the role of enhanced interactivity and the multiple ways in which users are involved in shaping a story discursively are also highlighted and examined in previous literature (Georgakopoulou 2013, p. 700). Previous research suggests that storytelling can be used as a discursive strategy for expressing an opinion, stance-taking, constructing several discursive identities and achieving authenticity on digital and social media (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2011; Georgakopoulou 2015; Thornborrow 2015; Giaxoglou and Spilioti 2020; Georgakopoulou 2022). Georgakopoulou's (2015) study emphasizes the importance of a story's trasnportality on digital media and highlighted that stance-taking is central in

narrative activity. Her study has shown that the transportality of stories online relies heavily on recontextualization processes of selected aspects of the same story by various people and is facilitated by platform-specific affordances (Georgakopoulou 2015, pp. 64-65).

More recent work in relation to storytelling and in particular small stories on social media (e.g. Georgakopoulou 2022; Georgakopoulou 2021; Mäkelä et. al. 2021) discusses a storytelling boom trend on social media. Storytelling boom refers to 'the design of stories as specific features on a range of platforms' (Georgakopoulou 2022, p. 265). Social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok now offer the possibility to users to share stories on their profiles, which disappear after 24 hours, urging their users to upload more of their everyday moments. More specifically, Georgakopoulou (2022, p. 265) focuses on self-presentation in relation to authenticity and storytelling practices through the sharing of Instagram stories. She highlights that authenticity is 'attestable in the values underlying the design of stories, the affordances offered, and the storytelling practices that these commonly lead to'. This type of 'imperfect sharing' of small stories for sharing moments happening here and now contributes to the authenticity the users wish to project to their audiences by letting them have access to moments of their daily life (Georgakopoulou 2022, p.265).

2.8.6 Im/politeness in digital media

Politeness and impoliteness have also attracted the interest of scholars examining digital media and CMC contexts (e.g. Subyantoro and Apriyanto 2020; Ibrahim 2020; Nishimura 2010; Vladimirou and House 2018; Ambarwati et. al. 2019; Prayitno et. al. 2021). Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which draws on Goffman's (1955, 1967) concept of face theory, has been highly influential when examining politeness and impoliteness on the internet. Goffman (1967, p. 5), defines face as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line of others assume he has taken during a particular contact'. In other words, face refers to one's self-image and the desire by most people to portray a positive self-image to others. Drawing on Goffman's (1955, 1967) notion of face, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 311) make the assumption that people have two different types of face i.e. a positive and a negative

face. The former is defined as 'the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of)' whereas the latter is defined as 'the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, right to non-distraction, - i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition' (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 311). Drawing on the assumption that positive and negative face exist universally among humans, they argue that 'certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face' proposing that these face threatening acts can be verbal (using words), paraverbal (conveyed through characteristics of speech such as tone or intonation) or non-verbal (e.g. facial expressions and body language) (Brown and Levinson 1987). Their politeness theory accounts for positive and negative face threatening acts and proposes four politeness strategies.

Drawing on Goffman's (1955; 1967) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) work, studies on digital media focus on either politeness or impoliteness on the web. Previous literature (e.g. Nishimura 2019, 2010; Subyantoro and Apriyanto 2020; Ibrahim 2020; Vladimirou and House 2018; Angouri and Tseliga 2010; Locher 2010) suggests that the latter seems to be a prominent research topic on digital media, and previously on CMC contexts. Drawing on Locher and Watts (2005), Tagg et. al. (2017, p.23) argue that a more recent model on politeness and relational work on social media considers politeness and impoliteness as 'extreme ends of a spectrum of behaviour'. Nishimura (2010, p. 38) also suggests that 'no linguistic forms [..] are inherently polite or impolite'. Similarly, previous linguistic research has indicated that what is considered as impolite, aggressive or marked behaviour is dependent on the (macro) social context, the objective of communication, 'the co-constructed norms of the forum, the relationship between participants and the dynamic group identities which the interactants call upon in any given situation' proposing a contextual approach to what constitutes as online aggression (Angouri and Tseliga 2010, p. 57). Therefore, according to Tagg et. al. (2017, pp.23-24) 'what is considered as aggressive, impolite or offensive will vary between communities or online sites and will change over time'. Therefore, the focus of research has shifted from not only establishing (im)politeness linguistic strategies (e.g. Brown and Levinson 1987), but also establishing how participants respond to a perceived offensive linguistic behaviour, the complex shared norms of appropriateness

often reflecting shared social/political views, the various identities constructed through issues of impoliteness (e.g. Tagg et. al. 2017; Angouri and Tseliga 2010; Locher 2010).

A prominent research interest in digital media has been conflict and more specifically hate speech in relation to impoliteness (e.g. Akintola and Ayantayo 2018; El Sherief et. al. 2018; Subyantoro and Apriyanto 2020; Kienpointner 2018; Tagg et. al. 2017). According to Tagg et. al. (2017, p.24) 'conflict often emerges in response o people's adoption of adversarial stances to others' views, encouraged by Internet affordances and shaped by immediate social norms'. Nevertheless, conflict online largely depends on affordances of digital technology and the particular sites which may encourage conflict due to anonymity and multiparty communication in the form of comments (Tagg et.al. 2017, p.24). Hate speeches have received attention from scholars (e.g. Akintola and Ayantayo 2018; El Sherief et. al. 2018; Subyantoro and Apriyanto 2020; Kienpointner 2018) and often involve communication in the form of insults, reflecting discrimination against certain group members due to their ethnicity, gender, religion, race or other characteristics denoting their group membership (Akintola and Ayantayo 2018, p. 98; Bagdikian 1997, p.4). Research examining hate speech online is often concerned with markers of hate speech and its target (e.g. El Sherief et. al. 2018).

On the other hand, research (e.g. Tagg et. al 2017; Blommaert and Varis 2015) suggests that another characteristic of social media and specific platforms, such as Facebook, is online conviviality. Conviviality refers to 'the desire for peaceful co-existence through negotiating or ignoring difference and avoiding contentious debate' (Tagg et. al. 2017, p. 46), which is the opposite of online conflict and hate speech. According to Tagg et. al. 2017, p. 47) people online desire to project a positive persona that is liked by their audiences and, hence, avoid engaging in conflict, in the pursuit of positive self-presentation (Tagg et. al. 2017, pp. 47-48). Conviviality online is characterized by polite and 'phatic' interactions which seems to be related to the sociality taking place on social media and the relationships of social media users with their audiences in the offline world (Blommaert and Varis 2015, pp.42-45).

2.9 Conclusion

Taking all the above into consideration, this chapter reviewed previous literature in relation to identity theory, and discussed different essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches to identity in relation to language. This chapter aimed to establish the theoretical framework to identity of the current study and consider previous literature which examined the key linguistic and other semiotic means through which identity is constructed in digital media. Drawing on previous literature discussed in this chapter, the following chapter will provide the methodological framework of the study in order to examine how older Facebook users do identity work on their Facebook walls.

Chapter 3: Data and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This study aims at investigating how older Facebook users do identity work on their Facebook walls. This chapter focuses on the research design of the study. After establishing the broader methodological framework of the study, I will present my data collection methods and the criteria for choosing a specific sample for the purposes of my research. Then, the participants of the study will be described and some background information will be provided for each one of them. Furthermore, the challenges and issues faced during the recruitment of participants and the data collection will be discussed. These methodological issues include challenges related to ethics and ethical considerations when collecting data online, focusing on the public and private dichotomy and the multimodal composition of the data collected. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the data analysis methods used in the study.

3.2 Sociolinguistic Situation in Cyprus

The sociolinguistic situation in Cyprus is characterized by linguistic diversity which is shaped by cultural heritage, as well as historical and political dynamics. According to Themistocleous (2019, p. 94) 'the Republic of Cyprus is a country characterized by a long-term conflict which resulted in the geopolitical division of the island', as the island is currently divided between the Northern part mainly inhabited by Turkish-Cypriots and the Southern part, mainly inhabited by Greek-Cypriots. Thus, Cyprus is home to two main linguistic communities: Greek-speaking Cypriots and Turkish-speaking Cypriots.

As supported by Themistocleous (2019, p. 98), the linguistic repertoire of the two ethnic communities i.e. the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot, consists of a local dialect (Cypriot-Greek or Cypriot-Turkish) which is 'mainly used for everyday oral communication and the respective standard language (Standard Modern Greek or Standard Turkish) which is learnt through formal education and it is used for written purposes'. The sociolinguistic situation in the Republic of Cyprus is also influenced by ongoing efforts towards reconciliation and reunification between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. Both Greek and Turkish are recognized as official languages in Cyprus, reflecting the linguistic rights of both communities. In terms of the Greek-Cypriot

community, which is examined in this study, while standard Modern Greek is used in formal contexts such as education and for written purposes, within the Greek-speaking community the Cypriot Greek dialect is the primary means of every day informal communication, serving as a marker of the Greek Cypriot identity and heritage. Cypriot Greek is a distinctive dialect with unique phonological, lexical, and syntactic features, which have been influenced by interactions with other languages, including Turkish and English. Moreover, there are also regional variations, with differences in language use and pronunciation observed across different areas of the island (Terkourafi 2007, p.67).

The English language also holds significant importance on the island, which is attributed both to the fact that English is considered a global language, but most importantly to the long historical relations between the island and Britain. Cyprus was under the British Empire in the past and was a Crown British colony until 1960, when after the 'Liberation Struggle' against the British colonial rule, which took place in 1955-1959, the state of the Republic of Cyprus was declared and gained its independence in 1960 (Themistocleous 2019, p.97). Thus, English is still dominant on the island, particularly in education, business, tourism, technological development, advertising and interethnic communication (Karpava 2022, p.4; Themistocleous 2019, p.98; Papapavlou and Satraki 2013, p.13).

As argued by Karoulla-Vrikis (2010, cited in Themistocleous 2019) there are two ideological positions among Greek-Cypriots: Hellenisation and Cypriotisation. Hellenisation endorses and supports the island's Greek national identity by focusing on the common aspects between Greece and Cyprus, such as religion, culture, language and hence English is considered a threat to Greekness which alters and distorts the Greek language (Themistocleous 2019, p.98). On the other hand, Cypriotisation endorses an independent Cypriot national identity, 'promoting the use of Greek and Turkish as official languages as well as English, due to its use on the island during the British rule and its associations with globalisation and modernity' (Themistocleous 2019, p.98).

3.3 The Facebook platform

Facebook is a social networking platform which has been founded by Mark Zuckerberg. Its idea was born in 2004 when then twenty-four-year-old Mark was a student at Harvard University as a way for fellow students to connect with each other. By 2012, the platform has reached one billion users (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.339). Since then, it has not ceased to expand, as of January 2023, Facebook was the largest social media platform globally with 2.96 billion active users worldwide (Statista 2023b). According to Tagg and Seargeant (2015, p.339), Mark Zuckerberg's letter which accompanied Facebook's stock market launch in 2012 stated:

> Relationships are the fundamental unit of our society. Relationships are how we discover new ideas, understand our world and ultimately derive long-term happiness. At Facebook, we build tools to help people connect with the people they want and share what they want, and by doing this we are extending people's capacity to build and maintain relationships. People sharing more – even if just with their close friends or families – creates a more open culture and leads to a better understanding of the lives and perspectives of others (2012, cited in Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p. 339)

In a relatively short period of time, Facebook has become a platform for billions of users worldwide where they could interact with their networks of friends, as well as engaging in a variety of social actions, 'from sharing photos and interacting with friends to organising street protests and house parties' (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.339). Facebook has succeeded in altering the ways in which people connect with each other which has been one of the main aims and ambitions of Facebook evident in the quote above.

Facebook has created an online society where users can connect and interact with each other, by 'blurring the boundaries between the interpersonal and informational' (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, pp.339-340). The platform offers a range of sharing possibilities by accessing information authored or generated by other individuals or other social communities and networks on Facebook. This vast access to information may result in opinion-giving, in the sense that users may wish to comment on information

shared. Moreover, the platform's affordances for connectivity, interactivity and building of relationships may result in phatic expression such as small talk. Thus, it has affected the ways in which users 'build and manage relationships and [...] how, as a society, we access and evaluate knowledge' (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.340).

At the beginning, in 2006 Facebook users could only post on their personal profiles referred to as 'walls' (or later on 'timelines'), in the form of status updates which included writing in a box, also referred to as 'Publisher box' which included a prompt asking users 'What's on your mind?' (Lee 2011, p.111). This prompt changed later in 2007 to 'What are you doing right now?' urging users to report on their daily activities and remained the same at the time of data collection for the purposes of the study in 2018. In 2023, the prompt includes the initial prompt along with the first name of the Facebook user, which indicates a more personalised approach. During the years, as Facebook has grown and expanded, it now enables users to communicate in various modes. These include asynchronous or near-synchronous private messaging in the form of Facebook Messenger (Androutsopoulos and Ziegler 2004; Tagg and Seargeant 2015). Synchronous communication refers to a real-time, interaction mode and resembles dyadic or multi party conversations in the virtual space, such as conversations in chats happening in real time, while the term asynchronous refers to communication that is not happening in real time. Facebook breaks down this distinction as it enables real –time chat but also offers a record of the conversation which can be accessed later by users combining both synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication in the form of Facebook Messenger (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015, p. 130). Moreover, Facebook walls can include public or semi-public posts such as status updates, wall posts, and comments (Tagg and Seargeant 2015, p.340). Furthermore, posts now also offer the Live video option in which users can take a live video to share with their audiences which provides a synchronous mode of communication, since fellow audiences can react and comment on these live videos while they are ongoing, or even ask to be included in the live video in order to have a conversation with the person streaming the live video. Users can also add a phrase which indicates their emotions in the form of 'feelings' to their posts, since the platform offers a variety of feelings to choose from. These feelings are accompanied with the

relevant emoticon in order to complement their posts. Finally, the platform also enables users to post life events, in which users can share significant events in their lives such as getting married, engaged or getting a new job.

The affordances of the platform also include the ability of Facebook users to comment or react to Facebook posts. The Like button, which used to only include a thumb up emoticon at the bottom of the content, in order to express whether a user liked a post, it now includes various emoticons which according to the platform indicate different sentiments towards the post. These reactions to the posts express the reader's opinion about the post indicating alignment or dis-alignment with what is being shared. These reactions include a heart, a smiley face with a heart indicating care, a smiley laughing equivalent to the 'haha' expression, along with the 'wow', 'sad' and 'angry' emoticons to reflect these specific sentiments towards the posts shared. In addition, Facebook now offers the story feature through which users can share a photo, video or text which appears for their Facebook audiences for only 24 hours. Stories encourage users to share more moments of their everyday lives with their audiences on a daily basis and hence further enhance the sociability among its users. Finally, users can also author their own post by using text and/or emoticons, create overlay images which is 'the technique of adding text or images over another base image' (Chaudhary 2022, n.p.) re-share ready-made multimodal content such as videos, links, memes, images and emoticons or combine their own content with re-shared content.

In addition to the above platform affordances for posting or sharing, users can also choose the audience who will access specific type of content. As a result, this option blurs the boundaries of the public and private dichotomy since Facebook combines different levels of publicness with parts of the site being 'more or less public/private in terms of both access and content than others' (Bolander and Locher 2014, p.17). Facebook users are able to filter the target audiences of their posts by choosing whether they wish for wall posts on their timelines to be public (i.e. accessible to everyone on Facebook), semi-public (accessible to specific audiences or excluding specific audiences by hiding posts for specific users) or private (accessible to the users themselves only).

For the purposes of this study, and drawing on previous literature (e.g. Georgalou 2017, Lee 2011), the terms 'Walls' and 'Timelines' will be used interchangeably to refer to the Facebook profiles of the participants. In addition, the terms 'status updates' as well as '(wall) posts' will be used interchangeably since both terms have been used in the literature to refer to what users share on their Facebook walls (Georgalou 2017, p. 17). Finally, Facebook friends in this study include people who have been befriended by Facebook users through friend requests and may belong to various networked audiences from the users' social circle. Friend relationships on Facebook is reciprocal since once a Facebook member confirms the friend request by another user, they are both able to 'see and post to each other's Wall or Timeline, unless privacy settings are customized differently by the profile owner' (Georgalou 2017, p. 17).

Despite Facebook's platform changes over the years, the main aim of the platform remains unchanged since its launch in 2012, which is 'posting relevant information on a customizable profile page as well as connecting and interacting with other members, with the major spaces for writing being still available' (Georgalou 2017, p. 18). The platform's affordances also urge users to deploy and/or play with them in order to shape, negotiate, construct and re-construct their identities on their timelines, drawing on their knowledge and perceptions of 'how these affordances are experienced and appropriated, as well as on their wider sociocultural assumptions and values' (Georgalou 2017, p. 18).

3.4 Digital Discourse analysis

The broader methodological approach of the study draws on digital discourse analysis. According to Tovares (2022, p.19), digital discourse analysis relies on theories from several fields of study such as linguistics, literary studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and communication studies. Early research of digital discourse focused on analysing features of online communication such as acronyms, emoticons, non-standard orthography, whereas recent studies focus on 'how actions, identities and ideologies are constructed in online spaces' (Tovares 2022, p.20). According to Waring (2018, p.23), the main research questions of discourse analysts include how discourse is structured, how social actions are accomplished, how identities are negotiated and finally how

ideologies are constructed. Digital discourse analysts draw on various theories and approaches to data analysis; according to Tannen et. al (2018, p.5) the theoretical and methodological diversity of discourse analysis can be an asset, as this diversity 'offers researchers creativity and flexibility in analysing discourse' (Tovares 2022, p.23). Tovares (2022, p.25) also argues that even though 'digital discourse-analytic studies are typically situated within qualitative, interpretive paradigm'; there is a growing number of research that combines mixed methodology from both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study will also draw on previous research and theories in order to examine how older users do identity on their Facebook timelines, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

More specifically, the current study relies on different frameworks in the data analysis chapters but isolates two models as being more influential. The first one is by Androutsopoulos (2014) who identifies three stages in the process of Facebook sharing; namely, selecting, styling and negotiating. The second one is by Wei (2011) who proposes moment analysis for the study of creativity and criticality in multilingual spaces. These two analytical frameworks are closely connected since moment analysis by Wei (2011) has influenced Androutsopoulos' (2014) study.

Sharing is an important aspect of the Facebook platform. John (2013, p. 178) has shown that sharing has become the word of choice to refer to the ways we participate in Web 2.0. He also argues that 'this word builds on more 'traditional' meanings of sharing, enfolding within it both distribution and communication, as well as the usage of sharing in the context of computing' (John 2013, p. 178).Even though it was initially used to refer to the command of the Facebook platform through which users could 'forward a contribution to their own timeline or that of a friend' and it was initially related to the contribution of embedded videos, now it has extended to include the sharing of any status update (Androutsopoulos 2014, p.5). Examining sharing practices on Facebook is also closely related to entextualization which has been defined by Bauman and Briggs (1990, p.73), as the process of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit - a text - that can be lifted out of its interactional setting'. Therefore, drawing on Sung-Yul and Bucholtz (2009) and Giaxoglou (2009), Androutsopoulos (2014, p.5) argues that entextualization focuses on 'detachment of discourse from its original situational context

and the recontextualization of the resulting text in new sites of discourse'. As a result, drawing on John's (2013) work, Androutsopoulos (2014, p.6) argues that practices of sharing are understood as including, but are not limited to 'the transformation of spoken discourse to written text' and refers not only to what is said but also to 'things represented by means of the semiotic resources social networking sites afford their participants'. Drawing on previous literature on entextualization, this study, aims to take into consideration and further analyse entextualized content shared by participants and examine how various identities are constructed through this practice.

In Androutsopoulos (2014, p.7) study, data on Facebook include wall events, a term used in Androutsopoulos' (2013, p.7) study to define 'spatially and temporally delimited, multi-authored sequence of contributions on a Facebook timeline'. Wall events are also referred to in Androutsopoulos' (2014) study as communicative events, a broader term which has been initially used by Hymes (1964). According to Androutsopoulos (2014, pp.7-8), communicative events on Facebook begin with a status update, which can also include 'embedded images, videos, links to web content or a combination thereof'. He also argues that these events are also followed by the audiences' contributions (Androutsopoulos 2014, p.8), which can take various forms such as likes, comments, reactions etc. Therefore, sharing is broadly understood in the study as 'a semiotic practice by which significant moments are entextualized for a networked audience' (Androutsopoulous 2014, p.5).

Significant moments also play a role in the analytical framework suggested by Wei (2011). In Wei's (2011, p. 1224) study 'a moment can be a point in or a period of time which has outstanding significance' and 'is characterized by its distinctiveness and impact on subsequent events or developments'. Once a moment has occurred it 'becomes a reference point or a frame; patterns can be detected by comparing the frequency and regularity of such moments'. Wei's (2011, p.1224) moment analysis, focuses on these moments and aims to capture what appears to be spur-of- the-moment actions that are semiotically highly significant to the actors and their subsequent actions, what prompted such actions and the consequences of such moments including the reactions by other people' (Wei 2011, p.1222). Similarly, Androutsopoulos (2014, p. 5) argues that a Facebook initiating post can be followed by contributions by members of

Facebook audiences. Drawing on Wei's (2011) moment analysis, Androutsopoulos (2014, p.6) adopts the notion of 'moments' as a theoretical and analytical tool, focusing on significant moments that 'are entextualized and interactively negotiated in a semi-public space that is socially construed by individuals in a social networking site'. For the purposes of the study and the qualitative analysis of specific posts and identity construction, the concept of 'significant moments' by Wei (2011) is also employed in a broader sense in this study, in order to select posts that are representative of the activity and the various identities constructed by participants. Thus, even though for ethical considerations the contributions of members of Facebook audiences in the form of comments, likes or reactions could not be included in the study, the number of reactions to the posts in the form of comments, likes, reactions was taken into consideration when choosing which posts to analyse qualitatively in the following analytical chapters. Drawing on Wei's (2011) and Androutsopoulos' (2014) studies, the number of reactions to the posts indicates the audience's interaction with a particular post, its content and the various linguistic and other semiotic tools used, and hence, it indicates its 'significance' not only to the participant's Facebook wall but also to their audiences. As well as the number of reactions, the recurrent use of certain themes and linguistic or other semiotic tools in my data were taken into consideration when choosing which posts to analyse qualitatively.

Drawing on Androutsopoulos (2014, pp.8-11) study, it is suggested that different practices should be taken into consideration by analysts when analysing Facebook communicative events, namely the practices of selecting, styling and negotiating. Selecting involves the process of Facebook users selecting what to share on their timelines. Styling 'refers to the way participants mobilise semiotic resources for entextualization' which can 'index various aspects of communicative context' (Androutsopoulos 2014, p.10). Thus, the selection and styling of communicative events represent key practices in the process of entextualizing significant moments by individual Facebook users (Androutsopoulos 2014, p.10). Negotiating on the other hand, 'refers to the audience engagement that follows up on acts of sharing' and is therefore concerned with the complex and various responses of audience with the shared moment by the Facebook user (Androutsopoulos 2014, p.8-10).

Considering the purposes of this study, and due to ethical considerations which will be explained in section 3.6.1, only the first two practices; namely selecting and styling as suggested by Androutsopoulos (2014) will be examined in the analysis of the posts collected by participants and in relation to the identities constructed by participants on their timelines. More specifically, this study aims to examine what older users select to share on their Facebook wall posts (together with the potential of such content for identity work), as well as the way in which different semiotic tools are used for styling identities on the Facebook platform. Furthermore, in this study, Facebook wall posts are also considered as communicative events (Androutsopoulos 2014; Hymes 1964), where users employ a range of linguistic and other semiotic tools in order to achieve a range of communicative goals on their timelines. These communicative goals and functions are analysed quantitatively initially in order to examine what users select to share on their timelines and for what broad purposes. In chapters 5 and 6, my research takes the form of qualitative analysis which will examine key 'moments' which arise from the data as potentially important or representative of a participant's use of Facebook, due to the high frequency and regularity of such moments in my sample.

3.5 Data collection methods

In order to examine how older Facebook users do identity work on their Facebook walls, two data collection methods are used: 1) observing the participants' activity on Facebook, 2) collecting and recording their Facebook wall posts in the form of screen-shots during a 6-month period starting from January 2018 to September 2018. The 6-month period varied depending on the participant and when consent was acquired to collect their posts.

Observing the participants' activity on Facebook involved noting down information on the profiles of the participants such as the frequency in which they post, the topics they post about, how they choose to post on their timelines i.e. whether they choose to re-share posts generated by others or generate and author their own posts, as well as the number of friends they have on Facebook and how these friends interact with the participants' posts. Background information for each participant such as their age, marital, parental and academic status, profession was acquired with the observation of

their Facebook profiles, since most users include this type of information on their profiles. Moreover, this type of information was also easy to access since participants were approached through my network, or using the snowball sampling method, which allows researchers to recruit participants through referrals from other people (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981, p. 141).

Collecting and recording the posts involved taking a screen-shot of each post on my phone and then these screen-shots were categorised and numbered in separate folders for each participant. Each post may have had various screen-shots, as this enabled me to include everything in the post in cases where the post was long, as well as any quantitative reactions to the posts, such as the number of likes. The names of the screen-shots were for instance 'Post 1' followed by the date when the post was shared by the participant. In cases where the post was long and there were more screen-shots the name of the image was for instance 'Post 1 continued', as indicated in Figure 1.

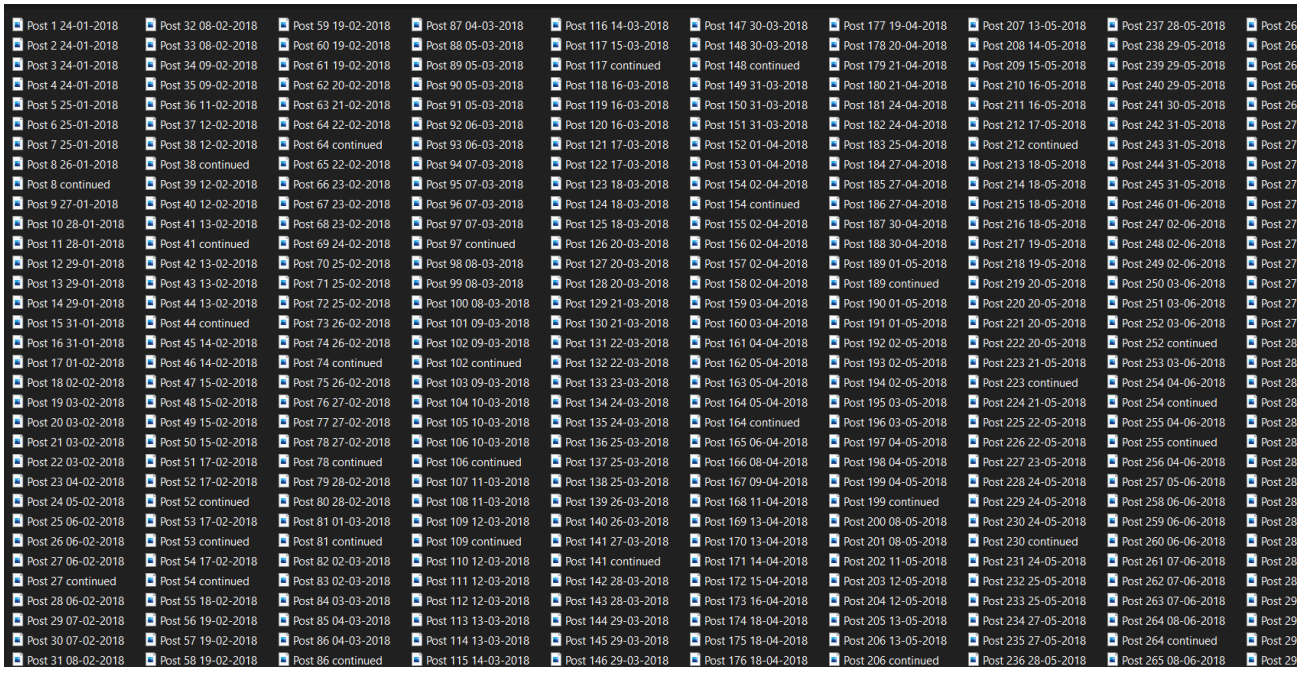


Figure 2: Screen-shot of how posts were recorded

The participants of the study were recruited based on certain criteria. Age was considered as a key criterion for selecting the participants of the study since its aim is to examine identity work on older Facebook users' walls. Examining older users on

Facebook in relation to online identities was motivated by the gap in the literature in relation to older users of Facebook (see section 1.1).

In terms of establishing an age limit for the participants, we need to acknowledge that 'the age at which people are considered "older" is variable' (Van House 2015, n.p.). For example, other studies which investigated older adults like Lindley et. al (2009) recruited participants aged 55 to 84 years old, whereas Van House's (2015) study investigated Facebook users who were 60 to 70 years old. Based on the existing literature, researchers choose a specific definition of older users based on their research questions and the aim of their study. Taking all these into consideration, the age of 45 years old (at the time of data collection) was selected as the lower limit for this study due to several reasons. Considering that these generations were born before 1973, people over 45 represented at the time of the data collection Facebook users who have first encountered computer-mediated communication and digital media as adults, and drawing on previous literature (Prensky 2001; Wang et. al. 2013) they may be considered as 'digital immigrants'.

More specifically, Prensky (2001) and later on Wang et. al (2013), make the distinction between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants'. Digital natives are also referred to in the literature (e.g. Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005) as the Net generation or Millennials, with Palfrey and Gasser (2008, p. 1) arguing that people belonging to this category were born after 1980. According to Wang et. al. (2013, p.409), 'digital natives are the new generation of young people born into the digital age', while "digital immigrants" are those 'who learnt to use computers at some stage during their adult life.' They note that 'whereas digital natives are assumed to be inherently technology-savvy, digital immigrants are usually assumed to have some difficulty with information technology' (Wang et. al. 2013, p. 409). This dichotomy has received some criticism throughout the years, mainly due to its universality and generalization (Prensky 2011, p. 16). Addressing criticism, Prensky (2011, p. 17) elaborated on the dichotomy between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' by explaining the former belonging to a younger generation feel more comfort and ease with digital technology, having grown up with it acknowledging that this may not be the case for every child. He continues by acknowledging that a great number of digital immigrants exhibit digital wisdom even

though they grew up in the pre-digital era (Prensky 2011, p. 20). He discusses wisdom enhancement in relation to digital technology and argues that people of all ages should be encouraged to enhance their digital wisdom (Prensky 2011, p.27). Drawing on Prensky's (2001) dichotomy, this study focuses on digital immigrants rather than digital natives to examine how they use social networking sites such as Facebook since their digital knowledge only started to develop as adults, in contrast to younger generations who grew up with digital technology.

Apart from Prensky's (2001) dichotomy, recruiting participants over 45 years old was also motivated by other reasons as well. For instance, an article on 'The Verge' in 2021 argues that Facebook is perceived by young adults as a place for people in their 40s and 50s (Heath 2021, n.p.). This argument was also reinforced by an article in 'The Guardian' suggesting that young users leave Facebook, while the popularity among people over 55 surges (Sweney, 2018). Furthermore, the definition provided by the OED (2023, n.p.) considers middle age as 'the period of life between young adulthood and old age, now usually regarded as between about forty-five and sixty', which also reinforced the rationale for choosing the age of 45 as the minimum limit for the age of my participants. The age of 65 was chosen as the upper limit for the age of my participants drawing on Britannica (2023) which considers ages 40-45 to 60-65 as being 'middle age'. Drawing on the fact that the age of 60-65 is the age of eligibility for retirement in several contemporary Western countries, it also marks the beginning of 'old age' according to the dictionary, and therefore 65 could be considered as the upper limit for middle age (Britannica 2023). Lastly, apart from the age factor, the population of the study should belong to the Greek-Cypriot community, since this is the specific ethnolinguistic group this study is interested in.

In order to recruit the participants for the study, two methods were used: 1) use of personal network/convenience sampling, motivated by the criteria already mentioned, and 2) snowball sampling, again having in mind the criteria mentioned above. Four participants were targeted and recruited using my personal network (see Figure 2) below. The advantages of this method are that (i) it is easy to contact the participants, (ii) the participants are more willing to participate in the study and (iii) the information about participants and their social relationships is easier for the researcher to retrieve

and access. The latter is significantly important as acquiring information on participants and their social relationships is often limited for analysts (Androutsopoulos 2017, p.237). Nevertheless, the main disadvantage includes sampling bias, as the researcher may choose participants based on their acquaintances. Therefore, there is a great possibility that the subjects share the same traits and characteristics leading to a sample which represents a small subgroup of the entire population. Nevertheless, this disadvantage is less pertinent to a qualitative study, where the emphasis is on the specificities and richness of interaction of individual participants and the group they belong to, rather than the population as a whole.

After recruiting these four participants through my personal network, these participants were asked to give suggestions of any of their peers who they believe use Facebook to a great extent and who would be willing to participate in the study. Therefore, using the snowball sampling method, which 'yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest' (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981, p. 141), nine more participants were targeted and recruited for the study (see Figures 2 and 3). One of the main advantages of snowball sampling is access to more participants. Moreover, a further advantage is that there is no previous contact of the researcher with the participants which leads to eliminating bias. However, a disadvantage of this method may be that initial subjects may nominate people that they know well; therefore, there is a possibility that the subjects share the same traits, characteristics and interests since they belong to similar social circles. This may result in limiting the study's sample and the findings of the study may reflect only a specific social group. Nevertheless, by combining these two methods for recruiting participants, I was hoping to eliminate bias by not knowing personally most of the participants.

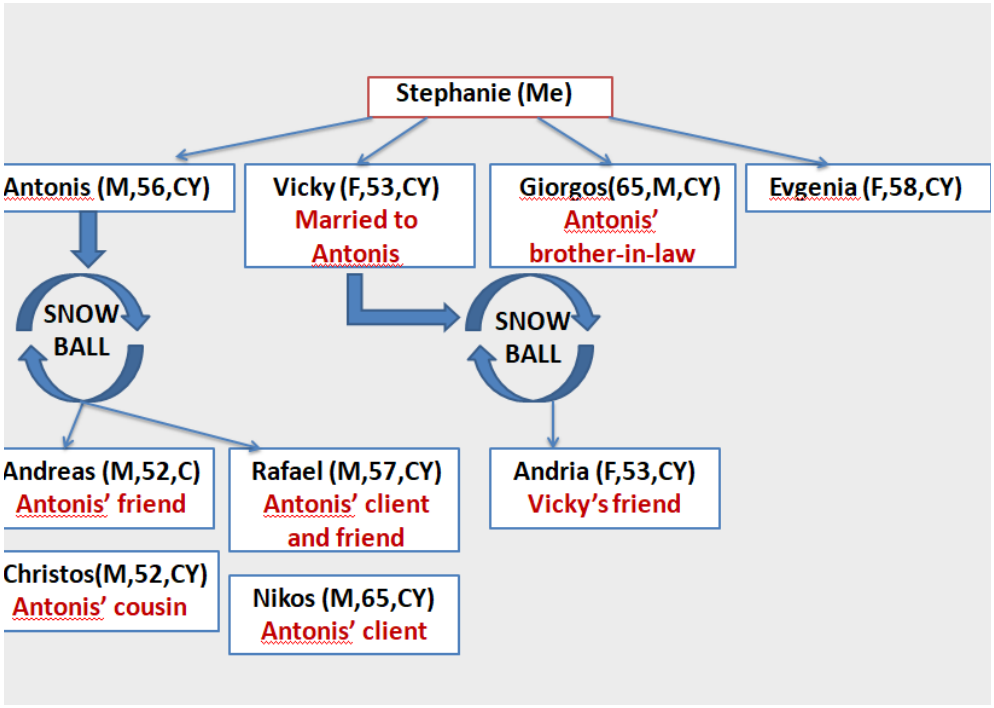


Figure 2: Recruiting participants from personal network and snowball sampling

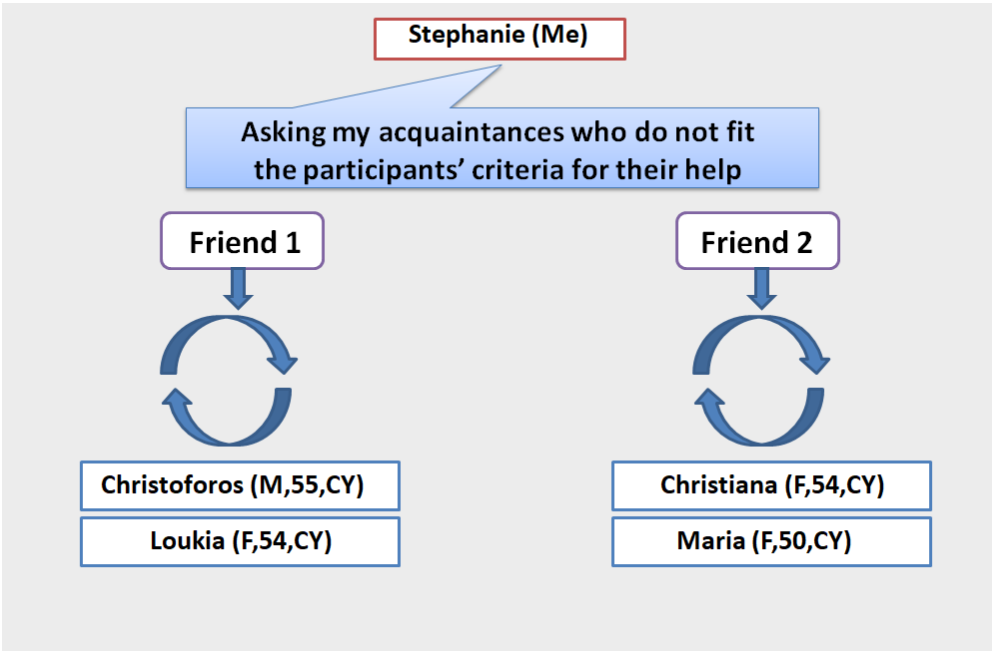


Figure 3: Recruiting participants from friends

As a result, five participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method (see Figure 2) and four participants were recruited using a method similar to snowball sampling (see Figure 3), which involved asking my acquaintances who do not fit the participants' criteria (and hence would not participate in the study) for their help. This method resulted in recruiting four more participants from two of my acquaintances and expanding the initial social network. Considering that these four participants do not belong to the network of the people who were initially recruited through the snowball sampling technique, it is likely that the study included a range of people with a wider range of characteristics and traits. Overall, this study recruited 13 participants whose profiles are presented in the following section.

3.6 Participants and Sample

After identifying the ways in which the participants were recruited, the ethno-linguistic and socio-professional background of each participant is discussed in this section. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, section 6.1, the ethno-linguistic background of the participants belonging to the Greek-Cypriot community involves two linguistic varieties i.e. Standard Greek and Cypriot-Greek. Standard Greek is the prestigious, standard variety typically associated with education, administration, the media and written communication (Karatsareas 2018, n.p.). In contrast, Cypriot-Greek is the non-prestigious, minority language variety, only spoken in Cyprus and is associated with informal, oral communication (Karatsareas 2018, n.p.; Themistocleous et. al. 2012, p. 262). In the description of each participant there is also information about the exact number of posts collected during the 6-month period. Overall, the sample includes 2845 posts. As already mentioned in section 3.4, the socio-professional information for each participant was gathered during the observation of their Facebook profile. Moreover, this type of information was also easy to access for the participants who were recruited using snowball sampling or using my personal network.

At the time of the data collection, Antonis was a 56-year-old Greek-Cypriot living in Cyprus. He is a shop owner and is married with children. His parents were Greeks born

and raised in Egypt and then moved to Cyprus, where Antonis was born. Standard Greek was the language spoken at home and there was minimum input of Cypriot-Greek from his parents. However, he was able to acquire Cypriot-Greek features as he was born and raised in Cyprus, where he went to school. Moreover, he studied in the USA and acquired his undergraduate degree in his 20s. Antonis speaks English fairly fluently, as he has lived in the USA for four years. He joined Facebook in 2009, had 363 friends on Facebook and posted 2 messages during the data collection period.

Vicky was a 53-year-old Greek-Cypriot living in Cyprus. She is a social worker working for the Cypriot government. She is married to Antonis and they have children together. Her parents are both Greek-Cypriots born and raised in Cyprus and therefore Cypriot-Greek was spoken at home. Her father is an English teacher. As a result, Vicky had a considerable Cypriot-Greek input as well as English due to her father. Vicky studied in Greece for four years in her 20s and later on acquired a master's degree in her 40s at a private English university in Cyprus, where she was able to use English to a great extent. She joined Facebook in 2009, had 245 friends on Facebook and posted 8 messages from January to July 2018.

Giorgos is a Greek-Cypriot living in Cyprus. He was 65 years old when the data was collected. He used to work in a shipping company in Cyprus and is now retired. Moreover, he is Antonis' brother-in-law, as he is married to his sister and they have a child together. Giorgos is the son of a Greek-Cypriot mother and a Greek father who were born and raised in Egypt. His parents mostly spoke Greek at home and even though he is exposed to Cypriot-Greek, as he lives in Cyprus, he mainly uses Standard Greek. He also acquired a diploma from a private school in Greece when he was younger. He joined Facebook in 2013, had 388 friends on Facebook and posted 35 messages on Facebook during the data collection period.

The last participant from my personal network is Evgenia who was a 58-year-old Greek-Cypriot housewife living in Cyprus. She is married with children and her parents and husband are Greek-Cypriots. Therefore, she has been exposed to Cypriot-Greek since

she was born. She joined Facebook in 2011, had 186 friends on Facebook, and posted 12 messages.

As shown in Figure 2 in section 3.4, using the snowball sampling method, resulted in Antonis and Vicky helping me recruit more participants for the study: Andreas, Christos, Rafael, Nikos and Andria.

Andreas was a 52-year-old Greek-Cypriot male living in Cyprus. He is married with children. He is a university professor at a university in Cyprus. His parents are both Greek-Cypriot and he was born and raised in Cyprus, with Cypriot-Greek being the language spoken at home. He was able to acquire a bachelor, masters and PhD in the USA. By studying in the USA he was exposed to the English language and still uses English daily at his work environment. He joined Facebook in 2007, had 1147 friends and posted 157 messages on Facebook during the period of data collection.

Christos was a 52-year-old who is Greek-Cypriot and lives in Cyprus. Moreover, he is a pastry chef and is married with children. Christos is Antonis' cousin. He was born and raised in Cyprus, but his father was of Greek origin, born and raised in Egypt, whereas his mother was Greek-Cypriot. Therefore, the languages spoken at home when he was growing up were both Standard Greek and Cypriot-Greek. He left school when he was a teenager to work with his father in their pastry business. He joined Facebook in 2009, had 562 Facebook friends and posted 69 messages from January to July.

Rafael is also Greek-Cypriot and was 57 years old. He is an artist and a musician living in Cyprus. He is divorced with a child from his first marriage and is now remarried. Rafael is Antonis' client and friend. His parents are both Greek-Cypriots born in Cyprus, therefore Cypriot-Greek was spoken at home. He sings Italian songs at many venues in Cyprus, even though he never had Italian lessons and never lived in Italy. When asked about his use of Italian, he said that he does not know how to speak or write Italian but learned some phrases and words from the songs he sings empirically. He also writes,

composes and sings Greek songs. He joined Facebook in 2006, had 2568 Facebook friends and posted 522 messages.

Nikos was 65 years old. He is also Greek-Cypriot and lives in Cyprus. He is also a musician, born and raised in Cyprus, he is divorced with children and he is Antonis' client and friend. He studied music in Israel and sings Greek songs in Cyprus. He is a performer and a pianist. He joined Facebook in 2009 and had 4989 friends in this Facebook account. He also has two more Facebook accounts. From January to July 2018 he posted 368 messages on Facebook.

The last participant from the snowball sample is Andria who was 53 years old and is also a Greek-Cypriot who lives in Cyprus. She is a travel agent living in Cyprus and is now divorced with children, beginning at the same time a new relationship. Moreover, she is Vicky's childhood friend. Her parents are also Greek-Cypriot and the language input she had at home was mainly in Cypriot-Greek and Standard Greek. She studied Business in the UK when she was in her 20s and therefore, is fluent in English. She also uses English daily at work. She joined Facebook in 2009, had 458 Facebook friends and posted 121 messages from March to September 2018.

After recruiting the participants through the snowball sampling method, I asked two acquaintances for their help. My acquaintances did not fit the age criteria for my research; since they were in their 20s, but were able to help me recruit four more participants as shown in Figure 3 (see section 3.4): Christophoros, Loukia, Christiana, and Maria.

Christophoros was a 55-year-old Greek-Cypriot male born and raised in Cyprus. He lives in Cyprus and is an excavation contractor. He is married with children and has only lived in Cyprus since he was born. Both his parents are Greek-Cypriot and the main input was Cypriot-Greek at home. He does not speak any other languages but understands some phrases in English. He joined Facebook in 2013, had 1394 friends on Facebook and posted 451 messages from January to July.

Loukia was a 52-year-old Greek-Cypriot female living in Cyprus. She is single with no children and is not in a relationship. She is a secretary in a firm in Cyprus. Both her parents are Greek-Cypriots and she was born and raised in Cyprus. She mainly uses English at work, especially in spoken interaction. She joined Facebook in 2014, had 139 Facebook friends and posted 161 messages from January to July.

Christiana was 54 years old. She is Greek-Cypriot born and raised in Cyprus and works for the government. She is married with children and both her children studied in the UK and they now live in the UK and in the USA, therefore she is using English a lot, as she travels a lot to visit her children. Both her parents are Greek-Cypriots and she is therefore exposed to Cypriot-Greek daily due to her family, friends and acquaintances, but also to Standard Greek due to her work environment. Finally, she joined Facebook in 2009, had 359 Facebook friends and posted 1 message from March to September.

The final participant is Maria, who was 50 years old at the time of data collection. She is a Greek-Cypriot born and raised in Cyprus and is a secretary who works for an office in Cyprus. She is married with children and both her parents are Greek-Cypriot. Therefore, Cypriot-Greek was the language used at home when she was growing up and she is also exposed to English daily due to her work environment and needs. She joined Facebook in 2010 and had 1263 friends on Facebook. From February to August she had 938 messages on Facebook.

Drawing on the above descriptions of the participants, their ethnolinguistic backgrounds display some differences and similarities. For instance, all participants share the same ethnicity since they are Greek-Cypriots. They belong to similar age groups (the youngest participant being 50 and the oldest being 65 years old). Nevertheless, the linguistic repertoire of each participant varies slightly with the dominant language varieties being Standard Greek, Cypriot Greek and English. While thirteen (13) Facebook users gave their consent to participate in the research, the posts of nine (9) participants will be further analysed for the purposes of the study (overall

2822 posts). The reason for discarding the posts of four (4) participants, namely Vicky, Evgenia, Antonis and Christiana, is that they only produced a very small amount of posts, as indicated in the above descriptions; during the period of data collection (e.g. Antonis only posted twice during the 6-month period, Vicky had 8 posts, Evgenia 12 and Christiana only posted once). Therefore, for the purposes of the study, the amount of data collected from these participants was considered as insufficient for examining the identities constructed by these participants and the linguistic and other semiotic tools used to construct various identities.

3.7 Methodological and data collection challenges

Since the 1990s, as Herring (2004, p.1) highlights, the Internet has triggered a great amount of research on human behaviour, as

> people engage in socially meaningful activities online in a way that typically leaves a textual trace, making the interactions more accessible to scrutiny and reflection than is the case in ephemeral spoken communication and enabling researchers to employ empirical micro-level methods to shed light on macro-level phenomena.

Nevertheless, despite this great potential as Herring (2004), Androutsopoulos (2017), Bolander and Locher (2014) note, several issues and challenges arise when collecting online data for research, and more specifically sociolinguistic research. Bolander and Locher (2014, p.14) divide these issues into four categories: 1) ethics, 2) multimodality, 3) mixed methodologies and the relationship between online and offline settings, and 4) web corpora and annotation. The first three issues will be further explained and examined in relation to this study, as several issues and challenges arose when collecting the data related to these three categories.

3.7.1 Ethics

The key principles of ethics were fundamentally considered prior to recruiting the participants and collecting data. These principles include respecting human dignity,

privacy, sensitivities, interests, autonomy, safety and protection from harm (BAAL 2016; BAAL 2021; AoIR 2012; AoIR 2019). In terms of ethics online, 'respecting and protecting the privacy of informants is a basic legal and ethical requirement in social-scientific fieldwork' (Androutsopoulos2017, p.247). Drawing on previous literature (e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2017; Bolander and Locher, 2014; Landert and Jucker, 2011; Spilioti and Tagg, 2017) ethics online can be challenging in terms of defining what is public, semi-public and private, which is a core issue in order to ensure anonymity and privacy.

In early research (until mid 1990s), defining the degree to which a group was public or private determined to a large extent ethical decisions' (Bolander and Locher 2014, p.17). 'Public' and 'private' were understood in relation to access. For instance, Herring (1996, p.6) distinguished between restricted and open-access electronic fora, the former of which were considered private whereas the latter were considered public. Since the mid to late 1990s, one of the main developments concerns the rethinking of the public and private distinction in digital media environments. As Bolander and Locher (2014, p. 17) note, this distinction shifted towards conceptualising 'public' and 'private' 'in terms of both access and content', and framing 'this conceptualisation as gradable and not absolute', moving towards a more differentiated understanding of the dichotomy between public and private. Landert and Jucker (2011) add that the researchers

> are confronted with media texts that combine private and public aspects on various levels. They may be public in the sense that they are within the public space and can be read by a large and anonymous audience, while at the same time discussing topics which we think of as 'private' and using language which is associated with informal and private conversations (Landert and Jucker 2011, p.1423)

Taking all previous literature into consideration and having in mind that the dichotomy between public and private is complicated and challenging, the need to assess whether the Facebook space was public or private arose. Facebook is a social networking site which combines different levels of publicness in the sense that 'parts of [the] site (e.g.., the personal profile information on Facebook compared with wall posts)

are more or less public/private in terms of both access and content than others' (Bolander and Locher 2014, p.17). Therefore, it is more challenging for a researcher 'to conceive of the ethical decision-making process as a holistic one that can be applied to a whole site, and only once at the beginning of the research process' (Bolander and Locher 2014, p.17).

Moreover, according to Tagg and Sergeant (2016, p.346), although there are options for conducting one-to-one conversations on Facebook, the audience for most Facebook posts can be described as 'semi-public' in the sense that, although a user decides who to add as their friend on the platform, they cannot be entirely certain about the audience of their posts and who will read them or react to them. Therefore, they continue by arguing that in this sense, the audience is largely unknown or invisible. This is further complicated by the fact that the nature of the audience may include people from different parts of a user's life (Tagg and Seargeant 2016, p. 346) which collide into a single space and affect the ways in which people present themselves. Drawing on work by Goffman (1959) and Meyrowitz (1985), Davis and Jurgenson (2014, p. 476) introduced the term 'context collapse' differentiating between context collusions and context collisions. Context collusion 'is an intentional collapsing of contexts', whereas context collision is unintentional (Davis and Jurgenson 2014, p.476). The term 'context collapse' has been used in previous research examining digital and social media practices (e.g. Tagg and Seargeant 2016; Georgakopoulou 2017; Marwick and Boyd 2011). Georgakopoulou (2017, p. 170) defines 'context collapse' drawing on Marwick and boy's (2011) work as 'the idea of a clash in terms of how participants may present themselves through semiosis, for whom and with whom: what works for a limited audience known to a communicator may clash with wider, unknown audiences'.

For the purposes of the study, wall posts were treated as semi-public/semi-private and, thus, in order to ensure ethical consideration, before acquiring any data, all participants gave their consent in order to participate in this thesis (see Appendix A). As Zimmer (2010, p.324) has argued, 'concerns over consent, privacy and anonymity do not disappear simply because subjects participate in online social networks; rather, they become even more important'. Thus, in this study, all consent forms were signed before the collection of wall posts of each participant. By signing the consent form the

participants allowed me to observe their activity on Facebook and collect their Facebook wall posts. The consent form assured the participants that their real names would be replaced by pseudonyms in order to ensure their anonymity. Additionally, all participants were reassured that their material including information about themselves, status updates, their posts, their images and other multimedia content would remain confidential and would be used for academic purposes solely. Furthermore, they were informed about the general objectives of this study and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point. In addition to the use of pseudonyms for the participants, in my study I exclude information or cues that could lead to the identification of the participants both from the description of their background and from their wall posts that are used as examples in the analysis. Finally, pseudonyms are also used for any names of people or other organisations that might be mentioned in the participants' posts in order to ensure that the participants cannot be identified.

3.7.2 Multimodality

When collecting the data for the study several challenges arose related to the multimodal nature of digital media data, or in this case the Facebook wall posts of the participants. As also identified by Bolander and Locher (2014, p.14) multimodality can raise several challenges for researchers. Multimodality is defined by Bolander and Locher (2014, p.18), as 'a mixture of language, images, sound and/or music or of sub-types of these modes, e.g. writing (language) mixed with static or dynamic images (images)', which according to Tagg and Seargeant (2016, p.341) has become a central part of users' experience on Facebook.

A central assumption related to multimodality is that language is part of a multimodal combination, meaning that language may be one means, through which people communicate in digital media but 'it often does not occur in isolation' (Bolander and Locher 2014, p.18). Therefore, Androutsopoulos (2017, p.237) has argued that the richness in possibilities of contemporary digital environments has forced scholars to think about the impact of multimodality on meaning-making and the way these modes function semiotically. According to Androutsopoulos (2017, p.244), there are three ways in which multimodality can be understood. Firstly, he suggests that 'it can refer to user

activities during the production of and interaction with online content' like photographs or video-recordings of users. In this sense, multimodal analysis can be used to examine the relationship between the 'users' face expression and posture to the online content they type in or read' (Androutsopoulos 2017, p.244). Secondly, multimodality can refer to 'the simultaneous use of more than one application in people's digital literacy practice' and in this sense, screen-movies can be used 'to document how users multitask on various applications' and evaluate its meaning in terms of style-shifting for example (Androutsopoulos 2017, p.244). Thirdly, Androutsopoulos (2017, p.244) argues that multimodality can refer to 'the coexistence of resources from more than one semiotic mode in digital content itself'. In fact, Androutsopoulos (2017, p.245) argues that researchers examining self-presentation online are interested in the ways in which users draw on all semiotic resources at their disposal in order to construct different identities online.

The third way in which multimodality is understood by Androutsopoulos (2017), certainly applies to the Facebook platform, as nowadays, it combines 'the possibilities of interacting by means of writing status updates and leaving comments on other people's walls, as well as providing the possibilities of uploading and sharing pictures and videos, writing messages similar to email, and chatting via a chat window' (Bolander and Locher 2014, pp. 18-19). Consequently, taking into consideration the multimodality of the Facebook wall posts, analysis will have to examine how Facebook users a range of semiotic resources to construct different online identities. Nevertheless, this task can be challenging for researchers as they have to consider ways of collecting and analysing the data that will include a range of semiotic modes. Moreover, Androutsopoulos (2017, p.245) adds that, 'even when the research question is concerned with the language part, taking into account multimodal prompts may help interpret patterns of variation or style choice'. He continues by adding that due to the absence of widely accepted standards for multimodal online data collection, the use of page-long screenshots and automated video or comment download are considered as practical techniques, even though 'ethics considerations may restrict the types of content that can be downloaded' (Androutsopoulos 2017, p.245). For the purposes of my study, therefore, I collected the participants' wall posts in the form of screenshots in order to include the multimodal

nature of the data. Even though screenshots were considered as the best way to collect my data, it has been challenging and time-consuming to collect all 2845 posts from my participants. This is due to the fact that the screenshots were taken from a phone device in order for each screenshot to include only one post from each participant and not all of their timeline. However, there were some cases in which all semiotic features of a post, such as the number of reactions to the post or all of the text of the post, could not be included in only one screenshot, and therefore, there was the need to have two screenshots for only one post. For instance, the following example indicates such a case in which the number of reactions to the post is included in the second screenshot:

Example1

In addition to these challenges related to collecting the posts, there were some issues prior to the data collection in relation to the multimodality of the data and the protection of the privacy of other people included in the participants' posts. Four of my participants, namely Evgenia, Andreas, Christiana and Andria, expressed their concern about the protection of privacy of other people included in their posts (mainly in photos). They wanted to ensure that when posting photos of friends, acquaintances and family,

their friends'/acquaintances'/family members' faces would be hidden and wanted to know whether others would be able to identify other people that may be included in their posts. In fact, all four people wanted to ensure the safety and anonymity of people involved in their multimodal posts. This is particularly interesting as it indicates that the people researched are aware of ethical issues and they also become protective of the people in their network, wishing to protect other people's privacy and anonymity. While they were sensitive about other people appearing in photos uploaded on their Facebook wall posts, they were less concerned about references to other people appearing in their posts. As a result, there is an interesting gap between lay and expert understanding of ethics, as researchers do not only protect any visual material related to third parties but also any verbal references to other people, locations or organizations that could potentially identify them. Based on the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL 2016) 'it is important to try to anticipate any harmful effects or disruptions to informants' lives, environment and to mitigate any stress, undue intrusion, and real or perceived exploitation'. Therefore, I explained and reassured the participants that all faces would be hidden and the names or other personal information that could lead to the identification of people included in the posts would be concealed, as also explained in the consent form (see Appendix A).

3.7.3 Mixed methodologies and the relationship between online and offline settings

When collecting online data for research, and more specifically for sociolinguistic research, several challenges may arise due to the blending between online and offline settings (Bolander and Locher 2014, p.14). Depending on the researchers' interests and research questions, online data can be collected and analyzed differently. For instance, as Bolander and Locher (2014, p.20) note, researchers may use the web as a corpus in itself and be less interested in the individual users or they may focus on practices by particular groups or people that are portrayed by their use on the web. Depending on the focus of a research project, sociolinguists often combine different methodologies and make use of different types of data, often combining offline and online contexts. According to Androutsopoulos (2017, p.240) there are two main sites of data collection

in new media sociolinguistics: “screen-based” and “user-based”. ‘”Screen-based” data are produced by participants and collected online by the researcher’ whereas ‘”user-based” data are prompted by the researcher’s activities and produced through their contact with CMC users’ (Androutsopoulos 2017, p.240). Therefore, the former confines data production and collection to the screen, whereas the latter gives focus to the user and what he/she does through and with language, either online or online and offline, as Bolander and Locher (2014, p.20) add. Based on Androutsopoulos’ (2017) distinction, the data collected for the purposes of this study is screen-based. The data collected are then analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to examine how participants use linguistic and other semiotic features to construct identities on Facebook.

Several studies (Bolander and Locher 2014; Androutsopoulos and Beißwenger, 2008; Androutsopoulos, 2008) highlight the importance of collecting and analysing not only screen-based observational data, but also following up this type of analysis with user-based data, to gain a more complete interpretation of the findings. In fact, Androutsopoulos (2017, p.242) proposes a specific procedure in order to obtain such “blended” data; ‘any combination of screen data collection through direct contact to selected users’, that involves a form of mixing methodologies. He suggests that ‘cyclical procedures of blended data collection can begin with observation, followed by screen data collection and [a] preliminary analysis’, and ‘then establishing contact with selected participants’ (Androutsopoulos2017, p.243). He maintains that in the contact situation, ‘samples of online content can serve as a prompt in order to elicit participants’ awareness of and attitudes to language use online’ (Androutsopoulos2017, p.243). He therefore suggests that research on social networking sites could involve an initial contact with the participants to gain their consent for accessing their profiles, followed by observing their profile activities and collecting data, carrying out preliminary analyses and finally conducting individual or group interviews (Androutsopoulos2017, p.243). The initial plan for this thesis was to follow this approach. Indeed, at the time when participants gave their consent, the aim was to follow up the collection and analysis of screen-based data with interviews with selected participants, and participants were therefore asked to give their consent to provide interviews as well as their on-screen

data (see the consent form in Appendix A). However, the process of collecting on-screen data and posts by the participants resulted in a larger than expected dataset (2845 posts) requiring significant analytical effort, which did not allow enough time for conducting and analysing the planned interviews as part of this thesis. Nevertheless, participants have informally expressed their willingness to provide interviews at a later time to enable the continuation of this research. I expect that such interviews will add further valuable insights about the participants' perceptions of what they think they do on Facebook, in relation to constructing various identities on Facebook and how.

3.8 Data Analysis Methods

Drawing on previous literature (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2014; Wei 2011), the data analysis combines both bottom-up and top-down approaches in the processing of the data. In a top-down approach as defined by de Haan (2010, p.103) researchers begin with established categories they wish to map onto the data. Even though de Haan's (2010) study is related to semantics, in this study a similar top-down approach is employed in chapter 4 that draws on Lee's (2011) study and her categorization of 11 communicative functions of status updates on Facebook. Nevertheless, when analysing the posts based on their communicative function in chapter 4, a bottom-up approach is also employed. A bottom-up approach involves the opposite process to the top-down approach, since one starts from individual categories and builds a larger system of categories. This approach was employed when new categories arose from the data. In addition, a bottom-up approach is also employed in chapters 5 and 6, since the types of identities that were examined qualitatively also arose from the dataset and were not pre-determined in advance prior to data collection

3.8.1 Analysing Posts based on their communicative function

In chapter 4, I first coded and categorised the posts based on their communicative function which is defined as the purpose or end that is achieved by the use of linguistic and/or other semiotic means (Hymes1964,p.10).The main focus when coding the posts was on the content of the post using content analysis. According to Preiser et. al. (2021, p. 270) content analysis methods aim to examine 'patterns of sense-making and

meaning creation in the communicative characteristics of language, by focusing on the content and underlying themes and meaning that emerge in a text (in either written or spoken form)'. As already mentioned, Facebook posts are treated as communicative events in this study as suggested by Androutsopoulos (2014, p. 8-9), and they serve various communicative goals and functions, and hence each post may belong into multiple categories based on the various interpretations of its meaning and themes. This content-based classification of the posts was used as a starting point for examining certain categories further in the following analytical chapters.

Drawing on Lee's (2011) study which aimed to examine the primary communicative functions of status updates and how they are embedded meaningfully and creatively in the everyday lives of Facebook users, in the context of Cantonese-English bilinguals in Hong Kong (Lee 2011, p. 111), in the first analytical chapter the main aim is to identify the various communicative functions of the Facebook posts shared by my participants. Lee (2011) identified 11 communicative functions of status updates. Drawing on this classification, a new classification of 17 communicative functions which addresses the needs of the study and the new affordances of the Facebook platform, is presented. Furthermore, in the first analytical chapter, the frequency of the categories that emerge from the classification of the functions of the posts is examined and indicates significant topics and moments that users share on Facebook. Thus, the quantitative results of the chapter drive the focus of the following analytical chapters.

3.8.2 Analysing Humour and identity

The second analytical chapter focuses on humorous posts, a category of posts which emerged as significant in the analysis of communicative functions and has been discussed in previous literature. Playfulness and creativity are considered by scholars as key tools with which people construct several identities online, and have typically been associated with humorous and playful identities (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014). Therefore, humorous posts are analysed further in the study to examine the linguistic and other semiotic tools used to construct humorous and other identities.

For the analysis of humorous posts, the data were organized into three categories based on their authorship and format: a) posts that include humorous content generated by participants themselves, b) posts that re-share humorous content generated by others and c) a combination of both re-shared and participant generated posts i.e. posts that have been re-shared by users but also include a caption generated by the users. Drawing on Goffman's (1981) theory of production roles in conversation, examining the various roles users take (such as the role of authors, animators and principals) when posting on Facebook indicates the various ways in which they express their position, stances, attitudes and beliefs towards what is being shared or re-shared. More specifically, drawing on Goffman's (1981, pp. 144-145) work, in terms of production roles in a conversation, there are three different roles, namely the animator, the author and finally the principal: (a) the Animator refers to the 'individual active in the role of utterance production', (b) the Author refers to 'someone who has selected the sentiments expressed and the words in which they are encoded' and (c) the Principal refers to 'someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say' (Goffman 1981, pp. 144-145).

Applying Goffman's (1981) theory to the Facebook context, one could argue that when participants generate their own posts, they broadly act simultaneously as the animators, the authors and the principals of the message communicated: they are active in the production of the texts they post, as they probably type their text on their Facebook profile; they produce the content of their posts by selecting the words and sentiments in the posts and they are also responsible for the content, which expresses their beliefs, feelings and identities they wish to construct. On the other hand, when users re-share posts generated by others on Facebook, one could argue that they act as animators and principals, as they choose which posts to re-share, they become active in their (re)production, and they convey their positions, beliefs, stances through the re-shared content, whether they affiliate or not to what is being expressed. Thus, their feelings and beliefs are also being represented by the content that they choose to re-share. Finally, when participants combine re-shared content and generate their own content at the same time, they arguably act as animators, authors and principals at the

same time, as they produce and author the caption accompanying the re-shared post, they are responsible not only for the content they author, but also the content they choose to re-share which complements the content they generated and authored. Through the re-shared content and the caption the participants produce, they also express their position, stance, beliefs and sentiments towards what is being re-shared by commenting on it to either express affiliation or disaffiliation. Each format affords different speaker roles, which have an impact on the identities the participants construct and, most importantly, on the way they construct these identities. This process also relates to Androtsopoulos' (2014, p. 8) selecting process which refers to the 'choice of moments to share' and indicating what participants select to share on their timeline.

After the quantitative analysis of the humorous posts in terms of their authorship and format, the posts are further analysed qualitatively in this chapter in relation to the various identities participants construct and the ways in which they are constructed. Thus, drawing on Androutsopoulos' (2014, p.8-9) work, the second part of this chapter focuses on the 'styling' of humour, i.e. how users employ semiotic resources for entextualising certain moments as humorous. Identifying key or significant moments (Androutsopoulos 2014) also draws on the frequency of certain types of posts or the audience's response to specific posts. (i.e. the number of likes or reactions certain posts generate). Such moments are qualitatively analysed in relation to the linguistic tools used and the specific identities constructed by older users on Facebook.

3.8.3 Analysing identity through opinion-giving on Facebook

This chapter examines the ways in which opinion is expressed on the older users' Facebook timelines. Similar to Chapter 5, the findings of the content analysis of posts based on their communicative function revealed opinion-giving as a prominent category among the communicative functions identified. Drawing on previous literature, digital media is a space in which opinion-giving and stance-taking is prominent (Georgalou 2017). Identity work is closely related to opinion-giving as 'the identity of the participants […] plays a significant part in how opinions are elicited and situated within any given mediated framework' (Thornborrow 2015, p. 89). Thus, posts in which participants express their opinion are analysed in the study to examine the linguistic and

other semiotic tools used to construct several identities when posting messages on Facebook.

For the analysis of the posts in which participants expressed their opinion, the data were initially analysed quantitatively, similar to Chapter 5 in which humorous posts were analysed drawing on Goffman's (1981) work. The posts were categorized based on their authorship format into the same three categories: a) posts that include opinion-giving content generated by participants themselves, b) posts that re-share opinion-giving content generated by others and c) a combination of both re-shared and participant generated posts.

Following the quantitative analysis of the posts in terms of their authorship format, the posts are further analysed qualitatively in chapter 6 in relation to the key identities constructed by participants and the ways in which they are constructed. Drawing on Androutsopoulos (2014) study, similar to chapter 5 which examines humorous posts, in this chapter key moments are chosen to be qualitatively analysed in relation to the linguistic and other semiotic tools used and the specific identities constructed by older users on Facebook. The frequency of certain types of posts as well as the number of likes and comments they attracted were taken into consideration when choosing significant moments to be analysed qualitatively.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodological framework, research design and data analysis methods of the study. In order to examine how older users construct different identities on Facebook using various linguistic and other semiotic tools a range of methods are used for the data collection and analysis of posts. The methods used for the data collection include: 1) observing the participants' activity on Facebook and 2) collecting and recording their Facebook wall posts in the form of screen-shots during a 6-month period. The Facebook wall posts of 13 participants were collected in the form of screenshots during a period of 6 months from January to September 2018, depending on when each participant gave their consent.

In the chapter the challenges and issues faced during the recruitment of participants and the data collection have also been discussed. These methodological

issues included challenges related to ethics and ethical considerations when collecting data online, focusing on the public and private dichotomy. Moreover, issues related to the multimodality of the data and mixing different methodologies were also discussed in relation to this study suggesting ways in which these challenged were faced.

The analytical framework of the study is also discussed in the chapter focusing on the ways in which the data are analysed by combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. After analysing the posts quantitatively by categorizing them based on their communicative function using content analysis, selected categories, such as humorous posts and posts in which participants express their opinion or judgment are further analysed. The reasons for choosing these two categories for further qualitative analysis are explained in more detail in Chapter 4. Initially, both categories of posts are analysed quantitatively based on their authorship format, drawing on Goffman's (1981, pp.144-145) work in terms of production roles in a conversation and applying these in the Facebook context. After that, drawing on Androutsopoulos (2014) study, selected significant moments are analysed in each category of posts in order to examine the identity work achieved through various linguistic and other semiotic tools used in humorous and opinion-giving posts.

Chapter 4: Communicative functions and Identity work

4.1 Introduction

After establishing the methodological framework of the study, this first analytical chapter focuses on the analysis of the participants' Facebook wall posts, based on their communicative function. First, the chapter discusses the existing literature on communicative functions, as well as the rationale and the aims of the analysis. In this study, a communicative function is defined as the purpose or end of a textual artefact, such as a Facebook post, that is achieved by the use of linguistic and/or other semiotic means. Identity work on Facebook is closely linked to communicative functions, because it is related to the process of selecting of an utterance and the communicative ends such utterances aim to achieve. More specifically, the goals or communicative functions the Facebook users wish to achieve through their posts are related to the type of relationships they wish to establish with the friends in their network and, at the same time, the type of identity work that is invested in the construction of such relationships. This is further supported by Tagg and Seargeant (2016, p. 212) who point out that offline social roles are closely related to the ways in which they are used as interactional resource for identity work and relationship building online, and affect the users' perceptions of their roles which 'shape or constrain what they post and how they manage their online communication'. Therefore, the various goals or communicative functions of users' posts and what they post reflect the ways they do identity work and relationship building on Facebook. According to Hymes (1964, p.10), 'the relations between means and ends are multiple in both directions, the same means serving varied ends and the same ends being served by varied means'. Thus, a single post may serve various communicative functions. Examining the broader communicative functions of each post facilitates and directs the next steps of the study, and the findings of this chapter are used as a starting point for the following analytical chapters, in which identity work is explored in more detail.

Lee's (2011) categorisation of status updates based on their communicative function was used as a starting point and was further developed for the purposes of this study, taking into consideration the recent technological affordances of the Facebook

platform, which did not exist at the time of Lee (2011). The 2822 (out of 2845) Facebook posts collected for this study were thus categorized into 17 categories, based on and adding to Lee's (2011) framework. These categories are presented in this chapter, illustrated with examples, and followed by a quantitative analysis of the posts based on their communicative functions.

For the analysis of the posts, the multimodality of the posts was taken into account by considering the communicative function of ready-made content that is being reshared by participants such as memes, images, videos, and articles, as well as multimodal content generated by the participants, such as images or videos. Furthermore, for the analysis of the posts, the various functions a single post can serve was also taken into consideration, drawing on Hymes (1964, p.10) who argues that a single communicative event may serve more than one communicative end. Accordingly, each of the posts collected during the study was analysed and, whenever more than one communicative function was detected, the post was assigned to more than one category. As a consequence, although the total number of posts collected from the 9 older Facebook users during the 6-month period was 2822, the number of communicative functions coded is larger than the number of posts collected.

4.2 Communicative Functions, Self-Presentation and Context Design

The examination of the communicative functions of the Facebook wall posts in relation to identity draws on Hymes' (1964) influential work on communication theory. Hymes' (1964) SPEAKING framework has been highly influential in linguistics. It addresses not only the lexical and grammatical components of language when communicating, but also the context in which communication occurs. SPEAKING is an acronym which stands for: S is for scene and setting meaning the physical location of the speech; P for participants; E for ends meaning the purpose or reason of the speaking; A for act sequence, i.e. speech acts and the order they are presented in; K is for key i.e. the way the speaking is performed (tone, manner, delivery); I for instrumentalities meaning the mode of communication used; N for norms of interaction, i.e. the social rules of what is proper in conversation and finally; and G is for genre , i.e. the type of speech act or event (gossip, jokes, conversations) within the culture.

In analogy to Hymes' (1964) SPEAKING framework, Tagg et. al's (2017, p.12) context design theoretical framework examines 'how participants take on board a range of factors in imagining the various ways in which their online posts may be re-contextualised (embedded and reinterpreted in new contexts' and also examines 'how this awareness both shapes and constraints what they say'. Tagg et. al (2017, p.19) also examined 'how this awareness not only affects and shapes what they say, but also limits it'. Tagg et. al.'s (2017) context design framework draws on other interactional frameworks (Clark and Carlson 1982; Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1981; Sacks et. al. 1974) as well as speech accommodation theory introduced by Giles and Powesland (1975). Even before Tagg et. al.'s (2017) study, Marwick and boyd (2011, p.114) also claimed that people present themselves differently 'based on who [they] are talking to and where the conversation takes place' and this also applies to online communication. On a similar note, Tagg et. al. (2017, p.22) argue that 'people typically adjust their style and content according to their understanding of who they are talking to, and thus complex notions of audience result in potentially complex dynamics of communication'. Tagg et. al. (2017) introduced the framework of context design which is closely related to the concept of context collapse.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, the term 'context collapse' was initially introduced by Davis and Jurgenson (2014, p. 476) who differentiated between two types of context collapse: context collusions and context collisions. The former 'is an intentional collapsing of contexts', whereas the latter is unintentional (Davis and Jurgenson 2014, p.476). The term 'context collapse' has been widely used by scholars when examining digital and social media practices (e.g. Tagg and Seargeant 2016; Georgakopoulou 2017; Marwick and boyd. 2011). The notion of context collapse has been used to explore 'how users negotiate the management of communication in semi-public sites where they cannot fully predict the audience for their posts and so struggle to evaluate their self-presentation strategies' (Tagg et. al. 2017, p.19). As Georgakopoulou (2016, p.2) notes, the definition of context collapse 'encompasses the idea of a clash in terms of how participants may present themselves through semiosis, for whom and with whom: what works for a limited audience known to a communicator

may clash with wider, unknown audiences' or as Marwick and boyd (2011, p. 115) an 'imagined audience'. According to Marwick and boyd (2011, p. 115):

> Our understanding of the social media audience is limited. While anyone can potentially read or view a digital artifact, we need a more specific conception of audience than 'anyone' to choose the language, cultural referents, style, and so on that comprise online identity presentation. In the absence of certain knowledge about audience, participants take cues from the social media environment to imagine the community (boyd, 2007: 131, cited in Marwich and boyd 2011). This, the imagined audience, might be entirely different from the actual readers of a profile, blog post, or tweet.

Therefore, as Marwick and boyd (2011) explain in the above extract, it is difficult to predict the audience in an online context; for example, in the context of the Facebook platform, people from different social networks of the poster online collapse into a single space, leading to issues with self-presentation and addressing simultaneously all these different networks. In a more recent study, Marwick and boyd (2014, p. 1052) have argued that 'social media-enabled practices require people to contend with the limitations of individual control and address how to actively navigate context when boundaries cannot be taken for granted'. Therefore, people, and especially young people, negotiate collapsed social contexts such as Facebook and manage privacy in networked publics (Marwick and boyd 2014, p. 1052). Adding to this notion, Tagg et al (2017, p. 36) propose the context design framework in which they argue that the way in which people design a context for each utterance is related to what is considered as appropriate or valued behaviour. As a result, when styling an utterance, people are also 'actively constructing the context or frame in which it will or can be interpreted' at the same time (Tagg et.al. 2017,p.36).

Drawing on the concept of 'context collapse', Tagg et.al. (2017) identify the elements that Facebook users take into account when styling their posts and designing the context in which they are intended to be interpreted. These elements

are organized by using the acronym POSTING, similar to Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING framework. P stands for Participants, O for online media ideologies, S for site affordances, T for text type, I for identification processes, N for norms of communication and G for goals or immediate purposes or ends when posting. Consequently, Tagg et. al (2017, p. 39) argue that Facebook users have some awareness of the above elements, which are inter-related, when thinking about how their posts will be received and interpreted by their social networks and thus, this has an impact on their behaviour on the site. Hence, drawing on Tagg et. al.'s (2017) POSTING framework, the above elements are inter-related and, therefore, there is a connection between identification processes i.e. identity work, and goals or ends when posting. Drawing on all the above research, but mainly on Hymes' (1964, 1974), Marwick and boyd (2011) and finally Tagg et. al (2017), there is a correlation between the various communicative functions users aim to achieve through an utterance, or in this case their posts, and the ways they wish to present themselves to the various audiences on Facebook.

Several studies have examined the communicative functions of language in the past, particularly in the field of language learning in the educational context (e.g. Hymes; 1964; Lee 2011; Wong and Lim 2014). Graham (2015, p.309) has also identified as the goals of interaction as one of the factors that emerge as having an influence on relationality and identity online, along with perceptions/expectations of the audience and the limitations or capabilities of different media. Therefore, identifying communicative functions when analysing language online, and more specifically on Facebook is considered as vital in order to understand self-presentation practices which are highly influenced by how participants design the context in order to address their different audiences on Facebook, as argued by Tagg et. al.'s (2017) context design framework.

Taking all previous literature into consideration, identifying the various communicative functions of posts would serve as a starting point for my main analysis which focuses on self-presentation strategies and issues of identity. Furthermore, content analysis is used initially for the Facebook posts collected by participants. The analysis of communicative functions of the posts collected

represented a largely exploratory and descriptive analysis of the whole dataset that will be used as a basis for more detailed analysis of specific categories of posts. The quantitative analysis of the posts based on their communicative function will give an overview as to how my participants, i.e. older users who use the Facebook platform, and which communicative functions are prominent in their communication with their Facebook contacts. The categories of the communicative functions that emerged from the analysis of my data set are further presented, illustrated with examples and discussed below.

4.3 Communicative Functions categorisation

Lee's (2011) categorisation of communicative functions was used as a starting point for analysing and coding the posts collected in my study. Lee's (2011) study focused on the emerging literacy practices of Cantonese-English bilinguals in Hong Kong and more specifically examined microblogging, through the feature of status updates on Facebook. Her study attempts to answer what primary communicative functions the status updates serve and how status updates are embedded meaningfully and creatively in the everyday lives of Facebook users (Lee 2011, p.111). Her study identified 11 communicative functions of status updates which are presented and briefly explained in Table 1.

Category	**Explanation**
1. "What are you doing right now?",	In this type of status update, messages were a direct response to the original Facebook prompt (i.e. starting the message with "is" and speaking as a third person).
2. Everyday life	This type of status updates included messages in which participants talked about activities in their day-to-day life, including domestic or work-related topics
3. Opinion and judgment	Messages in this category expressed and showed the participants' beliefs about themselves and others

4. Reporting mood	Mood messages expressed participants' inner feelings and emotions, either positive or negative.
5. Away messages	Away messages on Facebook were similar to those on IM (i.e. letting people know the user is momentarily not at their computer); but at the same time, "away" messages indicated the poster's absence in the past or future.
6. Initiating discussion	This category consisted of messages with open-ended questions in order to elicit responses and comments elsewhere on the personal profile of the user
7. Addressing target audience	This type of message was addressed to a specific audience/group of people but not all Facebook contacts
8. Quotation	This category included the sharing of quotes of songs and famous saying
9. Silence and interjection	This type of playful message expressed "speechlessness" through punctuation marks such as a series of ellipsis or question marks
10. Humour	Humorous messages occurred when the user made jokes or used (visual) language play
11. Facebook-related discourse	This category expressed opinions about Facebook and its technological affordances

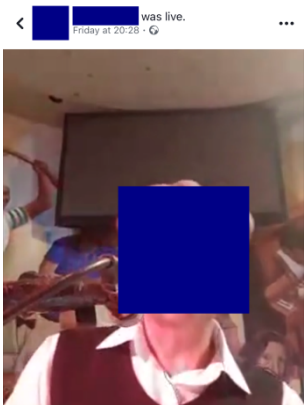
Table 1: Lee's (2011, pp.115-117) categorisation of communicative functions

Compared to Lee's categorisation, the Facebook posts I collected and analysed were categorised into 17 categories. Some of Lee's (2011) categories were excluded as they were considered as irrelevant and not suitable to my data which were collected in 2018, while categories were also inferred from the data. Categories which were considered unsuitable or irrelevant included categories which reflect older versions of the Facebook platform but do not align with new affordances of Facebook whereas new categories inferred from the data also align with the facelifts of the platform during the

years. In other words, for the coding of the Facebook posts, initially a top-down approach was used, moving from the general coding system provided by Lee (2011) and selecting which categories are related to my data. Then, a bottom-up approach was used since new categories emerged from the data to create a categorisation system of Facebook wall posts that meets the needs of the current study. These categories include:

1. **What are you doing right now?**

This type of post was used for check-ins, live videos and posts that indicated that an activity was happening at the moment or close to the moment of it being posted on Facebook.

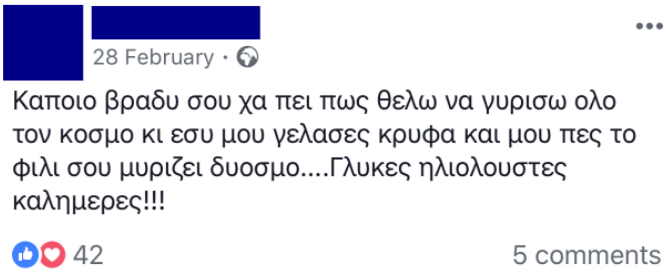


Example 2

In example 2, for example, Rafael posts a live video of him at the time of performing at a specific restaurant.

2. **Greeting**

In this type of post the users used linguistic features to express a greeting to their Facebook audience. This is a new category that was not included in Lee's categorisation but was introduced in my study because when analyzing the data quantitatively, the participants' posts included greetings addressed to Facebook audiences such as 'Good morning' and 'Good night'.



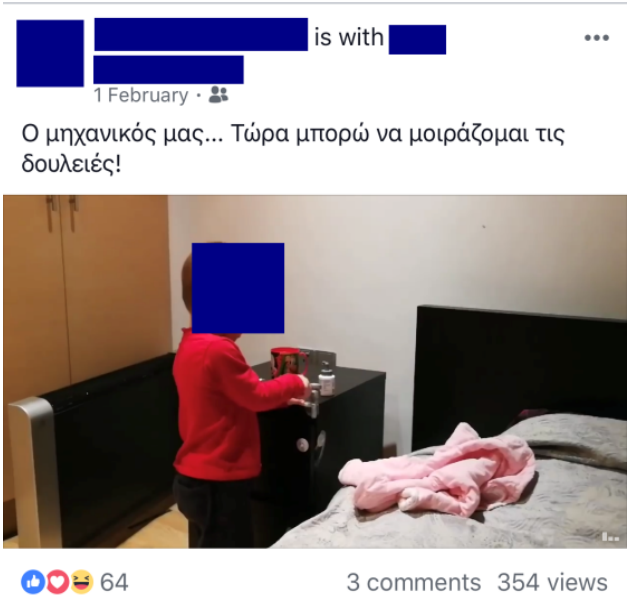
Example 3

Translation: *One night I told you that I want to travel all over the world and you laughed secretly and told me that my kiss smells like mint. Sweet, full of sunlight good mornings!!!*

Example 3 illustrates this type as it includes a greeting at the end wishing Facebook friends to have a nice sunny day, preceded by lyrics from a Greek song.

3. Reporting day-to-day activities

In this type of posts users reported activities in their day-to-day life, including domestic, work-related topics and what they do in their free time with friends or family. This category was adjusted from the category named 'everyday life' from Lee (2011).



Example 4

Translation: *Our mechanic…Now I can share the chores!*

Example 4includes a photo of Andreas' child who is role playing (in this case he is pretending to be a mechanic) along with a comment about the photo.

4. Reporting a significant activity

This category is similar with the third category in the sense that it reports an activity of the user's daily life. Nevertheless, in this category, the users explicitly highlight the importance of this activity to them.

Example 5

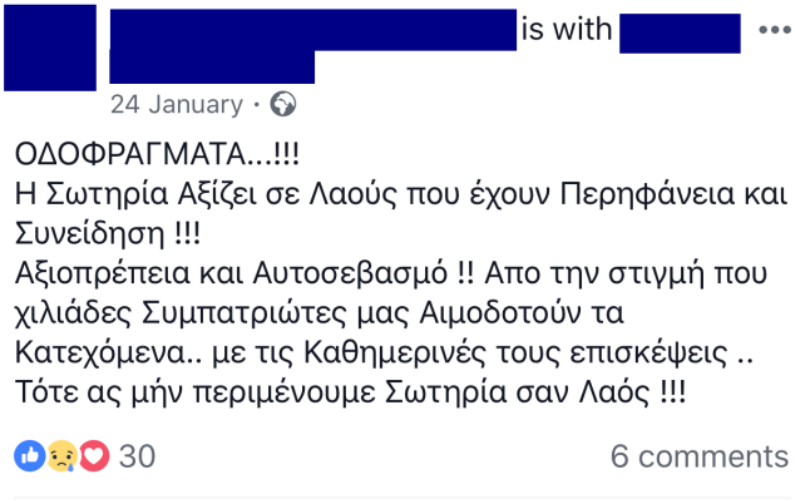
Translation: *My only concern at the moment is about the mass protest in Athens about the Macedonia naming dispute.*
The people want to shout out loud 'Macedonia is Greece'. I
hope more than a million people show up at the protest

Example 5 includes a photo showing people in Greece protesting with Greek flags. The users highlight the importance of this activity to them through linguistic and visual means.

Linguistically, the user does so by using the phrase 'my only concern at the moment' as well as his wish for a great number of people to attend the protest. Visually, the user also highlights the significance of this activity by posting an image of a protest from the past with numerous Greek flags in the foreground of the picture. The significance of the event is evident in the inclusion of a picture that includes many people and many flags which may indicate/underline the impact that such events have on society.

5. Opinion and judgment

Similar to Lee's (2011) categorisation, posts in this category expressed and revealed the participants' beliefs about themselves, others, matters of the society they live in and life in general.



Example 6

Translation: *BARRICADES!*
People who have Pride and Consciousness deserved to be saved!!!
Dignity and Self-respect!! Since
thousands of our fellow citizens are spending enormous amounts of money
at the occupied side of Cyprus…with their daily visits…

Then we should not expect to be saved as a nation!

Example 6 illustrates a political stance towards people who visit the occupied part of Cyprus, arguing that they benefit the Turkish people with their spending. This is the personal political opinion of the participant who condemns people who do this act.

6. Reporting moods, feelings and emotions

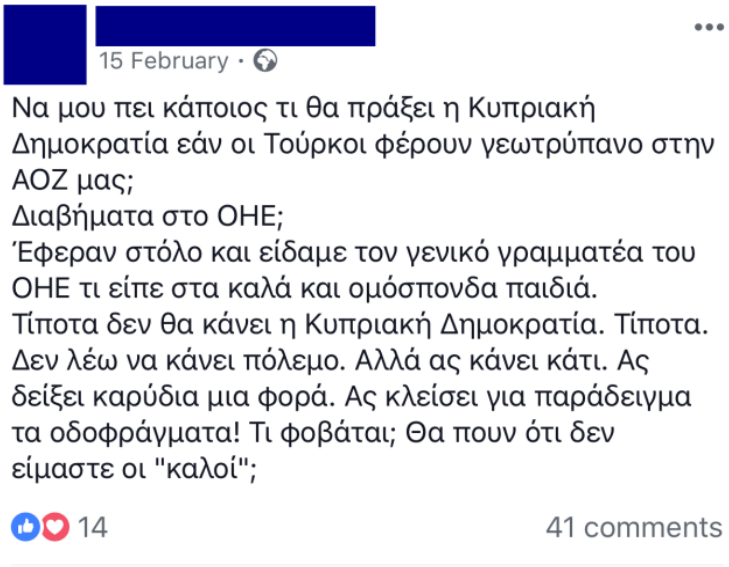
Mood posts expressed the mood, feelings or emotions of the participants either by using the 'feeling' functionality of Facebook which allows users to select feelings from a list or by verbalising a feeling of their own along with an emoticon. This category was also adjusted from Lee's (2011) categorisation, in which Lee included the 'Reporting mood' category. In Lee's (2011, p. 7) study this category included mood messages that 'expressed participants' inner feelings and emotions, whether positive or negative'. Since the time Lee (2011) undertook her study on Facebook, the 'feeling' functionality was added on the platform's interface. This functionality, therefore, had to be considered during the analysis.

Example 7

Example 7 includes Rafael's expression of pride towards his son who is also a musician singing 'Careless Whisper' by George Michael.

7. Initiating discussion

This category included posts in which participants often posed open-ended questions, often addressed to their audiences which indicate that they are wondering about a social matter, with an aim of eliciting responses or comments from the participants' Facebook friends. Similar to Lee's (2011) categorisation, open-ended questions are considered as a defining characteristic of this category, which were used by my participants to initiate discussion.



Example 8

Translation: *(Could) someone tell me what the Cypriot government will do if the Turks bring a drilling rig in our EEZ (Economic Exclusion Zone)?*
Inform the UN?
They have brought ships and we saw what the General Secretary of the UN said to the good federation guys.
The Cypriot government will do nothing. Nothing.
I am not saying that they should start a war. But they should do something. They should show they have balls for once. They should block the roads for example!
What is the government scared of? That they will say that we are not the 'good' guys?

Example 8 begins with the phrase '(could) someone tell me' which indicates that the Facebook user asks for his Facebook friends' contribution to the discussion related to this political matter (i.e. the response by the Cyprus government to a potential violation of Cyprus's EEZ by Turkey). Nevertheless, this post belonged to two categories, as it aims to initiate discussion through questions or expressions like '(could) someone tell me', but it also includes the personal opinion and judgment on a specific political matter regarding the Cypriot government.

8. Addressing target audience

Drawing on Lee's (2011) categorisation, this category included posts that were addressed to a specific person or group of people, either by tagging or by explaining the type of people the post referred to.

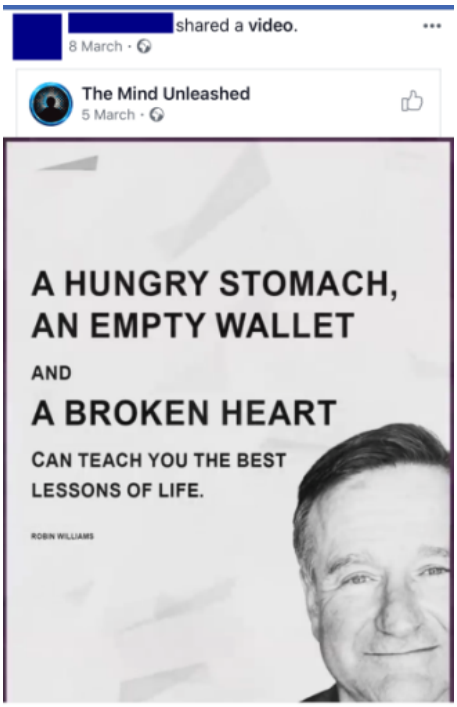
Example 9

Translation: *Let's celebrate (Friend's Name)!!!!*

Example 9 includes a video celebrating the participant and her friend's friendship on Facebook, which is provided by the social media platform for every friendship anniversary. The participant shared this video along with a caption and tagged her friend.

9. Quotation

Similarly to Lee's (2011) categorisation of communicative functions, this category included posts which shared quotes of songs, famous sayings or words taken from other people. These quotes or saying were posted in the form of text on pictures, videos (like in the example provided here) or in the form of single texts.



Example10

Example 10 consists of a quote by Robbie Williams reshared from another page on Facebook.

10. Facebook-related discourse

This category was adjusted from Lee's (2011) categorisation as it included not only opinions about Facebook and its technological affordances, but opinions about appropriate Facebook practice.

Example 11

Text in the photo: *When you like your own posts and comments*

Translation: *We've already said this…. Be modest and humble…☺☺ It's other's job to do so… ☺*

Example 11 includes a photo with a caption about a particular Facebook practice along with the participant's comment as a caption in order to express his agreement about the message shared.

11. Reminiscing the past

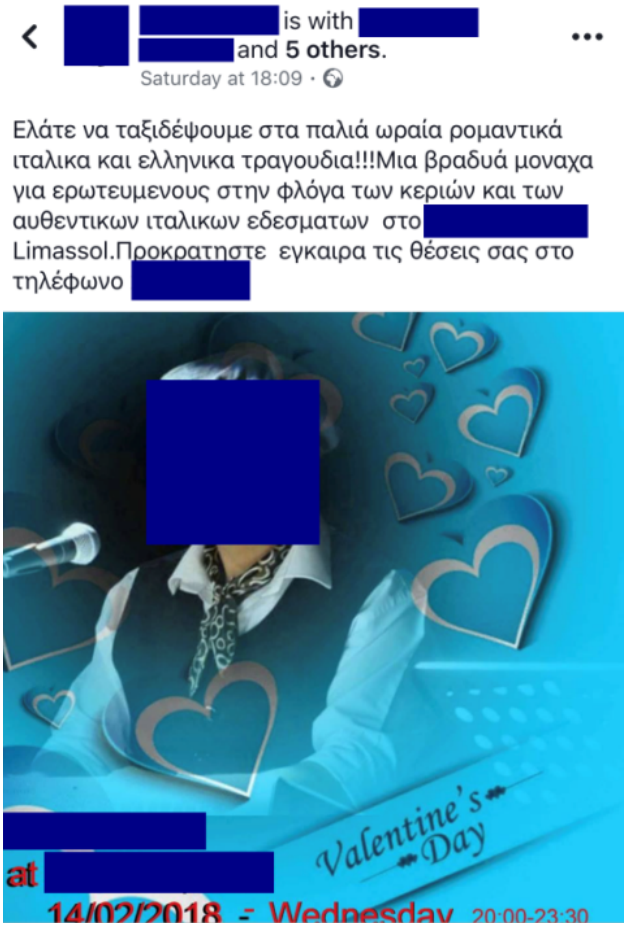
This category arose from my data and it is not included in Lee's (2011) study. This category includes posts from the functionality of 'memories' which was not available on Facebook in the past. Participants are now able to reshare older Facebook posts as memories. Therefore, this category included posts that were uploaded in the past and the user reshared them in order to remember a past moment. It also included events that the users wanted to remember that happened in the past, in the form or photos, links etc.

Example 12

Example 12 illustrates the resharing of a participant's post from 2017. This post included a video of his son performing a song with another musician.

12. Announcing/advertising

Posts in this category were aimed at advertising an event or someone's work or announcing an event or an activity. This category is not included in Lee's (2011) study and it emerges in the specific dataset collected from my participants.



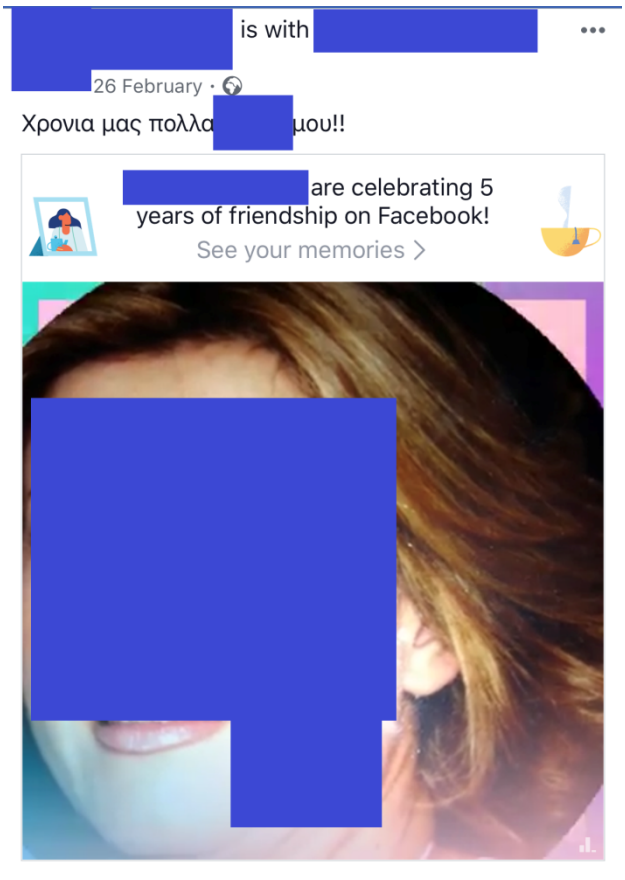
Example 13

Translation: *Come with us to travel back to the nice old romantic I talian and Greek songs!!! A night only for people in love, in candle light with authentic Italian food at (Name of restaurant). Reserve your table as soon as possible by calling (telephone number)*

Example 13 takes the form of an event poster. The poster advertises the participant's (Rafael's) appearance at a restaurant on Valentine's Day. The poster is uploaded in the form of an image along with a caption by the user who advertises this event in order to inform his Facebook friends about his performance.

13. Wishes

This category included wishes that participants expressed either towards a specific audience by tagging specific people or giving wishes to people among their Facebook friends in general. Although this category was not included in Lee's (2011) categorisation, the inclusion of a separate category for such posts was important due to the changes of the platform. Facebook now reminds users of their Facebook friends' birthdays and Facebook friendship celebrations (i.e. reminding users of when they became friends on Facebook). Facebook now offers personalized videos for each user or allows users to post an image with wishes. Unlike category 8 that includes memories on Facebook in the form of resharing previous posts or status update, this category may include videos, created by the platform through a combination of selected photos of the two friends on Facebook together with wishes such as 'Happy Birthday', 'Happy Anniversary' etc.



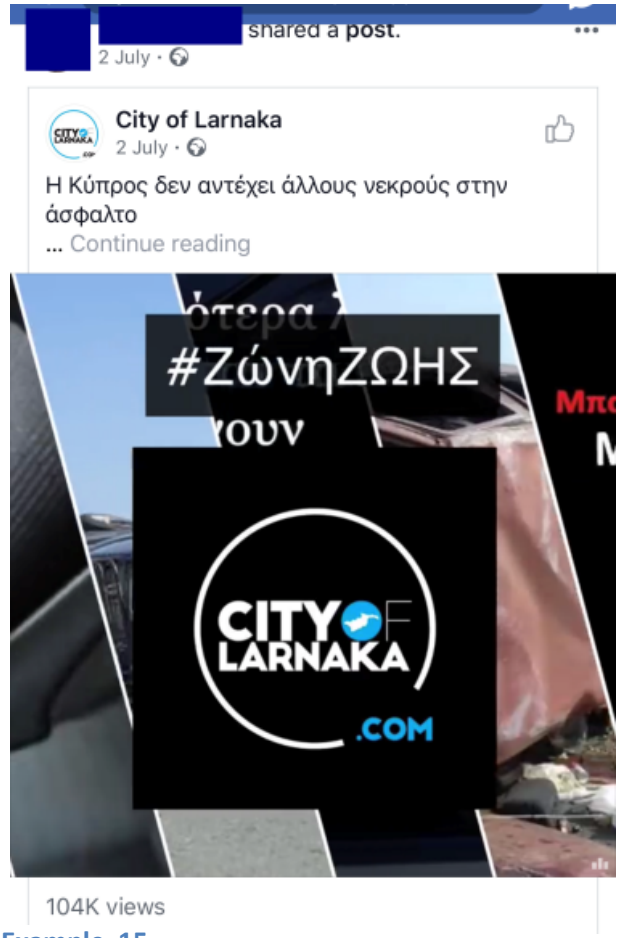
Example 14

Translation: *Let us celebrate my dear (name of Facebook friend)!!*

Example 14 includes a video celebrating the Facebook friendship of the participant with a Facebook friend.

14. Inform about a social matter

In a number of posts participants wanted to inform others about a social matter, either global or local, and wished to sensitize their Facebook audience to take action. Moreover, in these posts participants advertised a charity event taking place.



Example 15

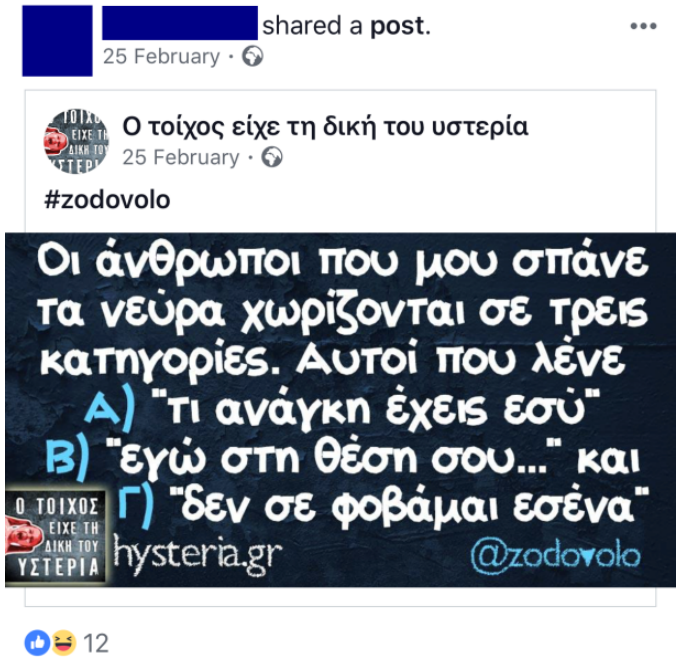
Translation: *Cyprus cannot afford any more*

road deaths.
#seatbeltoflife, CityLarnaka.com

Example 15 includes an urge for people to wear their seatbelts when driving in Cyprus.

15. Humour

Similar to Lee's (2011) study, humour messages were also included in this study as a separate category. All participants used humour as a communicative function on their Facebook walls. This category included posts with jokes or posts that used (visual or linguistic) play in order to cause laughter.



Example 16

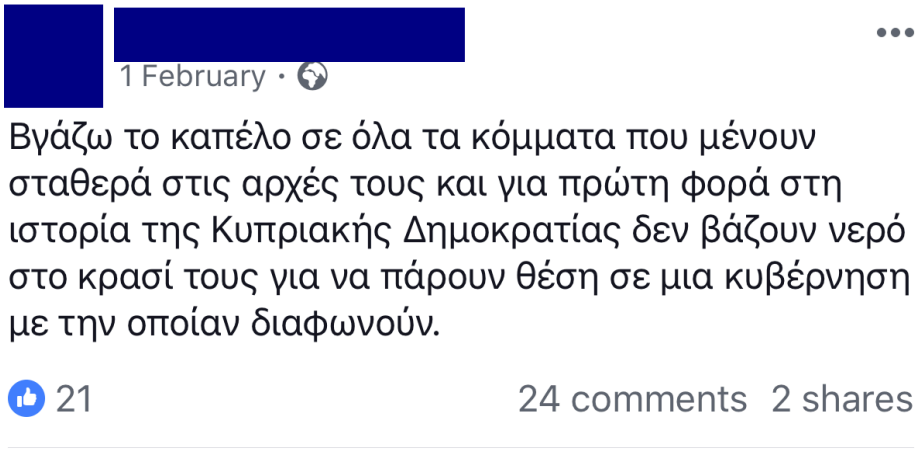
Translation: *People who make me*
angry are divided into three
categories. Those who say:
a) what needs do you have? (meaning in Greek that that person has everything),
b) in your shoes I would.. and

c) I am not afraid of you (meaning in Greek that someone is sure that the other person is going to be fine or 'I have confidence in you')

Example 16 consists of an image with a joke found on a Facebook page that is reshared by the participant.

16. Congratulating

This category included posts that congratulated people about a specific achievement, event, or an accomplishment. Although this category was not included in Lee's (2011) categorisation, its recurrent use by my participants, together with the platform's new functionality for highlighting a congratulatory event with confetti and colour cording the word 'Congratulations', justifies the creation of a separate category.



Example 17

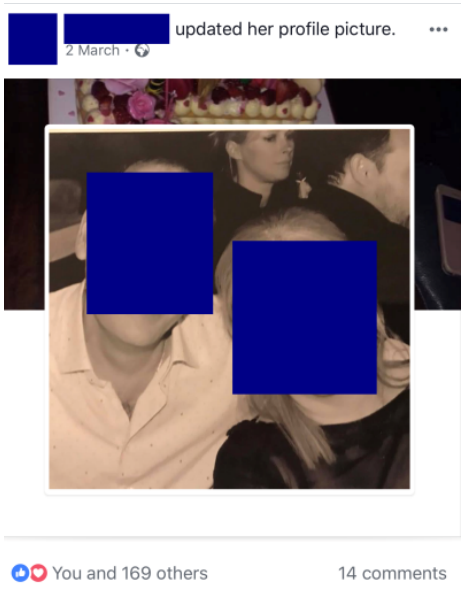
Translation: *I congratulate all the political parties that remain true to their beliefs and for the first time in the history of the Republic of Cyprus they do not compromise these in order to gain a position in the government with which they disagree.*

Example 17 includes a post in which the participant expresses his congratulatory endorsement of political parties in Cyprus. This post was also categorized as

expressing the opinion of the participant as it both congratulates political parties for their stance and also expresses the participant's opinion on a political matter.

17. Other

The last category included posts that could not be assigned any communicative function category listed above or posts that were difficult to be categorised due to the fact that they did not include any linguistic features.



Example 18

For instance, example18 includes the profile picture of a participant. The picture is an image of her with her husband and it does not include a caption or a comment. Therefore, it was difficult to assign a specific communicative function to this kind of posts. As a result, I included these in the 'Other' category.

The key communicative functions that appear to remain the same across both Lee's (2011) and my study include: 1."What are you doing right now?", 5. Opinion and Judgment, 6. Reporting mood, 7. Initiating discussion, 8. Addressing target audience, 9. Quotation, 10. Facebook-related discourse and 15. Humour. Furthermore, the second category of 'Everyday life' from Lee's study was divided into two different categories for

the purposes of my study, namely categories 3. Reporting day-to-day activities and 4. Reporting a significant activity. Even though these two categories were similar in the sense that they referred to everyday activities, reporting day-to-day activities consisted of routine activities whereas reporting a significant activity referred to life-events. In the category 'Reporting a significant activity', users highlighted the importance of that activity to them through linguistic and/ or other semiotic means.

Focusing on the content of the posts uploaded by my participants, new categories emerged, including posts that included greetings, wishes, ways of congratulating, announcing an event or advertising an event or someone's work and informing about a social matter. At the same time, new categories emerged when the new functionalities of Facebook were taken into consideration for the analysis. For example, these include the functionality of memories, which allows users to reshare older posts, or the functionality of Facebook friendships. As a result, these were included in the analysis of the posts so that the current study acknowledges these new functionalities and the new ways in which Facebook users utilize Facebook.

Finally, some categories from Lee's (2011) categorisation were excluded from the study as they appear irrelevant to my data. These categories include 'away messages'. In the past, away messages as Lee (2011, p. 9) states, 'were similar to those on IM (i.e. letting people know the user is momentarily not at their computer); but at the same time, "away" messages on Facebook seemed to have a lower degree of immediacy, with messages indicating the poster's absence in the past or future'. Such an example would be 'Nelson goes to China on Feb 21 & 22'. This kind of messages were not included in the data collected for this study as Facebook Messenger now indicates whether a user is online and when they were last online, which indicates how Facebook has evolved during the years. The data of my study suggest that due to Facebook's new affordances which now offers various modes of synchronous and asynchronous communication (see Chapter 3), my participants seem to make a distinction between synchronous Facebook by using Facebook Messenger, and asynchronous Facebook through posting on their walls. Furthermore, the category of 'silence and interjection' was also excluded as the Facebook users of my study did not use punctuation marks or questions marks to express "speechlessness". The practice of

taking into consideration the affordances of the online platform an analyst is investigating, is also reinforced by Jones (2015). He argues that there is a need for scholars to pay more attention to the platform affordances, as 'in the past applied linguists and discourse analysts have been accustomed to regarding texts primarily as information delivery devices, focusing on how they communicate' (Jones 2015, pp.408-409).

So far in this chapter, I have explained the rationale for analysing the communicative functions of Facebook posts, along with the literature to support this analytical framework and the categorisation used for the coding together with any similarities and differences between Lee's (2011) categorisation system and the one employed for this study. Moreover, the need for potentially revising existing categorisation due to the new affordances of digital media nowadays, and more specifically of the Facebook platform has led this study to contribute to existing research by creating a new categorisation scheme which draws on, and expands and adapts Lee's (2011) model accordingly. In the next section of this chapter, a quantitative analysis of the Facebook posts will be provided based on the type of communicative functions presented in this section.

4.4 Quantitative analysis of Facebook posts based on their Communicative function

Having identified the types of posts uploaded in terms of their communicative function, this section focuses on the relative frequency of the aforementioned categories.

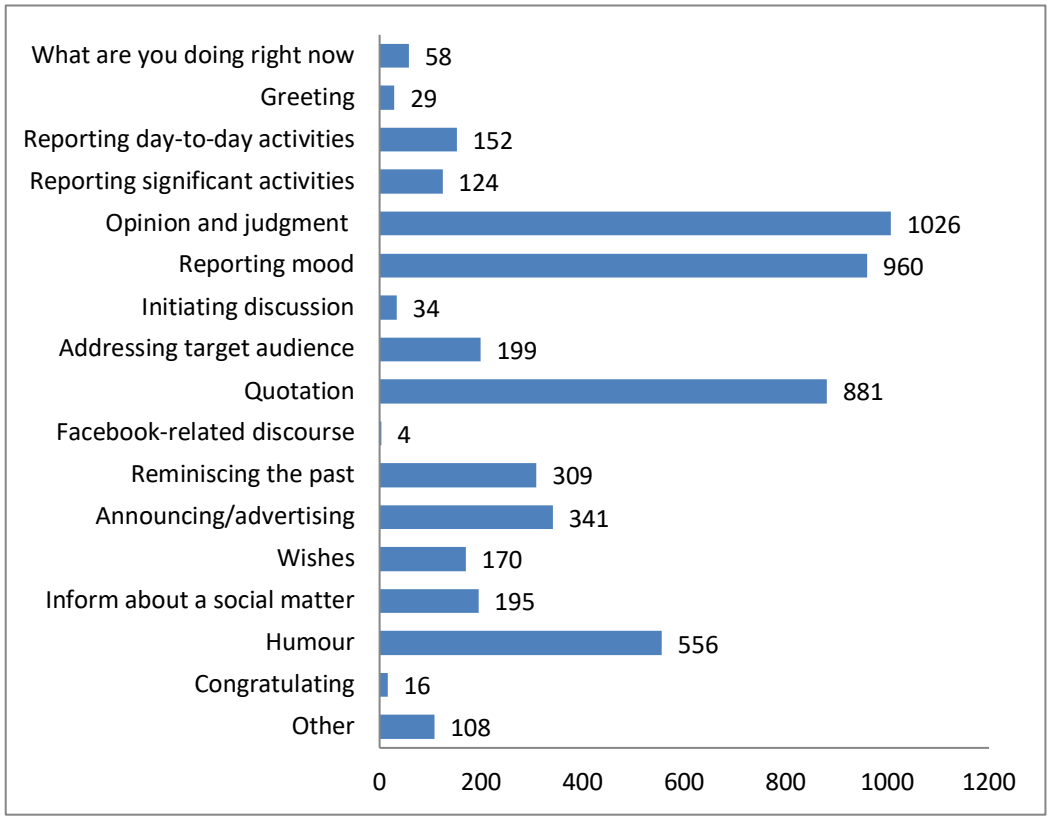
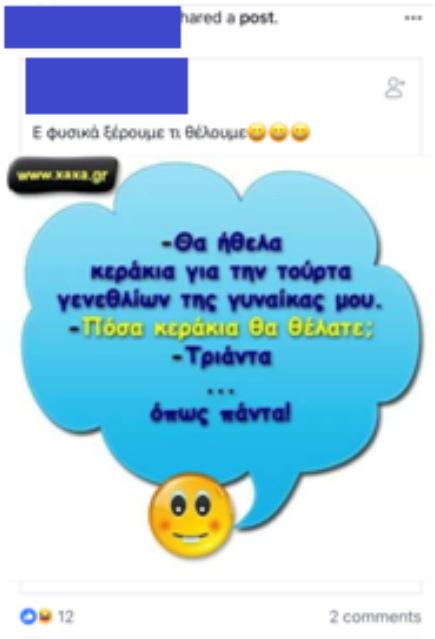


Figure 4: Communicative functions of Facebook wall posts

Figure 4 offers an overview of the relative frequency of the aforementioned communicative functions, as attested in the Facebook wall posts collected during the 6-month period. As shown in Figure 1, the highest number of posts (n: 1026 out of 2822 posts, 36.4 %) belongs to the category of expressing 'Opinion and Judgment'. The second most popular category (n: 960 out of 2822 posts 34%) concerns posts about feelings and mood, which often co-occurred with participants expressing their opinion on an event or matter. As also argued in previous literature, the internet is a space in which people feel they can express their opinion freely due to the lack of status markers (e.g. Papacharissi 2002b, p.18), which might explain why a number of posts belong to this category.



Example 19

Translation: *'I'd like c*
andles for
my wife's birthday cake'
'How many candles would you like?'
'Thirty… as always!'

The third most popular category (n: 881 out of 2822 posts, 31%) concerns posts with quotations. The posts in this category included quotes from famous people, jokes from humorous sites or Facebook pages, song lyrics or quotes from pages with no author indicated. According to Lee (2011, p. 9) the sharing of quotes consists one of the ways in which participants in her study related to target audiences. In my data this was evident in instances where the use of quotations included humorous language and jokes which as indicated in Example 18 addressed specific audiences through the use of linguistic or other semiotic tools. For instance, in Example 18 Maria posted a quotation which included a dialogue between two speakers. This short dialogue in the form of a quotation on a photo was aimed at women over thirty and perhaps men who are married to women over thirty. The post received a number of 'Haha' reactions, which also indicates its humorous function. This practice is also referred to in the literature by Georgakopoulou (2016) as ritual appreciation. According to

Georgakopoulou (2016, p.301) 'ritual appreciation involves positive assessments of the post and/or poster, expressed in highly conventionalized language coupled with emojis'. In this case, the 'haha' reaction includes a smiley face laughing emoji and this reaction is embedded in the Facebook platform as a reaction option for its users.

Similarly, participants also posted a great number of posts of the 'humour' category as humour instances reached the number of 556 out of 2822 posts (19.7%). Thus, playfulness and humour seem to play a significant role in my participants' communication on Facebook. This number also included the jokes in the form of quotations as these posts were considered to belong to both categories. In the past, scholars (such as Lee, 2011; Thurlow, 2012) have also argued that an important activity in new media contexts is playfulness. As Lee (2011, p. 9) also notes in her study, perhaps Facebook offers a space in which participants feel even more motivated 'to show off their wit and creativity, allowing target readers to display their own cyber literacy in comments and responses'. Responses to Facebook posts now not only include likes and comments, but also reactions to posts such as 'haha', 'love', 'sad', 'wow', 'angry' and 'care'. In Sophocleous and Themistocleous' (2014) study, in which Facebook data were collected from people aged 15 to 60 years old, a similar finding was found for users of Facebook when interacting on Facebook in the comment section. According to Sophocleous and Themistocleous' (2014, n.p.) findings, both older and younger users of Facebook used humour on Facebook through style-shifting within the dialect. In addition, Tsiplakou (2009) also pointed out that style-shifting among varieties of Greek was used for humour, to signal in-group solidarity and mitigate potentially face-threatening acts. Taking all the above into consideration, it seems that playfulness and humour is not only a key aspect among other studies, but they are also relevant in this study as shown from the initial analysis of the posts based on their communicative function. Playfulness and humour will therefore be further explored in the next section of the chapter.

[redacted] is with [redacted] and [redacted]
11 March ·

ΕΙΠΑΜΕ...Σεμνά και ταπεινά..:) :)
Δουλειά των άλλων αυτό..:)

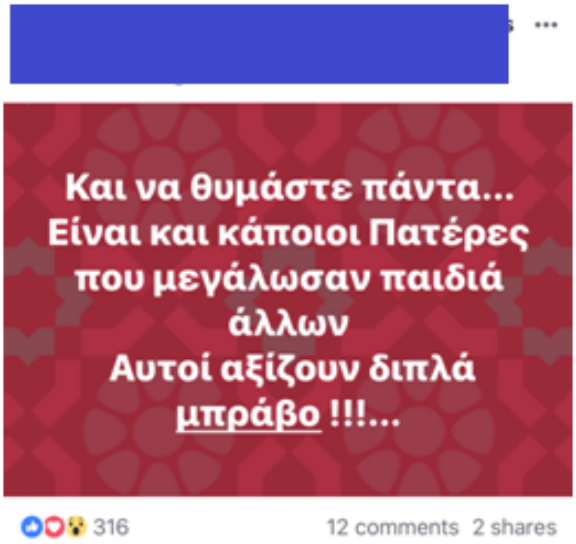
45 11 comments 1 Share

Example 20

Text in the photo: *When you like your own posts and comments*

Translation: *We've already said this…. Be modest and humble…☺☺ It's other's job to do so… ☺*

Figure 4 also demonstrates the categories in which the lowest numbers of posts belong to. The category that included the fewest posts is 'Facebook related discourse' as only 4 posts included language which was related to Facebook as a social media platform. For instance, Nikos posted an image (see Example 20) of a lion licking itself with a caption about Facebook along with his own comment as a caption above the image in order to express his agreement about the photo shared. The words 'posts' and 'comments' are Facebook related in the sense that they have a certain meaning and function in the Facebook platform. Posts include anything shared on one's timeline such as status updates, images, videos, feelings, memories etc. Comments, on the other hand, can be found under each post and consist of the various comments of Facebook users on a specific post.



Example 21

Translation: *And always remember… there are some Fathers who raise others' children. Those deserve to be told bravo/well done twice!!!....*

Example 22

Translation: *With these spider-teachers how could our children not be happy!'*

Another communicative function category that included a limited number of posts was the category of 'Congratulating' since only 16 posts were aimed at giving congratulations. Example 20 shows a post by Nikos who created a post using linguistic means on an image of his choice. Facebook now offers the possibility to users to create posts using an image and writing on that image as well as adding emoticons of their choice if they wish. As also indicated in example 20, the word 'Μπράβο' (well done)in Greek was used by Nikos to congratulate a specific audience. In fact, the word 'Μπραβο' was used by all users when they wanted to congratulate someone. Another way of congratulating included appraising one's work. For instance, in example 21 Andreas praised his son's teachers by posting a photo of them with Spider man with a caption in Greek congratulating and praising the teachers. The act of congratulating someone or a group of people on Facebook indicates the participant's need to show appraisal towards them and making their work or accomplishment known by other Facebook users. This is also why in example 21 Andreas also tags the teachers of his son along with the picture and the caption. This way, his post is intended for a larger audience, and not only at the audience available in his friend list.

The quantitative analysis of the posts based on their communicative function indicates that some categories are more prominent than others. More specifically, based on the analysis the participants of the study which are also older Facebook users, mostly used Facebook to express humour and playfulness, as well as to express their opinion and judgment on various matters. Moreover, reporting on their feelings and moods was also prominent when analysing the posts quantitatively through expressions of affect and the use of adjectives, verbs or adverbs to describe their emotion. The key findings from the analysis indicate the need to explore these predominant categories qualitatively in more depth in relation to previous literature. Furthermore, as already mentioned this kind of qualitative analysis will be used in the next section and in the

following chapters in order to explore self-presentation strategies and identity work on the Facebook platform by the participants.

4.5 Main communicative functions

The categorisation of the posts based on their communicative functions is used as a point of departure in order to identify the purposes these wall posts achieve and what identity work is done through achieving these purposes. According to Androutsopoulos (2014, p.8) selecting is the first stage to sharing and refers to 'the choice of moments to share' by Facebook users. He argues that 'participants select what to share on their Facebook timelines', and that 'the resulting representations differ from other accounts of everyday life, especially those construed in face-to-face social interaction'. Consequently, by taking into account the types of events and activities selected for sharing with their Facebook friends, we can infer the ways in which the participants present themselves to their social network and, thus, the range of identities they deem relevant for this type of interaction. After identifying the categories used for the classification of the posts based on their communicative functions and illustrating the most and least common communicative function categories among participants, in this section the main ways in which participants present themselves through the different communicative functions will be further discussed. Thus, the main identities which may be constructed through the use of the broader communicative functions will be discussed along with examples to illustrate how these identities are relevant.

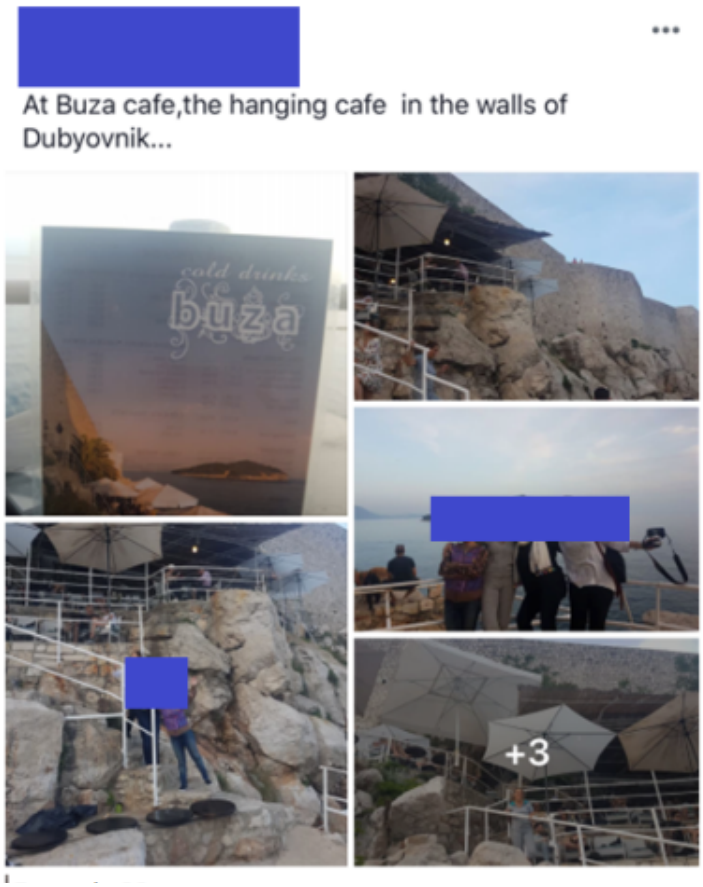
4.5.1 Reporting Life Events

A common way in which participants constructed their identities on Facebook and presented themselves was by reporting on specific events and by providing information on certain activities in their everyday lives. This reporting aspect is evident in certain categories, such as 'What are you doing right now?', 'Reporting day-to-day activities' and 'Reporting significant activities'. In other words, the participants reported on a specific aspect of their life and provided information on certain activities either ones that are being done in the time of posting, or ones that are part of their everyday lives, significant or not. Similarly, Page (2012, p. 69) found in her study that self-reports, as

she refers to them, like reporting day-to-day activities, are a dominant type of activity on Facebook. Page (2012, p. 69) also argues that 'the narrative dimensions of the self-reported stories in status updates are shaped by the generic context of Facebook and the relationship between participants within the collapsed contexts of Facebook Friend lists'. Ochs and Capps (2001) differentiated between high and low tellability in stories. The former type of stories includes the reporting of unusual, out-of-the ordinary events, which captures the interest of the teller's audience in the form of rhetorical performances or polished stories (Ochs and Capps, 2001, pp.34-36; Page 2012, p.69). Highly tellable stories are assumed to be of significance for both the teller and the audience (Page 2012, p.69). On the other hand, stories of low tellability involve the reporting of mundane, ordinary events which is achieved through hesitation and unevenness (Ochs and Copps, 2001, p.76; Page 2011, p.69). Drawing on Ochs and Capps' (2001) distinction between high and low tellability in stories, Page (2012, p.69) also notes that the tellability of the updates is limited by both the need to illustrate social connection with Facebook friends, but also the need to avoid disclosure that may be considered as inappropriate for Facebook friends who are acquaintances rather than intimate, close friends. These types of posts typically focus on the 'minutiae of everyday events' (Page 2012, p. 69). This is also a typical practice among the Facebook users of my study as they update their Facebook friends about the small details of their everyday events with respect to a range of topics such as leisure activities, travelling, domestic or professional activities etc.

Example 23

By taking into consideration the types of events and activities selected for sharing with their Facebook friends, we can infer the ways in which the participants present themselves to their social network and, thus, the range of identities that are considered relevant for this type of interaction. On the basis of my data set, it appears that the participants' professional identity, as well as aspects of their everyday life that are related to the enjoyment of a particular lifestyle and travelling, have been particularly prevalent. The professional identity is the most predominant identity aspect amongst all participants when reporting their day-to-day activities or the activities they were doing at the time of posting. For instance, Rafael foregrounds his professional status as in Example 23, through checking in at the place where he works as well as using photos, live videos and linguistic ways to boast about his workplace. These means are used in order to achieve immediacy with his Facebook friends as well as to promote or advertise his workplace.



Example 24

Another aspect of everyday life foregrounded through the shared posts concerns the trips my participants made and their identity as mobile citizens. In order to achieve this, participants use texts, photos (typically taken from their trip), check-ins at the place they travelled to, and videos. The use of check-ins also achieves immediacy as audiences on Facebook are also given the map of the place the participants have checked in. In Andria's case (see Example 24 above) this type of identity is closely linked to her professional identity as she owns a travel agency and by promoting the trips she has been to, she also promotes and advertises her workplace. Therefore, Andria does not only project an identity as a mobile citizen, but she also uses this type of wall posts to project and construct her professional identity too.

Example 25

In addition to focusing on travelling, posts that reported everyday life report other leisure activities, such as going out for a coffee and going to restaurants. This was achieved through the use of check-ins, photos typically taken at the specific place that the event or activity is taking place and texts (mainly captions), which usually provide some information for the given activity. Example 25 demonstrates how Facebook users achieved this type of identity by checking in at specific restaurants or coffee shops in order to show to their Facebook friends where they are. Therefore, this type of disclosure is used in order to present a certain kind of lifestyle.

Taking all the above into consideration, the participants of the study report on their everyday life events using a variety of linguistic and other semiotic (i.e. visual) means. Drawing on the types of events and activities selected for sharing, we infer that, the participants' professional identity, their identity as mobile citizens and finally aspects of their daily lifestyle seem prevalent when reporting on their everyday life events.

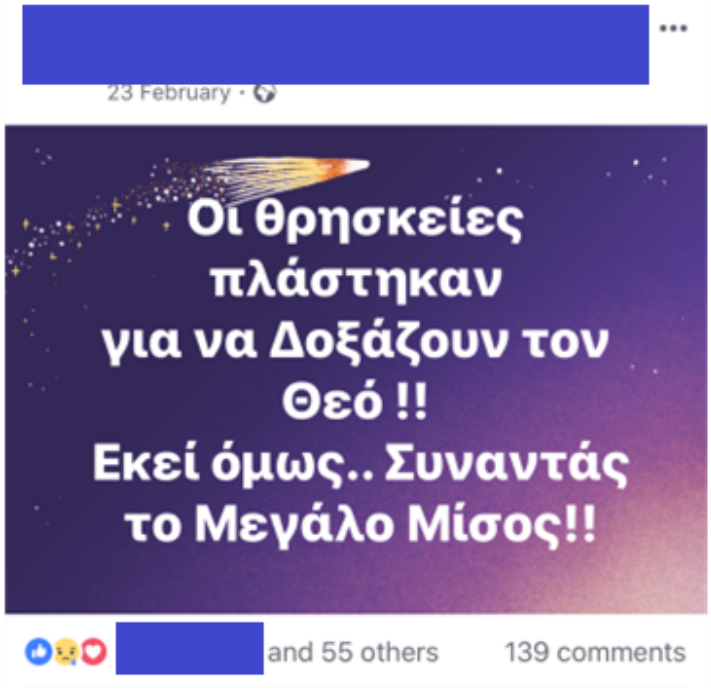
4.5.2 Reporting Mood/Opinion

The analysis of communicative functions reveals that Facebook posts are often used to express opinion or participants' feelings. More specifically, categories that include such functions concern posts 'Reporting mood' and 'Opinion and Judgment'. By taking into account the themes in relation to which emotions and opinions are expressed in the data, we notice that the focus is on politics or society, people, religion, parenthood and family love. On the basis of my dataset, it appears that the participants present themselves as being politicized, religious and family oriented.

Example 26

The participants' posts included their opinion on political matters or matters closely related to the government of Cyprus or the Cypriot society. This was achieved by using several means. One of the most prominent ways of expressing their political stance was by using the post's text to express their opinion, accompanied at times by

photos or videos related to the text. Andreas also expressed his political stance in English in some cases, especially about the Macedonian matter (see Example 26 above). More specifically, example 26 illustrates the use of both Greek and English and a video to express the participant's opinion on the Macedonian matter. English is initially used to comment on the matter and then the Greek translation follows. The use of both languages indicates that the participant wants the post to be understood and read by a wider range of Facebook friends. In other words, he targets both Greek speaking and international audiences as this political stance about Macedonia seems to be a matter that requires attention from most or all his Facebook friends. The video that follows includes an archaeologist's talk about Macedonia and its origins traced back to Alexander the Great. The linguistic mode combined with the video that follows work together in constructing the message of the post and the video is used as validation for the linguistic part of the post and provides proof for the participant's opinion. This practice was also evident in Jones and Li's (2016, p.567) study who argue that videos on social media serve as evidentiary support around which viewers share their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about events through engaging in exercises of ''collective seeing''.



Example 27

Translation: *Religions*
were made
to Worship
God!!
However, there… is where you meet
the great Hatred!!

In addition to focusing on politics, posts that reported opinion and emotions focused on other themes too, such as religion. Through their posts, participants also presented themselves as religious people and more specifically in most cases, their religion was also revealed as the Greek Orthodox, which is associated with Greek-Cypriots in Cyprus. In order to achieve this, the participants used religion-related vocabulary such as God (see Example 27), as well as visuals, such as photos of Jesus Christ. These means are used by participants either to portray religious identities or to express an opinion on a religious matter.

Finally, another aspect foregrounded through the shared posts concerns parenthood and family. In particular, participants presented their orientation towards family values and parenthood by mainly expressing their feelings and/or their opinion on either their own family or the institution and value of family in general. This type of identity is closely related to the idea of affective discourse discussed by Page (2012, p.

72), who explains that Facebook users not only update their audiences about their daily activities, but also 'express their opinions, reactions and emotional responses to their life experiences'. For instance, Rafael uses intensifiers such as 'the great' to refer to the type of hatred in Example 27, in order to emphasize emotion.

Example 28

Translation: *I am very proud of you (son's name)!!!*
I didn't know you were a director too ☺☺<3 <3
<3 <3

This category of posts often included emoticons (for instance in Example 28), which is a word derived from the words 'emotion' and 'icon'. According to Dresner and Herring (2010, p.249) emoticon is 'short for "emotion icons"—refers to graphic signs, such as the smiley face, that often accompany computer-mediated textual

communication'. They, therefore, represent facial expressions and feelings by using symbols incorporated in the keyboard within the Facebook platform. According to Page (2012, p.77) 'emoticons and their allied resources can indicate the current mood of the updater and clarify or accentuate the meaning of a message'. In Example 28, Rafael uses both lexical and other semiotic resources, such as emoticons, to express both his opinion and emotions about his son. More specifically he uses the smiley and heart emoticons along with a video by his son in order to both express his opinion and emotion and advertise his son's work.

As a result, based on the analysis, identities constructed through the participants' expressing opinion, mood or emotions on Facebook wall posts are related to politics, religion and parenthood or family. Similar to when reporting everyday events, participants use several means provided by the Facebook platform to construct these identities by using linguistic means, videos, images. Nevertheless, check-ins are not used for this type of posts whereas check-ins were used to report everyday life events. Additionally, when posting about political matters participants may use either Standard Greek or English or even both languages to express their opinion. Moreover, participants use emoticons when posting about their family or parenthood.

4.5.3 Sharing Humour

The analysis of the posts based on their communicative function has also revealed that a common way in which participants constructed their identities on Facebook and presented themselves was by using and sharing humour. In many cases, humour was used by participants in order to create a feeling of solidarity and to comment on their lives in a humorous manner. In order to achieve this, the participants in this study achieve humour through various means as hyperbole, irony, anecdotes, allusion, humorous lexemes, dialogues and making fun of oneself, reinforced by creative use of resources such as punctuation, emoticons or the use of colour and images. All these means will be further explained and discussed in the following analytical chapter.

Example 29

Translation: *'How old are you?'*
'Around 40'
'How much around?
'Round round everyone'

An example worth mentioning is the one by Maria (Example 29) , where she not only implies that her age is above 40, which is known by her Facebook friends, but by posting a joke in the form of a dialogue she identifies with people who like to hide their age after the age of 40. This type of humour is used to achieve solidarity with people among her Facebook friends who are older than 40 years old. Thus, humour is evident in the participants' posts and is used mainly to achieve a more playful identity, which is a common aim among Facebook users as previous research suggests (e.g. Deumert, 2014; Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014; Lewin-Jones, 2015). The thematic content of the posts containing humour varied, ranging from jokes about age,

nationality, family, relationships, politics etc. Deumert (2014, p.23) argues that playfulness is evident in online interactions among users. According to her paper, drawing on Jos de Mul's (2005) idea of ludic self-construction in new media contexts, it is argued that as online users, as well as Facebook users engage in a playful mode online, they 'mobilize (and desire) a particular type of self, as well as a particular set of social relations: light hearted and creative, enjoyable and full of possibilities' (Deumert 2014, p.27). Thurlow (2012, p. 186) also agrees that creativity in new media is rather 'mundane and intensely social'. In other words, the playfulness and creativity achieved through humour and the use of quotations on Facebooks is closely related to how users wish to present themselves to their chosen audiences as well as acting social in the Facebook platform often expecting and hoping for a positive response from their Facebook friends.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the initial quantitative analysis of the 2822 posts collected during the 6-month period of the study, in which each post was examined and categorized based on its communicative function. Drawing on Lee's (2011) study, an adjusted classification of the posts was introduced, which added some new categories to Lee's (2011) categorisation, such as 'Reminiscing the past', 'Congratulating' 'Wishes' and 'Informing about a social matter'. This classification of posts was demonstrated in Table 1. The quantitative analysis of the posts revealed that the four most prominent communicative functions (which accounted for a combined 66% of the total number of communicative functions observed in the data) were found in posts in which participants (1) express judgment/opinion; (2) report their mood, (3) share quotations and (4) express humour.

The vast majority of posts assigned to the category of quotations included famous quotes related to life, relationships, and religion, which the participants in the study used to express their opinions on related topics, or included funny quotes in the form of ready-made jokes or memes. Thus, almost all posts belonging to the quotation category were also assigned to another category, typically the category of judgment/opinion or the category of humour. A similar observation was made with

regards to posts belonging to the mood category, most posts in which participants expressed their mood were posts in which they were also expressing an opinion or judgment about a matter. Accordingly, based on the quantitative analysis of this section and the observed overlap between the four dominant categories, the following analytical chapters will focus and examine in more detail the two categories of 'opinion and judgment' and 'humour,' noting that this analysis effectively also covers the posts belonging to the 'mood' and 'quotation' categories. Specifically, the following chapters will examine what identities participants orient to when expressing their opinion or share humour on their timelines, and how participants construct these identities on their walls using various linguistic and other semiotic tools.

Apart from the quantitative basis for choosing the two categories of "opinion" and "humour" as the focus of the following chapters, several smaller categories, such as 'Reminiscing the past', 'Informing about a social matter', and 'Initiating discussion' also exhibited a strong overlap with the 'opinion' and 'humour' categories, further reinforcing the decision to focus on the specific categories. Other smaller categories such as 'Wishes', 'Congratulating', 'Greeting', 'Announcing and advertising' included repetitive, often formulaic language which, drawing on the posts collected in the study, were excluded from the analysis as they did not provide sufficient discursive data for the analysis of identity construction on Facebook (this is further reinforced by the fact that Facebook itself now acknowledges the use of such formulaic language for these communicative functions and highlights formulaic language used for congratulating people by using bold orange letters for the word 'Congratulations' or 'Μπράβο' (translation: Bravo) in Greek or for 'Happy Birthday' or 'ΧρόνιαΠολλά', which is a Greek expression used for birthdays, name days, or anniversaries). Moreover, categories that reported on the participants' life events, which included mundane, day-to-day activities, significant activities or the activities they were doing at the moment of sharing were excluded from the analysis in order to protect the participants' identity, since this type of posts often included images from their families, friends, every-day activities and personal spaces. Finally, the category 'Facebook-related discourse' only included 4 posts, and therefore no meaningful conclusions could be drawn on this type of practice due to insufficient data.

The main questions that will be addressed by the analysis in the following analytical chapter will be what type of identities older Facebook users construct when sharing humour on their walls, and how they use linguistic and other semiotic resources to project different online identities on their Facebook walls when sharing humour. Based on the findings of this chapter, sharing humour and thus orienting to playful identities on Facebook is a prominent practice among older Facebook users, and is often achieved in the form of posts containing quotations and memes. Although online discourse is often characterized as playful, humorous, and creative, as Vásquez and Creel (2017, p.59) point out, only a small number of digital media studies have previously focused on this topic.

Chapter 5: Humour

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter's findings indicate that humour is one of the key themes and functions that emerged from the initial analysis of the posts based on their communicative function. Furthermore, it has been argued that a playful identity is constructed on Facebook by older users in the form of quotations and in other forms. In fact, 'online discourse is often characterized as playful, humorous and creative' (Vásquez and Creel, 2017, p.59). Therefore, humour will be further explored in this chapter. Initially, the first part of the chapter will define humour for the purposes of the study by comparing and contrasting this term to other similar terms found in the literature such as creativity, play and playfulness. Furthermore, this chapter will examine how older users construct identities when sharing humour on Facebook in more detail. More specifically, this study will explore the discourse strategies that Facebook users exploit in order to communicate humorous content on their Facebook walls. In other words, this thesis will further explore the linguistic and semiotic means used in their posts to project humour. According to Vásquez and Creel (2017, p.59) a limited number of studies have focused primarily on humour in the past. Furthermore, humour has been examined in the past in relation to young people, either by examining the ways in which it is achieved by them on social media (e.g. Inyabri, et. al., 2021) or how it is perceived by them on social media (e.g. Kasmani 2022). According to Mukherjee (2018, p.114), 'humour is pervasive' and 'people of all ages, cultures, religions, and every stratum of society experience humour on a daily basis'. Therefore, there is a need to examine not only humour among young people, but also humour among older users of social media, and more specifically Facebook.

5.2 Humour, creativity and playfulness

Humour, creativity, play and playfulness are all terms used by several scholars (e.g. Nishimura 2015; Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014; Deumert 2014; Page 2014; Attardo 1994; Vásquez 2019; Vásquez and Creel 2017). These terms are often associated with the types of interactions people engage in either online or offline in

order to construct humorous and playful identities or in other words to convey humour using a specific tool, such as making jokes, using memes, hyperboles etc. This section will discuss these terms prior to the analysis of the posts that displayed humour as a prime communicative function.

Even though humour is a very common aspect among humans, it is also a complicated one. According to Pindur (2019, p.28), humour is a very complex phenomenon and can be examined from various angles. Due to its complexity this phenomenon is hard to define even though different disciplines have attempted to do so in the past, such as philosophy, linguistics, psychology or sociology (Reyes et. at 2012, p. 2). Definitions of humour go back to Plato's era who is considered as one of the early humour theorists who defined it as 'a mixed feeling of the soul' relating to a mixture of pleasure and pain' (Piddington 1933, p.152; Attardo 1994, p.18). In the past, Reyes et. al. (2012, p.2) have defined humour simply as relating to 'the presence of amusing effects, such as laughter or well-being sensations'. They continue by arguing that the main function of humour is 'to release emotions, sentiments or feelings that positively impact on human health'. However, defining humour is a rather complex matter as 'the stimuli that make people laugh can hardly be generalized or formalized' (Reyes et. al. 2012, p.2).

There are two broad approaches to examining humour linguistically i.e. essentialist and teleological /sociolinguistic (Attardo 1994, p.2) or also referred to as anti-essentialist approaches (Pindur 2019, p.29). Attardo's (1994) and Raskin's (1984) work have been influential in how humour can be understood linguistically and suggested several linguistic theories of humour. Raskin (1984) proposed the Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) which argues that for a text to be considered as humorous it should be possible to be read in two opposite semantic scripts. According to Raskin (1984, p. 81) a semantic script is 'a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it'. Raskin's work was then extended by Attardo and Raskin (1991) work who proposed the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). This theory is considered as essentialist, because of its universality and is concerned with what contributes to the creation of humour. It classifies the script opposition suggested by Raskin (1984) as being one of the six Knowledge Resources which contribute to the

structure of a joke. The other five include: Logical Mechanism which refers to the logical connection between the opposing scripts; Situation refers to the reality described; Target to 'the person or object being referred to in the joke or ridiculed by it'; Narrative Strategy refers to 'the organisational structure of the joke'; and finally, Language which is considered 'the medium necessary to verbalize the joke' (Masaeli and Heidari-Shahreza 2016, p. 232). Additionally, in the field of linguistics, Attardo's (1994, 2001) work has been influential when studying humour. Overall, essentialist approaches' goal is common which is to identify the features that make a situation, a text or an object funny (Attardo 1994, pp. 9-10). In essentialist approaches to humour, according to Pindur (2019, p. 29) there is the presumption that 'there exists some essence of humour that is present in every humorous phenomenon'.

In sociolinguistic approaches to humour or anti-essentialist approaches, several scholars (e.g. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1990; Goodchilds et. al. 1972; Latta 1999) have challenged the notion that humour can be limited to a single essence or theory as in essentialist approaches. For instance, Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1990, p.147), suggested a polythetic-prototype approach which 'stresses the lack of constants in humour, making it indefinable but recognizes elements in it with high frequency'. This study approaches humour in an anti-essentialist manner. Humour in this study is used as an umbrella term to describe the communicative function that has been achieved through the post. In other words, posts that aimed at creating amusing effects such as making other Facebook users laugh or creating well-being sensations will be considered as humorous. On the other hand, creativity, play and playfulness are considered as practices or techniques used to achieve humour. However, these practices are not restricted to humour as they may be used to achieve other goals not only online but offline too. For instance, one can be playful and creative on social media platforms but may use these practices to achieve other communicative ends, such as through non-standard typography or orthography referred to in the literature as 'Netspeak' (see Crystal 2001).

Creativity has been broadly identified by Swann and Maybin (2007, p. 491) as 'a property of all language use in that language users do not simply reproduce but recreate, refashion and recontextualize linguistic and cultural resources in the act of

communicating'. This definition has been challenged by Jones (2010, pp.467-468) because 'it locates creativity in the ways in which 'linguistic resources' themselves are recreated and reconfigured rather than in the acts of communicating for which they are used'. He argues that even though this definition focuses on language use and language users, most work in the language and creativity field has mainly highlighted the formal aspects of language so far and not so much the context in which language is produced. As a result, he continues by stating that there is a need to shift the focus on how language is used in situated social contexts and contributes to the creation of new kinds of identities, social practices and relationships of power. He proposes the 'discourse and creativity' approach which 'locates creativity in the concrete social actions that people use these words and texts to perform' (Jones 2010, p.468), rather than 'linguistic creativity', i.e. locating creativity in words and how they are put together to form texts like other 'language and creativity' approaches in the field (e.g. Carter 2004). This approach according to Nishimura (2015, p.105) is more helpful when discussing creative practices as it takes into consideration how users' choices are linked with their identities which is also crucial for this study. Solely looking at the output product and not considering the context in which it occurs can make it difficult to reach a better understanding of this process, as also highlighted by Nishimura (2015, p.105).

Play and playfulness are also terms that are often used along with humour and creativity. Based on the literature, it seems that play and playfulness are terms used interchangeably. More specifically, Nishimura (2015, p.105) notes that 'play in online environments covers a wide range of activities such as performing characters/roles, engaging in games, and displaying language play'. Therefore, for the purposes of this study play and playfulness are considered as tools with which one could achieve humour. The importance of play in digital communication has also been argued in Danet's (2001) work and the concept of play has since then been the topic of research of many other researchers (e.g. Rao, 2008; McIntosh 2010). According to Deumert (2014, p.23) 'this playfulness is visible in the types of interactions people engage in online-they play games, joke, flirt or just hang out with one another - as well as in the language and multimodal imagery they use'. Based on Herring et. al (2013, p.8), the common features of language use online such as abbreviation, unconventional spelling,

acronyms, emoticons and other features ‘represent the inherently ludic character of language use on the Internet’. As a result, this type of language use online can be regarded as playful. Inspired by the philosopher Jos de Mul’s (2005) work, Deumert (2014, p.23) investigates ‘ludic self-construction’, according to which new media provide a space in which people can relate to themselves and others in a playful manner.

Overall, this thesis will consider humour as an umbrella term as mentioned above. Within this concept of humour, creativity and play are tools with which the participants achieve humour on their Facebook posts. Considering that this chapter will not only take into consideration the linguistic resources used, but also any other semiotic resources which are mobilized by the multimodal nature of the posts, the next section offers a brief review of the key ways of doing humour online, as discussed in previous literature.

5.3 Linguistic and other semiotic tools for contructing identities related to humour online

Before analysing humour on Facebook as well as how various identities are constructed through humour in my data, I will identify the different ways in which humour can be constructed in this section. The focus will be primarily on the discourse strategies and tools which users exploit in order to communicate humorous content on the Facebook walls. Before identifying these tools, it is important to take into consideration that the way in which humour is understood and responded to is very much context-bound and humour largely operates on the basis of shared knowledge of interlocutors (Holmes and Marra, 2002; Schnurr and Chan, 2011).

The various discursive ways with which users can construct a humorous identity will be defined and discussed briefly. These include the use of incongruity, intertextuality, interdiscursivity irony and sarcasm, memic language and polyphony or voicing. These macro-categories may also include some micro-categories of various ways in which humour can be achieved such as hyperbole, metaphor, puns and analogy.

5.3.1 Incongruity

Several theories of humour include incongruity as one of its basic elements (Ritchie 2004, 1999, 2009; Hurley et al. 2011; Franklyn 2006). In fact, this link is further reinforced by Ritchie (2009, pp.313-314) who argues that humour is caused by incongruity. Several scholars have attempted to define incongruity in the past. For instance, McGhee (1979, pp.6-7) states that the terms congruity and incongruity are both referrals of the relationship between different components of an event, an idea, a social expectation or, when applied in linguistics, a communicative or discursive event. According to McGhee (1979, pp.6-7), incongruity occurs when 'the arrangement of the constituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern'. Furthermore, drawing on Deckers and Kizer(1975, p. 215), Pindur (2019, p.29), argues that incongruity refers to the situation in which humour is 'centred on introducing something unexpected or absurd in a certain situation', or also refers to as an element of surprise, which often affects the way or enlightens how the perceiver understands the situation. Drawing on Suls (1983, pp.41-42) and Jabłońska-Hood (2015, p. 111), Pindur (2019,p. 30) also adds that the humorous effect is established when 'the perceiver can understand the incongruous element and see its connection with the situation'.

Taking all the above into account, it seems that the element of something unexpected or surprising occurring is vital for incongruity to be achieved in humour but it is also important for the other party (listener/reader) to comprehend incongruity in order for it to achieve a humorous effect. As Pindur (2019, p.30) explains this is why a joke is not considered funny for a certain person if someone else needs to explain it to them. McGhee (1979, p.10), among others scholars (e.g. Ritchie 2004, 1999; Hurley et al. 2011; Franklyn 2006), considers incongruity an important and necessary condition for humour to occur, however, he adds that it is also not a sufficient one. Therefore, it is the combination of incongruity with other elements that can achieve a humorous effect.

5.3.2 Intertextuality and interdiscursivity

Intertextuality can also be used for humorous reasons and has been studied in the past in relation to humour (e.g. Tsakona 2018; Norrick 1989; Kinnunen 2012). Intertextuality is a concept attributed to Kristeva (1980, p. 66), who noted that 'any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'. Drawing on Kristeva's (1980) work, intertextuality occurs when quotations are taken from a given text, transformed and used in another text as a reference point to those specific quotations. Moreover, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002, p.73), argue that intertextuality occurs when 'all communicative events draw on earlier events', and when the language that has been used before, is used again, which means that texts draw on other texts. Furthermore, Tsakona (2018, p.2) adds that 'intertextuality infiltrates everything we say or write: our utterances/texts respond to previous utterances/texts, they reflect, recontextualize, or even re-accentuate them via implicit or explicit references'. As a result, recontextualization, in the form of reported speech or quotes, is also a concept closely related to intertextuality, which refers to this process of transferring language (Nguyen2017, pp.4-5). Similarly, Rock et. al. (2013, p.4) also refer to textual travel which 'concerns the way that texts move through and around institutional processes and are shaped, altered and appropriated during their journeys'.

Intertextuality nowadays is evident more than ever, due to the ways technology has evolved and the rise of social media and it can be used for humorous purposes along with other communicative purposes. Similarly, Tsakona (2018, p.210) states that 'we are surrounded by a network of interrelated texts, where each of them may influence the form and/or content of the other'. In fact, intertextuality is evident on social media in various forms. For instance, references to popular culture texts are often made by social media users and take the form of posting lines from a song, a popular film in order to comment on a situation online (Vasquez 2017, p.64).

On the other hand, interdiscursivity is closely related to intertextuality and refers to the 'mix of discourses, genres and styles in a communicative event, or a single text' (Nguyen2017, p.5). Interdiscursivity may also be used to achieve humorous effects through quotation and allusion (Nguyen 2017, p.5). Allusion is often confused with intertextuality but, according to Nguyen (2017, p.5), it is like a 'casual reference, an

incidental mention of something, either directly or by implication'; so intertextuality is a broader term which also encompasses allusion. Nguyen (2017, p. 5) makes a distinction between intertextuality and interdiscursivity by arguing that 'intertextuality refers to texts which are made up of elements from other texts (quotes, for example)'. In comparison, interdiscursivity refers to 'the process of constituting texts by combining discourses, genres and styles from the language system' (Nguyen 2017, p.5).

5.3.3 Irony and sarcasm

Irony and sarcasm are terms closely linked to humour and they are both frequently linked together in the literature (Colston 2007; Gibbs and Colston 2007). Sarcasm comes from the Greek word 'σαρκασμός', which according to Khoklova et al. (2016, n.p.) 'means "to tear flesh", e.g. to speak in this manner whereas irony on the other hand, comes from the Greek word 'ειρωνεία' which can be 'translated as "dissimulation"'. Irony is often considered as the broader term which also includes sarcasm (Khoklova et al. 2016, n.p.) Reyes et. al. (2013, pp.241-242) makes a distinction between the two by highlighting that 'irony tends to be a more sophisticated mode of communication than sarcasm: whereas the former often emphasizes a playful pretense [..] the latter is more often concerned with biting delivery and savage putdowns'. Moreover, it is noted that 'while irony courts ambiguity and often exhibits great subtlety, sarcasm is delivered with a cutting or withering tone that is rarely ambiguous' (Reyes et. al. 2013, p.242). Drawing on Giora (1995) and Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989), Khoklova et al. (2016, n.p.) add to this distinction by arguing that 'sarcasm is often interpreted as malicious irony that is intended to mock at somebody'. Therefore, a further difference to irony is that sarcasm may target a specific victim and may express 'indignation and hate in their highest form' (Khoklova et al. 2016, n.p.). Defining irony is a complex matter since it is a type of figurative language. Based on previous literature, there are two types of irony: verbal irony and situational irony. The former refers to when 'a speaker says something that seems to be the opposite of what he/she means (Reyes 2012, p.2) whereas the latter refers to 'an unexpected or incongruous property in a situation or event: i.e. situations that are just not meant to be' (Reyes et. al, 2012, p.2). Focusing on verbal irony from a pragmatic approach, Grice

(1975, pp.69-74) considers an expression as being ironic when it intentionally violates the maxim of quality i.e. expecting conversational contributions to be genuine, truthful and not spurious.

5.3.4 Polyphony and Voicing

Creative use of language is also often achieved through the notion of polyphony (Bakhtin 1984, 1986). According to Vasquez and Creel (2017, p.64) 'polyphony refers to appropriating, mixing, enacting, or impersonating, the voices of others'. She continues by arguing that this can be achieved either by incorporating the voices of actual individuals or 'it can refer more generally, to the blending of different styles, genres, or registers' (Vaqsquez and Creel 2017, p.64). As Baxter (2014, p.36) argues, polyphony refers to creative uses of language where several 'voices are juxtaposed and counterposed in ways that generate a creative energy, synthesis or productive outcome beyond the original'. Jones (2012, p.6) has also claimed that creative processes are often linked to hybridity or blending, in other words, with 'linking previously unrelated ideas, concepts or elements into new patterns'. In the context of social media, Vasquez and Creel's (2017) study has investigated how polyvocality and double-voicing are used by Tumblr users to produce humorous posts. In my study, polyphony in the form of switching between styles, genres, registers or even languages will be examined in relation to humour and how users use polyphony to construct humorous identities on Facebook.

5.3.5 Memic language

Memes have become popular on the internet and are often related to humour as they are considered usually as jokes in an online format (Dainas2015,p. 59). According to Kostadinovska-Stojchevskaand Shalevska (2018, p.158), the internet nowadays enables users with the possibility to communicate their thoughts, ideas, jokes, anecdotes, as well as their opinion about the society they live in and its political leaders (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska and Shalevska 2018, p.158). They argue that in order to do so emoticons, GIFs and memes are key tools and define memes as part of the online culture; 'mostly jokes that are presented through mediums such as image+text or

GIF+text combinations or just plain text and are spread virally on all Internet-based platforms, changing along the way' (Kostadinovska-Stojchevskaand Shalevska 2018, p.158). Davison (2012, p.122) defines a meme as 'a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission'. The most popular category of memes includes an image and a piece of written text, also known as image macros (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska and Shalevska 2018, p.158; Zenner and Geeraerts, p. 171).

Taking both definitions into consideration, it seems that key characteristics of memes include their format and their function, (i.e. humour, as they often include jokes). In addition, a key feature of memes seems to be their virality on Internet-based platforms and, therefore, social networking sites. This is further supported by Davison (2012, p.122) who argues that 'while not all internet memes are jokes, comparing them to offline jokes makes it clear what makes internet memes unique: the speed of their transmission and the fidelity of the form'. Thus, a joke which exists on the internet, and especially in the form of memes, is much easier and faster to be transmitted in contrast to a spoken joke.

5.3.6 Other devices which may be used for humorous purposes

Apart from these wider discursive devices that are often used to achieve humorous effects, other micro-devices may also be used for humorous communicative functions. These include hyperbole, metaphors or puns. Hyperbole is a term which can be traced back to the Greek word 'υπερβολή' and refers to 'a figure of speech consisting in exaggerated or extravagant statement, used to express strong feeling or produce a strong impression, and not intended to be understood literally' according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2023). Definitions of hyperbole in linguistics focus on the element of exaggeration and the emphasis of speech elements such as overstatement, extremity and excess (e.g. Carston and Wearing, 2015; Colston and Keller, 1998; Norrick, 2004; Cano Mora, 2009; Claridge, 2010). According to Burgers et. al. (2016, p.164) definitions of hyperbole assume that 'hyperbole (1) is scalar, (2) involves a specific shift between the propositional and the intended meaning, and (3) includes a specific referent'. Hyperbole is often used as a stylistic device for humour.

Metaphor is also a stylistic device which can be used for humorous reasons. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 5) define the essence of metaphors as 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another'. Semino (2021, p.50) adds to this definition by arguing that metaphors 'involves talking and, potentially, thinking, about one thing in terms of another, where the two things are different but some similarities or correspondences can be perceived between them'. Metaphors have been examined in relation to humour in the past (e.g. Dynel 2009; Kyratzis 2003; Veale 2003; Piata 2016). Piata (2016, p. 39) states that metaphor and humour both dwell on duality which makes them conceptually similar, 'yet they process it in a different way; metaphor fully resolves the tension between domains while humour does so only partially'. In Piata's (2016) study of a particular type of internet memes which mimic election campaign spots in a humorous way, during the two election campaigns in Greece in 2015. In this study, metaphors are examined as part of memes for humorous and other purposes (Piata 2016).

Puns are also closely related to humour (Attardo 1994). Puns occur when a word is used as 'to suggest two or more meanings or different associations' or when two or more words which share the same or similar sound with different meanings are used in order to produce a humorous effect also referred to as play on words (OED 2023). In Attardo's (1994, p.109) work, puns are referred to as 'spoken jokes (or jokes meant to be interpreted as if read aloud'. He adds that 'when one is discussing a pun's signifier, one needs only to refer to its phonological representation, but, there are also instances of visual puns' (Attardo 1994, p.109). Taking both definitions into consideration it seems that puns share certain characteristics. Gan (2015, p. 1212) summarizes these characteristics by arguing that 'a pun always uses words that have the same sound or similar pronunciation, or a word that has two or more interpretations' and 'is a kind of rhetorical device that produces certain language effects, especially humour'. In the past, puns were seen as 'the only legitimate field for the interdisciplinary contacts between linguistics and humour studies' (Attardo 1994, p.108). Puns were examined by Kao et. al. (2016, p.1271) in relation to incongruity as puns are considered as 'simple humorous sentences with multiple meanings' which facilitate incongruity in linguistic humour highlighting the element of ambiguity needed for incongruity to be achieved.

The above macro and micro-devices will be further examined in this chapter in relation to the humorous posts produced by my participants. The humorous posts collected will initially be analysed quantitatively based on the authorship of the posts, i.e. whether they are generated and shared by the participants, whether they represent posts that the participants have reshared or whether they display a combination of both these practices. Then, the posts will be analysed qualitatively focusing on key moments of sharing in order to examine how humour is done and what identity work is achieved through the specific posts.

5.4 Quantitative analysis of humorous posts

After identifying the various ways in which humour can be constructed, as noted in existing literature, this section presents a quantitative analysis of the humorous posts in terms of their authorship format i.e. whether they were generated and authored by the participants, generated by someone else and reshared by participants or a combination of both. Overall, the humorous posts were divided into three categories, a) posts that include humorous content generated and authored by participants themselves and b) posts that reshare humorous content generated and authored by others and c) posts that include reshared humorous content generated and authored by others together with a caption generated by participants. With respect to the second category, even though users simply share the content of others, examining what users select to share with their Facebook audience, contributes to examining how participants construct identities when sharing humour on Facebook. More specifically, the choice they make indicates a preference for or relatability with the content of these posts.

Name of Participant	Participant-generated Humorous Content	Resharing humorous content (generated by other Facebook users or pages)	Combination ofboth participant-generated humour and resharing	Total
Andreas	19	0	0	**19**
Andria	0	1	1	**2**
Christophoros	2	4	4	**10**
Christos	5	1	3	**9**
Giorgos	0	1	0	**1**
Loukia	0	61	0	**61**
Maria	0	365	0	**365**
Nikos	27	0	5	**32**
Rafael	48	1	8	**57**
Total	**101**	**434**	**21**	**556**

Table 2: Quantitative analysis of humorous posts

As identified in the previous chapter, there are 556 humorous posts. Table 2 indicates how these instances can be further categorized into three broad categories based on their authorship. The first category, i.e. humorous posts generated by and authored by the participant, may reveal the linguistic and other semiotic ways through which the participants construct a humorous identity towards their Facebook audience. In contrast, the second category, i.e. reshared humorous posts generated by others, may lack the creativity and contribution in terms of authorship on the part of the participants, but they can still prove a fruitful source as to how users construct identities related to humour.

In terms of their relative frequency, only 18% (101) of the humorous posts belonged to the first category. As shown in Table 1 five participants out of nine generated humorous content in their posts with Rafael, Nikos and Andreas being the only ones who generated more than a couple of posts in this category. It is also striking that these three participants rarely engaged in the practice of resharing humorous content from other pages on Facebook. In terms of the topics that these humorous posts touched upon, they range from social issues, politics, football, pop culture, family life, the other sex (i.e. women), their pets or, even, themselves (self-sarcasm).

On the other hand, 78% (434) of the posts belonged to the category of resharing humorous content. As shown in Table 1, while most participants reshared posts from other humorous pages on Facebook, Maria (and less so Loukia) appears to be the most avid sharer with 365 instances posted over 6 months. Thematically, these posts included jokes related to age, society, culture, as well as themselves in the form of self-sarcasm.

Finally, only 3.78% (21) of the posts belonged to the final category which combined both the participant-generated practice of constructing humour as well as the resharing of another post. For the purposes of the qualitative analysis that follows, I will mainly focus on the first two broad categories of humorous posts since the third category includes a limited number of instances and therefore, there is insufficient data to draw any conclusions. The analysis will focus on the macro- and micro- linguistic and other semiotic tools used to construct the participants' humorous identities.

Overall, the quantitative analysis indicates that the women in the study prefer to reshare humorous posts whereas male participants prefer to generate and author humorous content. As a result, gender may play a role in terms of how users construct their humour-related identities on Facebook, which will be explored further in the qualitative analysis. Moreover, Table 1 also illustrates that participants who choose to reshare humorous content do not generate original humorous posts, and vice versa. Therefore, they appear to select and orient towards one practice in their humorous posts.

5.5 The resharing of humorous posts as a means to construct various identities

Starting with the second category that includes the most instances of humorous posts, this section aims to examine the specific strategies that are employed in the posts that get reshared by participants on their Facebook walls (i.e. posts that reshare humorous content generated by others). At the same time, the qualitative analysis will be used to explore how users construct several identities when sharing humour on Facebook.

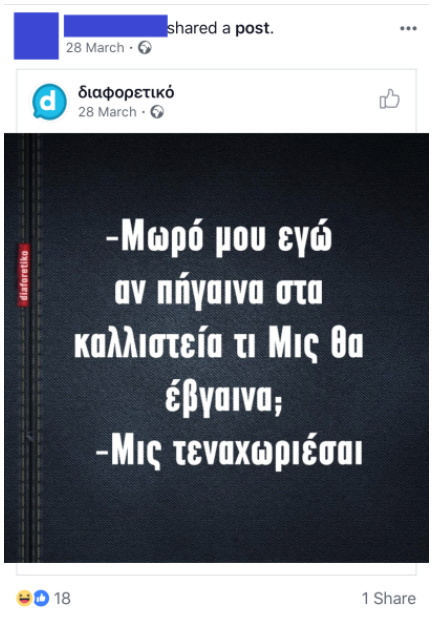
Internet memes are a common way to convey humour on the internet. As already mentioned, according to Davison (2012, p.122) 'an internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission'. Similarly, Shifman

(2013, p.367) defines internet memes as 'units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by individual Internet users, creating shared cultural experience in the process'. Thus, drawing on Shifman (2013) and Davison (2012), it seems that the higher frequency of posts with reshared content is related to the fact that these include reshared content in the form of memes. Moreover, Blommaert and Varis' (2015, p.36) definition of memes focuses on the format of memes as well, as they note that memes are 'often multimodal signs in which images and texts are combined'. They argue that memes facilitate intense resemiotization, by explaining that in memes 'original signs are altered in various ways, generically germane—a kind of 'substrate' recognisability would be maintained—but situationally adjusted and altered so as to produce very different communicative effects' (Blommaert and Varis 2015, p.36). These effects may also include identity construction, which is the main focus of this study. Furthermore, in their definition of memes they highlight that a significant level of semiotic productivity is often resulted by memes. This semiotic productivity may involve a variety of semiotic activity or genres (Blommaert and Varis 2015, p.36). In their study, Blommaert and Varis (2015) also draw on the fact that memes become viral on the web, as also highlighted by Davison (2012) and Shifman (2013). Taking all these definitions into consideration memes in this study are defined as multimodal signs, in which images and texts are combined, that are circulated, imitated and transformed by individual Internet users. Memes are further explored in this section in relation to the key research question of the chapter which is to identify how older Facebook users construct various identities in relation to humour on Facebook.

In order to investigate the ways in which users construct humorous identities it is useful to explore what the participants find relevant to share and laugh at and/or with their Facebook friends. Maria is the key representative of the category of reshared posts (365 out of 434 reshared posts) followed by Loukia (61 out of 434 reshared posts). Drawing on the content of the posts and what participants find relevant to share with their Facebook audiences, it seems that reshared posts in the form of memes can be used by participants to index various identities related to age, gender, lifestyle and profession.

5.5.1 Memes and Gender

A prominent topic explored in the humorous reshared posts by Loukia and Maria is the relationship between women and men, and in some cases between women and other people such as their mother-in-law. The act of resharing and thus, foregrounding of these posts on their wall, suggests that the specific participants orient to normative constructions of gender, as it will become evident in the examples. Normative gender roles are greatly affected by how women and men are portrayed stereotypically according to the traits they are assumed to possess. According to Hussain et. al (2015, p.1) 'normative role behaviour is collectivistic that delimits individual freedom and tie them to predetermined rights and duties as well as expectations'. They continue by noting that 'the socially constructed and culturally defined realities are closely associated with the development of stereotypes that are predetermined notions or images, which define various spheres of activities including gender' (Hussain et. al 2015, p.1). These stereotypes serve in differentiating males and females; as argued by Podesva and Van Hofwegen (2014, p.136), according to normative ideologies, women and men are portrayed as being significantly distinct from one another.



Example 30

Translation: *'Baby if I went to*

a beauty pageant which Miss title
would I win?',
'Don't be sad'

Example 30 illustrates how gender identity, particularly the hetero-normative construction of a woman as a person who is primarily concerned with their physical appearance and attractiveness, is portrayed through the reshared memes on the participants' walls. In the specific example, we notice the use of polyphony and voicing in the reshared post. Polyphony refers to 'appropriating, mixing, enacting, or impersonating, the voices of others' (Vasquez and Creel 2017, p.64). Furthermore, polyphony can be achieved by (i) incorporating the voices of actual individuals; (ii) by 'the blending of different styles, genres, or registers' (Vaqsquez and Creel 2017, p.64) and (iii) by the creative mixing of languages. As shown in example 30, memes in my sample draw on polyphony, evident in the use of dialogues between characters, indicated through dialogue markers (i.e. the use of hyphens) or through speech bubbles in images of people –or even animals- conversing.

As illustrated in example 30, polyphony is achieved through the use of dialogue markers. Example 30 appears as a dialogue where one party is addressing the other with the affectionate term 'baby' and therefore indicates that the two interlocutors are in a relationship. At the same time, the question regarding beauty pageants, which are typically associated with women in Cyprus, shows that the two interlocutors are either a woman talking to a man she is in a relationship with or two women in a relationship. This meme is funny due to the language play and incongruity detected in the second utterance which is a reply to the first one. Language play is achieved through the pun between the words 'Μις' and 'Μις στεναχωριεσαι' by the two interlocutors: the former 'Μις' (meaning 'miss'), refers to a woman winning a title at a beauty pageant (e.g. Miss Cyprus, Miss Wales 2023), whereas the latter represents a homophone form that is creatively used by conflating the negative particle 'mi' (μη, don't) with the initial sound 's' (σ) of the verb 'be sad' in Greek (στεναχωριέσαι). Incongruity is achieved through the creative parsing of the two forms and the absence of a positive response, implying that the woman would not receive the 'Miss' title, perhaps because they are not physically attractive.

The use of puns, and more specifically homophones, as illustrated in example 30, in relation to formulating a joke has also been examined in previous literature (e.g. Attardo 1994; Kao et. al 2013; Kao et. al 2016). According to Attardo (1994, p.143) incongruity on its own is not enough for humour to be perceived and achieved. In order for the humour to be perceived, resolving the incongruity is crucial (Attardo 1994, pp.144-145). In fact, Attardo (1994, p.144) claims that all puns serve as resolution elements in the form of 'pseudo-errors'. In example 30 for instance, the reply of the second interlocutor includes a linguistic error since the expression 'Μη στεναχωριέσαι' (translation: don't be sad) includes the negation along with the verb. The word play of the negation along with the first letter of the verb is a pseudo-error to allude to the word 'miss' used by the first speaker.

Chiaro (2018, p. 105) also suggests that women tend to display self-deprecatory humour especially on digital media. This type of humour often relates to the appearance of women since nowadays 'various media promote the body beautiful and eternal youth especially for women' which leads to a number of women being insecure about their appearance and bodies (Chiaro 2018, p.105). According to Chiaro (2018, p.105) 'joking about inadequacies is an obvious choice of comic material together with the subject of the decline of the female body due to ageing'. In example 30, a female participant chooses to reshare a meme with this type of humour. The resharing of this post may indicate a sense of relatability with the content of the meme or it may indicate the participant's attempt to connect with her female Facebook friends who may also find this type of meme funny or relatable.

5.5.2 Memes and Age

Similar to example 30, self-deprecatory humour by female participants is also evident in reshared content which thematically revolve around gender and ageing. According to Chiaro (2018, p.105) the subject of ageing is common in self-deprecatory humour produced by women. Gendered ideologies are shaped and produced in relation to local understandings of race, class, sexuality and age (Hall 2004, p.372; Hall 2020, p.242). Thus, how my participants construct humour related to gender can be affected by other factors such as age in this case and the way age is perceived in the local community.

In order to illustrate how age identities are talked about and constructed through the memes participants share on their Facebook walls, let us consider example 31.

Example 31

Translation: *'And how old are you?',*
'I am 20, and you?'
'and we are all fine, thank God'

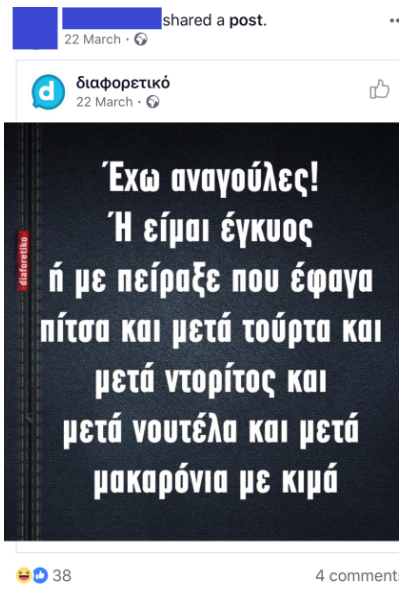
Example 31 reveals an orientation towards age in the meme Maria shares with her Facebook friends. Similar to example 30, this meme also depicts a dialogue between two speakers. The first individual asks about the age of their interlocutor with the latter avoiding answering a question regarding their age and instead answering how they are. The juxtaposition between '(εσύ) είσαι (translation: you-SING are)' in the first turn and 'εσείς (είστε) (translation: you are –PLU)' in the second turn is the key indication that the dialogue is between two people who likely belong to different age groups. The plural form of the pronoun *you*is used to address a single addressee in polite or formal situations as it is considered a politeness marker when addressing an older person, a person with status or a stranger. Additionally, the pun at the end also

confirms the age difference which is set up earlier through the pronoun use, as the speaker uses the plural pronoun *we* and not *I* even though they talk about themselves.

In example 31 the meme draws again on polyphony which takes the form of a dialogue where different voices belong to people from different age groups. The dialogue is scripted in a way that projects a stereotypical belief about women; it reflects and circulates the social belief that women (or men) who belong to an older age group hide their age. Through sharing the specific meme, considering the age of the participant, Maria seems to align with such beliefs, and potentially aligns with the older participants in the dialogue, foregrounding her age identity as an older Facebook user. Sharing jokes about age is perceived as a way of self-sarcasm and self-deprecatory humour (e.g Chiaro2018) that may be relatable to and appreciated by the other members of her social network.

5.5.3 Memes and Lifestyle

A prominent topic explored in the reshared posts is everyday lifestyle choices. This category of reshared posts included memes which ranged in topics, including exercise, healthy or unhealthy eating habits. The most notable topic in this type of memes was the relationship of users with food; such memes commented and made jokes about eating habits, such as excessive eating of unhealthy food. This type of posts illustrates an orientation towards identities related to everyday lifestyle choices (e.g. unhealthy eating habits).



Example 32

Translation:*I feel nauseous.*
Either I am pregnant
or I feel sick because I've had
pizza and then cake and
then Doritos and t
hen nutella and then
pasta bolognese

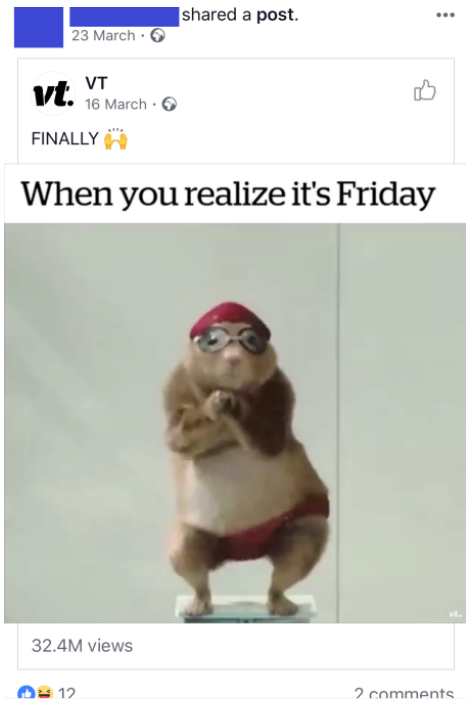
In order to illustrate how this type of identity is constructed through the memes in my sample, let us consider example 32. In example 32, unhealthy lifestyle identity is foregrounded through the use of self-sarcasm in the form of self-deprecatory humour. The meme includes a caption which appears in the first-person singular. The strategies employed in the meme to convey humour include exaggeration or hyperbole through the listing of the different types of food. Self-sarcasm is achieved through the use of a first-person narrative as if this person is being sarcastic about themselves. In fact, this group of memes also included posts related to lack of exercise, as well as memes related to people who have gained weight or weigh a lot, suggesting that this type of self-deprecating humour is appreciated and valued by my participants and their Facebook friends. Similarly, Dayter (2016, p.145) examined self-praise on Twitter, which is the opposite of self-deprecation. The use of a strategy that is opposite to what is expected on the internet (i.e. self-praise) makes this type of post funny. Incongruity is built through cancelling expectations; if we expect that social media users praise themselves or present themselves in a positive way, a post that presents them negatively (i.e. self-sarcasm or self-deprecation) may be funny because it goes against what is expected. In addition, users who choose to reshare this type of posts show a sense of relatability; they may identify similarities between the lifestyle choices portrayed in this type of posts and their everyday lifestyle choices, and project this unhealthy lifestyle identity to their Facebook audiences in the form of humorous content.

Example 32 also indicates an orientation to gender, evident in the use of the word 'pregnant'. The narrator of this story of excessive eating may be a woman (or, even a man who jokingly alludes to this image), drawing on, reflecting and circulating

popular beliefs about women who eat excessively, due to hormonal changes during pregnancy or menstrual cycle. Example 32 was also reshared by Maria, a female participant and therefore, this also aligns with Chiaro's (2018, p. 105) argument that females online often use self-deprecatory humour related to their appearance. According to Chiaro (2018, p. 105), in digital media 'a fat body is certainly not seen favourably and the fact that many women struggle with keeping their weight down through dieting' which also underlies 'the rising number of girls and women with eating disorders in the western world'. Our consumer culture certainly 'promotes a single female body type that is preferably tall, slim and at the same time curvaceous in the right places' (Chiaro 2018, p.105). Even though, there are certain celebrities such as Ashley Graham and sites or social networking accounts that attempt to promote body positivity, the image of an ideal body is still evident especially on social networking sites. Due to the fact that the majority of women do not correspond to this ideal body type, formulating or sharing jokes about their appearance or in this case unhealthy eating is used as self-deprecatory humour potentially to align with other female members of their Facebook audiences and create a feeling of solidarity.

5.5.4 Memes and Profession

Another topic that arose from the reshared posts of the two participants is their professional lifestyle. This category of reshared posts included memes typically referring to the days of the week in relation to working life. In order to illustrate this type of professional identity, let us consider example 33.



Example 33

In example 33, this aspect of the participants' professional identity is constructed in the meme through the use of an image with a caption. The image portrays an animal standing in a funny, dance-like position, wearing goggles, a swimming hat and a swimsuit. The visual is accompanied by the caption 'When you realize it's Friday'. The post implies that professionals, who work daily, look forward to the weekend in order to do fun activities like going swimming, dancing etc.

Example 33 also illustrates that the memes shared do not solely draw on the Greek language. In this case, the caption is in English indicating that this meme is potentially aimed at a larger, multilingual Facebook audience. Indeed, Maria and Loukia work in companies with multilingual speakers and thus, the sharing of an English meme strategically orients not only to their local network (of Greek-Cypriot friends and family) but also to their wider/global network of work contacts. In a number of studies examining multilingual Facebook users, it has been demonstrated how language choice, and in particular the use of English as a lingua franca and various 'local' languages, has been used by Facebook users as a means for audience design (Seargeant et al. 2012; Tagg and Seargeant 2014; Tagg and Seargeant 2016; Tagg et. al. 2017). Drawing on Bell's (1984) framework of audience design, Tagg et. al. (2017,

pp. 13-14) argue that audience design 'holds that the stylistic choices made by a speaker are shaped in part by their consideration of, and accommodation to, the varied segments that make up their audience'. Tagg and Seargeant (2016, p. 350) found that the use of English between Greek users, and between speakers of other languages on Facebook 'appears at least in part to be motivated by the semi-public nature of the site– that is, by users' awareness of their wider, multilingual audience'. In this case, one could argue that through this orientation to their multilingual audience achieved through the sharing of English memes, the participants project a more cosmopolitan identity that moves beyond the local network of Greek-speaking friends.

5.5.5 Memes and Being Local

A topic explored in the reshared posts also concerns practices and themes related to the local culture. These posts include memes with jokes in Cypriot-Greek, which is one of the spoken languages participants use in their everyday life. These posts are created by a Facebook page called 'Ο Πίκρης' (translation: the bitter person), which creates funny memes using Cypriot-Greek exclusively. This type of posts illustrates an orientation towards the Greek-Cypriot identity. The use of Cypriot-Greek in these memes indicates that these posts are addressed to a certain audience which understands the specific variety and in some cases the Greek-Cypriot culture, as these jokes comment on aspects of the Greek-Cypriot society and culture.

In order to illustrate this type of posts let us consider example 34.

Example 34

Translation: *Study shows that*
Cypriots abandon
their parents' house
around the ages of 26-27.
Weird.
I thought they just
moved upstairs

Example 34 is a meme reshared by Maria on her timeline from the page 'Ο πίκρης' (translation: the bitter man). For the first sentence Standard Greek is used, together with a more formal register, as it refers to an alleged study according to which Cypriots abandon their parents' house around the age of 26-27. The final sentence is written in Cypriot-Greek (rather than Standard Greek), as indicated by (i) the addition of 'ε' at the beginning of verbs in the past simple such as 'ενόμιζα' and (ii) the word 'που', instead of the Standard Greek word 'από'.

The juxtaposition between 'εγκαταλείπουν' (translation: abandon) and 'μετακομίζουν από πάνω' (moving upstairs) is key in this post. The joke in this meme capitalizes on this juxtaposition, as it highlights a practice in the Greek-Cypriot community where young people move out of their parents' house but they only move to a floor above them or in the same house. The word 'εγκαταλείπω' (abandon) in blue indicates a separation in some level and the word 'πάνω' (up/upstairs) in red shows that this separation is only a floor away which makes the meme funny. In addition, incongruity is also evident in the use of the final sentence which is unexpected and surprising. While the first sentence is informative of a study and has a more formal tone (cf. reference to study), the second sentence has a more informal tone with the use of the first-person singular i.e. 'εγώ ενόμιζα' (I thought) and focus on the opinion of the speaker. Furthermore, polyphony is also achieved in this type of humour with the change of register and style between the two sentences.

Taking all the above into consideration, Example 34 is an example of how Maria constructs her local Greek-Cypriot identity and indicates an association with the Greek-Cypriot community. Moreover, the fact that she chooses to reshare this type of memes which include Cypriot-Greek words and phrases, also indicates that these reshared

memes are addressed towards her Greek-Cypriot Facebook friends or the ones who understand the specific variety. This practice was also undertaken by participants in other studies as well. For instance, in Sheyholislami's (2010) study, Kurds used the Kurdish language as a prime tool in order to construct their Kurdish identity on the internet. Similarly, Cypriot-Greek is used in the reshared meme to construct a Greek-Cypriot identity which is also reinforced thematically as the post is a joke about young people in the Greek-Cypriot community.

5.6 Participant-generated humorous content as a means to construct various identities

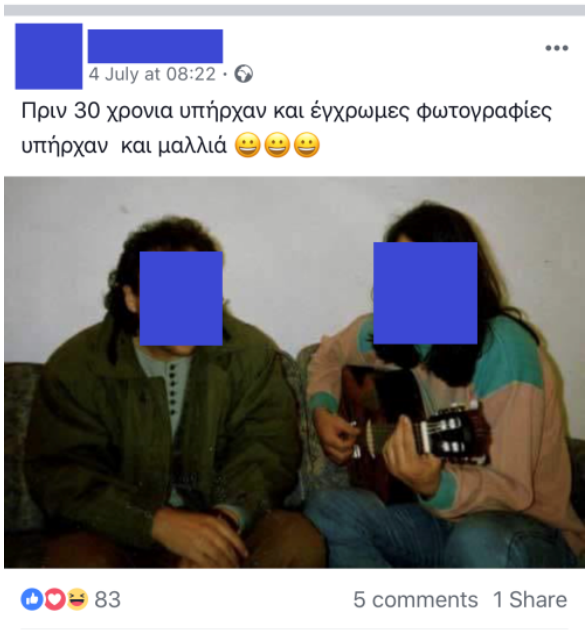
After analysing the reshared humorous posts of the participants and identifying the key identities constructed, this section aims to examine the specific strategies that are employed in the posts that include participant-generated humorous content. The qualitative analysis will be used to explore how users construct various identities in relation to humour on Facebook.

As in the previous category of reshared humorous posts, the focus is on what the participants find relevant to share and laugh at and/or with their Facebook friends. Rafael's posts (n: 48 out of 101 participant-generated posts) are represented the most in this category, followed by Nikos's (n: 27 out of 101) posts and then Andreas's (n: 19 out of 101) posts. Christos and Christophoros also construct identities in relation to humour with participant-generated humorous posts in a small number of instances; 5 and 2 respectively. Drawing on the content of the posts generated primarily by the male participants in the study, it seems that participant-generated posts can be used to index age, gender, political, lifestyle, professional and sports identities. As a result, in order to examine how these identities are further constructed, the qualitative analysis will examine the various linguistic and other semiotic tools used by the participants in this type of posts.

5.6.1 Participant-generated posts and age

Similar to reshared posts by female participants of the study, a prominent topic explored in the original humorous posts of the male participants is age. The content of these

posts may contribute to how the participants project their age identity. In order to illustrate how age identity is constructed through the participants' posts, let us consider example 35.



Example 35

Translation: *30 years ago there were colour photos,*
there was hair as well ☺☺☺

Example 35 includes a personal photo of Rafael with a friend who is playing the guitar, accompanied by a caption above. This is an older photo of Rafael, and therefore it portrays his younger self. Rafael's caption above the photo sets the humorous tone of the post as well as the orientation towards age. The caption may not be humorous for someone who is not Rafael's friend and does not know that at the moment Rafael is bald. Example 35 illustrates how Rafael constructs a humorous identity relating to age, and more specifically ageing, using self-sarcasm and self-deprecation (cf. example 31 where self-sarcasm and self-deprecation also appears in age-related humorous posts). Rafael also uses incongruity to construct humour-related identities as he uses the throwback practice of Facebook to juxtapose his past self to his present self. According to Youn (2020, p. 314), social media has become a platform for nostalgic recollections

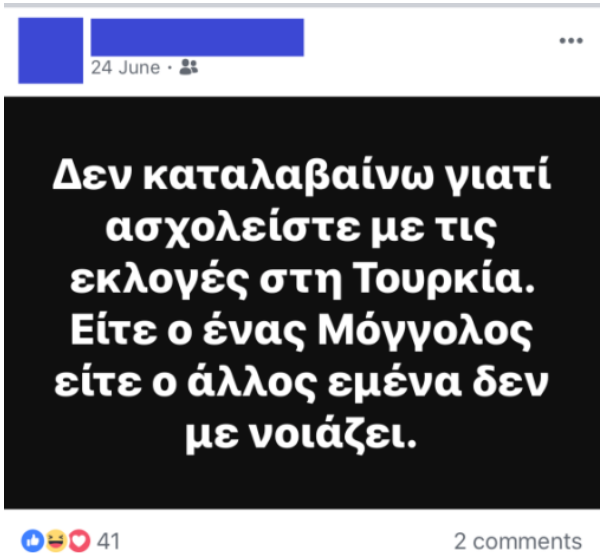
with family and friends. In fact, Gross (2018, n.p.), highlights the importance of Facebook's memory-triggering features such as "On This Day" and #ThrowbackThursday which have made it easier for internet users to channel nostalgia and reminisce the past.

Similar to reshared memes examined in the previous section by the two female participants, self-sarcasm and self-deprecatory humour are used when constructing a humorous identity relating to age identity of the male participants. In example 35, age is indicated not only by the phrase '30 years ago' but also by the fact that Rafael focuses on the physical changes that come with age, and more specifically baldness that is a key characteristic of middle-aged men. Similar to Maria's post, sharing jokes about age is perceived as a way of self-sarcasm that may be relatable to and appreciated by the other members of his social network, and potentially men who experience similar ageing characteristics. While Chiaro's (2018) study underlined this practice among women on social media, it seems that this case of self-deprecatory humour in relation to appearance and especially ageing is not only limited to females but encompasses male interaction on social media as well.

Nevertheless, self-deprecatory humour related to appearance was found to focus on different aspects, in posts shared by female and male participants. In the previous section, the reshared humorous posts by female participants focused on joking about inadequacies related to the female body and eating habits that lead to not matching the ideal standard or the beauty standards of winning a beauty pageant's title. In the participant generated posts by male users, self-deprecatory humour is related to the effects of ageing and baldness that is typical of males. Thus, even though in both cases, self-deprecation is used, it orients to different gender stereotypes. Moreover, the fact that the male participant uses his own photo also adds another layer to how self-sarcasm is done in this case. In a way, the photo also presents the participant in a positive light, as it suggests that his appearance was up to the standards of male beauty when he was younger since he had long thick hair.

5.6.2 Participant-generated humour and Politics

A prominent topic which participants explore in their participant-generated humorous posts is politics. The content of this kind of posts is related to political affairs at the time the posts were posted. Moreover, this kind of posts focuses primarily on local politics related to the Cyprus government and/or Cypriot political issues, but also Greece's or Turkey's political issues. This type of posts indicates an orientation towards a political identity expressed through humour by the participants.



Example 36

Translation: *I don't understand why*
you care about
the Turkish elections.
Either the one Mongolian
or the other one
I don't care'

Example 36 is a post created by Andreas. This type of posts is similar to memes created by pages on Facebook, as they include a background image, in this case a coloured background, and the caption is embedded in the photo. The Facebook platform now offers the possibility for users not only to use text to write on their walls, but also to choose a background image and write on top of the image. This way, Facebook users can express their thoughts on Facebook in a more creative manner, making their posts more visible and engaging for their Facebook audiences as they

scroll through their newsfeed. This technique used is referred to as image overlay by Chaudhary (2022, n.p.). He explains that image overlay refers to 'the technique of adding text or images over another base image' (Chaudhary 2022, n.p.).

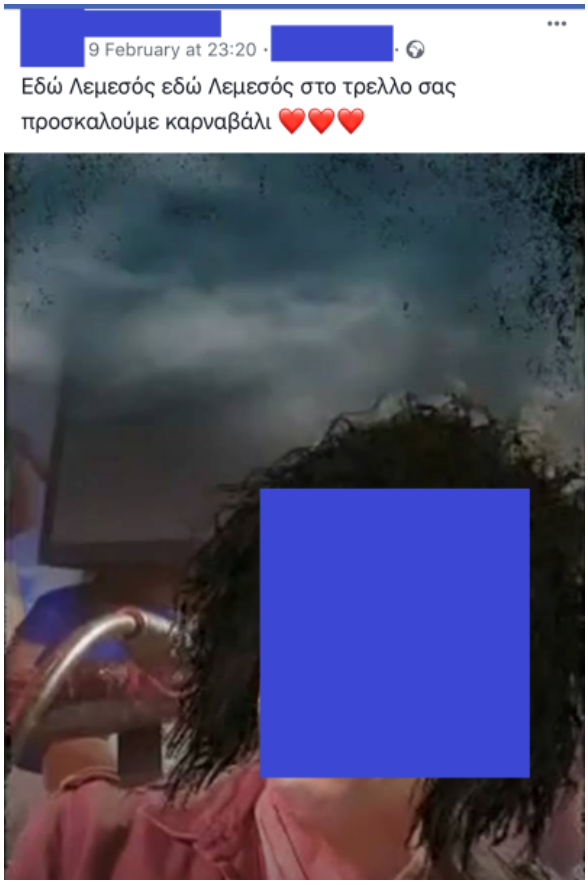
Example 36 is a joke generated by Andreas about Turkish elections. The joke is rooted in the word 'Mongolian' which indicates that the post by Andreas is aimed at the Greek-Cypriot citizens in his network. In fact, this type of joke violates Grice's (1975) maxim of manner by providing ambiguous and obscure information and resulting in not all users understanding the joke. The use of both the Turkish elections and the Mongolians in the same post is ambiguous and obscure for third parties who are unaware of Greek-Cypriot stereotypes and prejudices. Moreover, the fact that the word 'Μόγγολος' (Mongolian) is stressed on the first syllable, rather than the second as it would in Standard Greek, indicates the use of Cypriot-Greek with which his Greek-Cypriot Facebook friends are more likely to identify. Even though people from Mongolia are not related to the Turks, this word is often used by Cypriots to refer to stupid people. This joke can be considered as racist by Facebook users who are not aware of Greek-Cypriot stereotypes and prejudices, in the sense that it insults people from Mongolia, but also people from Turkey as it implies that they are unimportant or stupid or even barbarian too. According to Vásquez (2019, p.8), 'while it is possible that some texts may be universally funny, humour is often highly cultural'. In fact, according to Alamán and Rueda, (2016, p. 53), shared values and conventions in a particular culture are needed for audiences to 'produce [the] particularized conversational implicatures' that are vital for interpreting a particular text as non-serious in its intent.

Expressions of racism and hatred towards Turkey are deeply rooted in the Greek-Cypriot community due to the Turkish invasion in 1974 and the fact that the two governments have still not managed to find a solution to the Cypriot political matter, or also referred to as the Cyprus Conflict (Hadjipavlou 2007; Stergiou 2016) or as the Cyprus problem (Philippou 2009) in previous literature. The Cyprus problem or conflict refers to the division of the island, as a result of the Turkish invasion in 1974. The island is still divided between the Greek-Cypriot community in the southern portion of the island and the Turkish-Cypriot community in the northern portion of the island. Despite the racist nature of the post, the humorous tone is acknowledged by Andreas' Facebook

friends who find it amusing, as indicated by their reactions under the post, such as 'Haha', 'Like' and 'Love'. This type of post indicates a political orientation by the user and by taking into consideration other political posts by the participant, his political identity and stance are constructed through humour, as well as other type of posts.

5.6.3 Participant-generated humorous posts and being local

Similar to the humorous posts reshared by female users, a prominent topic which participants explore in their humorous posts generated by them concerns practices and themes related to the local culture. This type of original posts indicates an orientation towards a local identity expressed through humour by the participants.



Example 37

Translation: *'This is Limassol, this is Limassol, we invite you to the crazy Carnival festival <3 <3 <3*

Example 37 is a live video by Rafael which was posted during the Carnival season in Limassol. The live video features him with a filter, which alters his appearance in a humorous way, showing him with long black hair, even though Rafael does not have any hair, a white-painted face, singing at the place where he works. The humorous tone therefore, is set by the fact that he is presented in a manner that does not correspond to reality. As a result, incongruity and self-sarcasm is used by Rafael to visually construct his humorous identity. It is worth mentioning that Rafael is a musician and works in a restaurant in Limassol. The caption Rafael added is taken from a famous Carnival song in Limassol which includes lyrics related to the Limassol Carnival. Therefore, Rafael also constructs a local identity similar to the female participants in the reshared humorous posts in the previous section. Example 37 illustrates how Rafael associates not only with the Greek-Cypriot community but in particular people living in Limassol, as he potentially aims to show his love for his hometown, not only by including lyrics about his hometown and its Carnival celebrations, but also with the use of the heart emojis at the end.

5.6.4 Participant-generated humour and lifestyle

The last topic explored in the participant-generated posts is lifestyle choices and habits. This category of participant-generated posts ranged in topics, including posts related to their lifestyle, every day activities, going out, their relationship with friends and family members and how they spend their time with them. Through these posts, participants illustrate an orientation towards certain lifestyles in a humorous manner.

In order to illustrate this type of posts, let us consider example 38 by Christos.

Example 38

Translation: *At the BBALD guy's tavern for those of you who know where it is ;))*

In this post, Christos is posing in a photo wearing a wig with long hair, in his house with beers in front of him. It is worth mentioning that Christos is bald which is also relevant to the caption above the image. Incongruity and self-sarcasm also play a role here, as he presents himself in a negative manner: the word 'κκελης' means 'bald' in Cypriot-Greek. Moreover, the contradiction between the man with long hair (wig) in the photo and the reference to baldness in the caption adds to the humorous tone of the post; the joke on 'baldness' is further emphasized by the use of capital letters. In addition, he also invites his fellow Facebook friends to join him for food at his house. He addresses the friends who know where his house is by saying 'for those of you who know where it is', implying that those who have been to his house before or are close friends with him are invited to his 'tavern' as he calls it. The expression 'στην ταβερνα του ΚΚΕΛΗ' (translation: at the bald guy's tavern) also contributes to the humorous tone

of the post as it is a metaphor to imply that he offers good food at his house, similar to a tavern.

Lifestyle identity is constructed somewhat differently by Christos compared to the female participants in the reshared humorous posts. In example 32, Maria constructed her humorous identity by orienting to an unhealthy lifestyle of a woman who eats excessively by using self-deprecation and self-sarcasm. Similarly, Christos' post included self-sarcasm and self-deprecation related to his physical appearance and more specifically his baldness. Nevertheless, he not only uses this type of post for humorous purposes, but also to construct lifestyle identities relating to drinking, eating and enjoying life in general which adds an extra layer to humour-related identities. Furthermore, he also constructs the identity of a person who enjoys cooking as he metaphorically refers to his house as a tavern. Thus, self-sarcasm targeting his baldness is also accompanied with self-praise for his cooking skills in contrast to female participants who were found to only use self-deprecation as a humorous strategy.

5.7 Concluding discussion

This chapter examined humour in order to illustrate how Facebook users construct identities related to humour on their timelines. Initially, the first part of the chapter defined humour for the purposes of the study and examined different terminology used in the literature, including playfulness and creativity, as well as various approaches and theories in relation to humour. Furthermore, the chapter identified various macro discursive tools used to construct humour such as incongruity, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, irony, sarcasm, polyphony, voicing and memic language as well as other micro-devices such as metaphors, puns and hyperbole. After identifying the different linguistic tools that can be used to construct humour, a quantitative analysis of humorous posts was undertaken: it indicated that women in the study prefer to reshare humorous posts whereas men prefer to generate and author humorous content. As a result, gender seemed to play a role in how Facebook users of the study engage with the platform and construct their humorous identity on Facebook, which was then explored further in the qualitative analysis.

The analysis of the reshared posts by female users has indicated that Maria and Loukia's posts in the form of memes included references to normative representations of gender roles, such as the persona of women who focus on their physical appearance, women who worry about ageing and hide their age or even women who follow an unhealthy lifestyle with excessive eating. These normative representations were also expressed in self-deprecatory humour which also aligns with findings in previous literature (e.g. Chiaro 2018; Russel 2002; Kanai 2019). In fact, Russel (2002), Chiaro (2018) and Kanai (2019) argued in their studies that self-deprecation is a common humour strategy by women. Chiaro (2018, p. 105) has also argued that self-deprecatory humour by female stand-up comedians often revolves thematically around their appearance, and more specifically joking about inadequacies of their body which does not reach the ideal body shape portrayed on the internet, their relationship with their male partners, offspring, mothers as well as the strong effect of hormones on their well-being. Similarly, Kanai (2019, p.60), who examined 'a set of self-representative blogs authored by young women on the platform of Tumblr', found that young women in the study used self-deprecating jokes about body size, getting into shape as well as anxiety by referring to excessive pizza eating (Kanai 2019, p.67). In her study it is argued that this type of self-deprecatory humour among young women is done as a form of rebellion against norms of post-feminist demeanour, as well as preventing judgment from others (Kanai 2019, p. 72). Thus, self-deprecatory humour converts post-feminist regulation and the standards that women are supposed to live up to, into 'funny, bite-sized moments' by producing selves that are relatable (Kanai 2019, p. 60). Similarly, older female participants in the study chose to reshare humorous content which jokes about these normative representations of women using self-deprecation. Thus, it seems that self-deprecatory humour relating to physical appearance and body image is not exclusive to young women on the internet, as documented in previous research, but older female participants of the study were also found to reshare similar content. Furthermore, older female participants of the study also reshared self-deprecatory humour in relation to ageing, something that has not been noted in existing literature. This practice may contribute to the creation of a feeling of relatability and solidarity

among their Facebook friends, especially female Facebook friends who also belong to the same age group.

Both female and male participants of the study used self-deprecatory humour and self-sarcasm, especially in relation to their appearance features, age or ageing factors such as baldness. Nevertheless, despite the fact that both female and male participants used this type of humour, male participants also used self-sarcasm combined with self-praise. Matley (2018, p.30) who examined self-praise, hashtags and politeness in Instagram posts, found that that 'the hashtags #brag and #humblebrag function as part of a strategy that negotiates an appropriate level of self-praise and positive self-presentation'. Similarly, male participants of the study used self-sarcasm for self-praise purposes. For instance, Christos foregrounds a negative trait (baldness), but at the same time he also uses self-praise for his cooking skills by referring to his house as a tavern. Similarly, Rafael uses an old photo to joke about his baldness but the photo depicts him as a young person with hair. Even though the caption of the post includes self-sarcasm and self-deprecatory humour, he also indicates to his fellow Facebook friends that he used to have hair and therefore, constitutes self-praise about his past self. One is wondering whether this type of humour is also facilitated by the affordances of the Facebook platform, since users are encouraged to post photos of themselves, and reminisce the past by sharing older photos of themselves.

In addition, the fact that female participants in my sample choose to reshare humorous posts and not create their own posts, is also an indicator that perhaps women prefer to construct their humorous identity indirectly. By resharing content, female participants express humour in a more indirect manner by distancing themselves to some extent from the content that is reshared. Therefore, despite the fact that by resharing they indicate that they align with what is included in the content, they also distance themselves to some extent from the reshared content as what is produced is not generated by them. In contrast, male participants, preferred to generate their own humorous content by also adding images or videos of themselves to linguistic captions of their posts. Previous literature (Brown and Levinson 1987; Herring 1994) suggests that the concept of being more direct has been associated with impoliteness and male

linguistic behaviour, whereas indirect speech and mitigation have been associated with politeness and women.

Being local is also constructed in both male and female users' humorous posts. It is achieved through the use of Cypriot-Greek words and features. In the case of one male participant, locality was also expressed in relation to politics when Greek-Cypriot stereotypes and prejudices were evident in his post. This practice indicates that the participants of the study associate with the Greek-Cypriot community and wish to share their local identity and culture with their Facebook friends. Therefore, this finding agrees with Vásquez's (2019, p.8) argument that, 'while it is possible that some texts may be universally funny, humour is often highly cultural'.

Taking all the above into consideration, the analysis of the humorous posts has shown that both female and male users of the study share similar linguistic strategies to construct various identities on Facebook related to humour. These include self-sarcasm, incongruity and self-deprecation. Polyphony was also prevalent in the reshared posts, particularly in those orienting to gender identities.

The following chapter will focus on how participants constructed various identities when expressing their opinion or judgment on their Facebook timelines. Examining opinion-giving on Facebook seems relevant to identity construction as Thornborrow (2015, p.89), argues that the identity of participants, is related to how opinions are evoked and situated in any mediated context. This is further reinforced by Myers (2004, p.209) who adds that in a situation in which members of the public are interviewed in order to express their opinion, they do not only convey individual opinions but they also present themselves as representatives of the opinions of a given social category. Therefore, the connection between opinion-giving and identity seems prevalent and worthy of study in my sample.

Chapter 6: Opinion-Giving and Identities

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore how older Facebook users of the study construct a range of identities and present themselves through expressing opinion and judgment on their timelines. There are several reasons for choosing to analyse this type of posts in this analytical chapter. Firstly, the quantitative analysis of communicative functions of the participants' posts in Chapter 4 has illustrated that older Facebook users use the platform mainly to express opinion and judgment on their timelines as this was the most prominent communicative function found in the participants' posts, with 36.4% of instances (n: 1026 out of 2822 posts).

Apart from the quantitative aspect, opinion-giving on the internet and especially Facebook is considered a common practice among internet users worldwide since according to Papacharissi (2002b, p.18) the internet provides a free space with no status markers where people are encouraged to express themselves. This practice has its origins in early CMC as users expressed their opinions online on blogs and forums where anonymous or pseudonymous accounts were widely accepted. The prevalence of opinion-giving is evident in previous research that attempted to examine public opinion through the study of social media sites such as Twitter, forums or blogs (e.g. Klašnjaet. al 2017; Lee et. al 2014; Sobkowicz et. al 2012). This is further reinforced by Georgalou (2017, p. 172), who interviewed Facebook users who admitted that Facebook is a platform where they can communicate stances, thoughts, feelings, opinions, evaluations, but also access other people's personal opinions and 'engage in the process of structuring and developing arguments'. In addition, according to Đorđević (2022, pp.76-77), opinion-giving is a tool with which one constructs their identities on social media, and more specifically on Facebook. She argues that when someone posts an opinion on Facebook, a reaction from their communities of friends is expected in the form of likes or reactions, which may indicate agreement or disagreement, on the one hand, or in the form of comments in which they may support the argument, oppose to it or add their own opinions, on the other (Đorđević 2022, pp.76-77). She continues by arguing that over time, when a user posts their opinions on

Facebook, they ‘can negotiate a public, personal, social or professional role’ while recreating, extending and transforming their identity ‘in accordance with his motives and expectations’ as well as building a community who will support and value their opinion (Đorđević 2022, p.77). Thus, opinion-giving not only achieves negotiating, building, and interacting with Facebook audiences, but also allows its users to negotiate and construct several identities by doing so.

In fact, opinion-giving is closely related to identity performance as opinions can act as indicators of certain identity aspects of the speakers. According to Thornborrow (2015, p. 89), ‘the identity of the participants as well as their institutional role, plays a significant part in how opinions are elicited and situated within any given mediated framework’. Myers (2004, p.209) also argues that when members of the public are interviewed in order to express their opinion, they do not only convey individual opinions but they are also treated as representatives of the opinions of a given social category. Similarly, in the context of Facebook, Georgalou (2017, p.203) argues that stance-taking, which is a concept related to opinion-giving, is a vehicle ‘for public performances of identity’ which are ‘taken as to be perceived, endorsed, challenged, judged, justified, negotiated, contested or rejected by Facebook audience members’ and that it is ‘a bi-directional process to amuse, influence, validate, claim or disclaim’. Drawing on previous literature, this chapter aims to examine opinion-giving in relation to identity performance and the various tools used when Facebook older users interact with the other members of their network; an area which has been under-explored as existing research has primarily focused on opinion-giving by public figures, e.g. Donald Trump on Twitter (e.g. Ott 2017), or younger Facebook users, as in the case of Georgalou’s (2017) work where the average age of the 5 participants recruited was 27 years old.

The chapter will initially define the key terms in relation to opinion-giving. Moreover, the linguistic and other semiotic tools with which opinion-giving in various forms (including judgment) is achieved will be discussed drawing on previous literature. Furthermore, a preliminary quantitative analysis of the 1026 posts which included instances of opinion and judgment by the participants will be conducted in this chapter. Similar to the second analytical chapter, the posts will be coded initially in terms of the extent to which the opinions were generated by the participants themselves or were

(re)shared from other sources. This coding will result in three categories of posts similar to humorous posts in Chapter 5: 1) Participant-generated opinion and judgment posts, 2) Reshared opinion and judgment posts and 3) Combination of Participant-generated and reshared opinion and judgment posts. Following the quantitative analysis, this study will examine the range of topics that emerge from the participants' posts; in other words, the focus is on revealing what the participants find relevant to express their opinion or judgment about and how opinion-giving is related to the identity performance of the participants on their timelines. Then, drawing on Androutsopoulos' (2014) proposed analytical framework, this chapter will undertake a qualitative analysis by focusing on significant moments of sharing. These significant moments will be examined in relation to the strategies mobilised by participants in constructing their identities on their Facebook walls.

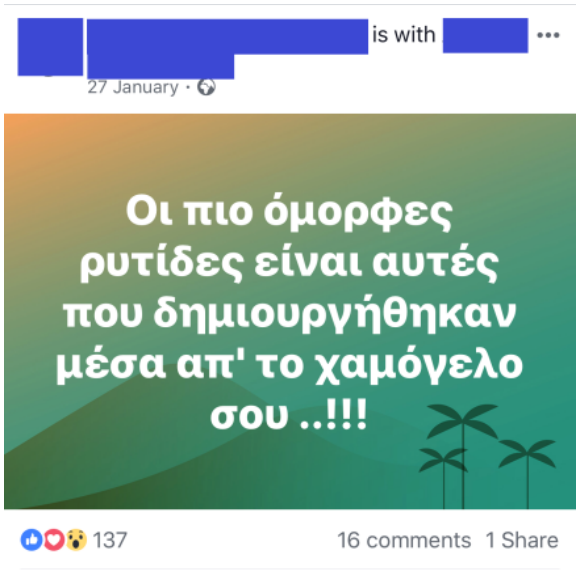
6.2 Defining opinion and judgment

Before analyzing posts belonging to the 'opinion and judgment' category in this study, this section will examine how opinion and judgment are defined in the literature but also in this study. In the literature these two terms even though they are similar in the sense that opinion-giving is core for both terms, they have some differences and often co-occur with other terms such as 'stance-taking', 'disagreement', 'argument' and 'conflict'.

In the case of public media debates, Thornborrow (2015, p.120) makes a distinction between two types of argument; 'the first is the type of argument [...], produced as a form of mediated debate based on participants' generally orderly, generally reasoned, though occasionally heated and confrontational expressions of opinion', whereas the second arises in interactional dispute, where speakers 'are engaged in some form of much more personal conflict with one another'. In the second type of argument, 'it is this activity of dispute, rather than of debate, in the production of competing evaluations and judgments of one another'. In other words, Thorborrow's umbrella term which is 'argument' encompasses both reasoned debates and conflict or dispute. Considering the first category, Thornborrow (2015, p.86) examined opinion-giving in relation to talk shows and radio phone-in programmes. She defines opinion-giving as 'a situated action that is collaboratively accomplished by participants in the talk

event' (Thornborrow 2015, p.86). In terms of the second category, i.e. conflict and judgment, Thornborrow (2015), examined confrontational arguments in talk shows that are structured around personal disputes. This type of discursive activity often involves 'a series of aggravated personal confrontations, which are sometimes physically embodied as well as verbally pursued through judgmental talk, evaluations and narratives which leads to a dramatic spectacle of conflict (Thornborrow 2015, pp. 120-128). In this study, the context in which opinion-giving and judgment occur is different in the sense that the Facebook posts collected include only the participant's opinion and judgment on a specific topic or topics and not the comments that follow, even though the posts can still be responsive to events or something said by another person. Therefore, the context differs from Thornborrow's (2015) study as in this study the response of other Facebook users to the participants post is not included in the analysis. In addition, users can express their opinion through other people's words by resharing other people's or pages' posts.

The reason for choosing to name this category of posts 'opinion and judgment' lies in Lee's (2011) categorisation of Facebook status updates, since her categorisation was used as a basis for the analysis of my posts in terms of their communicative function. Opinion and Judgment status updates in her study included posts which revealed the participants' beliefs about themselves or others (Lee 2011, p.115). Even though Lee (2011) does not specify why she uses these two terms in her categorisation, for the purposes of the study, judgment is a specific type of opinion-giving as explained above. In order to illustrate these two categories for the purposes of the study, let us consider the following examples.



Example 39

Translation: *the most beautiful*
wrinkles are the ones
that were created by your smile..!!!

Example 39 is a post from Nikos' timeline. It is an image overlay which as explained in Chapter 5, refers to 'the technique of adding text or images over another base image' which is now available on Facebook (Chaudhary 2022, n.p.). Example 39, which was generated by the participant, includes Nikos' opinion about beauty and ageing on a base green image; a potential sign of biological ageing (i.e. wrinkles) is represented as something that can be beautiful as they are indicators of a person's happy moments (i.e. moments that made someone smile in the past). This post belongs to the category of opinion-giving as it does not include any negative evaluative terms, judgmental or offensive language, which are characteristics when one expresses their judgment, drawing on the distinction presented earlier. Thus, the participant's opinion is expressed in a more general, reasoned manner.

Example40

Translation: *The stupidity of a janissary.. Those who voted for him are stupider… Those who put up with him are even stupider… And the stupidest of all are those who are still clapping for [supporting] him*

On the other hand, example 40 belongs to the judgment category of posts. Example 40 is a post from Andreas' timeline. It is a combination of participant-generated content as well as reshared content, since it is a reshared post by a Facebook page called 'Ξύπνα Ελλάδα' (translation: Wake up Greece) combined with a caption by the page's creator and the participant's caption above the reshared post. In the caption authored by the participant, the adjective 'stupid' is used to refer to people voting, tolerating or supporting the politician in the reshared post. It also characterizes the person portrayed in the image as stupid by captioning the reshared photo in his initial statement 'the stupidity of a janissary' (i.e. 'one of the former Turkish infantry,

constituting the Sultan's guard and the main part of the standing army' and by extension referring 'to any Turkish soldier' (OED 2023). As a result, this post has a different tone compared to example 39 as it involves evaluative language and judgmental talk with the use of the indicated negative evaluative adjective and noun phrase targeting a specific politician as well as his supporters.

With respect to opinion-giving, Georgalou's (2017, p.178) work refers to stance-taking practices, as opinion-giving often involves taking a stance. Stance refers to a speaker or writer expressing, either in the form of assertion or of inference, their attitudes, evaluations, judgments, and feelings, beliefs, towards a specific target which may be an interlocutor, an idea or other text (Georgalou 2017, p. 175). Moreover, according to Thurlow and Jaworski (2011, p.245), stance-taking is related to self-presentation; taking a stance is a form of self-presentation and social judgment since it involves not only saying something about oneself, or others, but also about how one views the world. Drawing on previous literature related to appraisal theory by Biber et. al. (1999, pp.972-975) and Martin and White (2005, pp.42-69), Georgalou (2017), differentiates between attitudinal and epistemic stances. Drawing on previous literature (e.g. Biber et. al 1999; Martin and White 2005) attitudinal stance refers to a 'broad category of stance, concerned with affect, judgments and personal aesthetic preferences'. Affect refers to expressing positive and negative emotions. Drawing on Martin and White (2005, p.42), judgment refers 'to attitudes towards people and their behaviour, which we admire or criticize, praise or condemn' (Georgalou 2017, p.178). In addition, aesthetic preferences include 'evaluations of semiotic phenomena and concern our 'reactions' to these phenomena (do they catch our attention? do they please us?), their 'composition' (balance and complexity), and their 'value' (how innovative, authentic, timely, etc.)' (Georgalou 2017, p.178). On the other hand, drawing on Biber et. al. (1999, p.972), Georgalou (2017, p. 178) defines epistemic stance as signaling 'knowledge, facts, certainty, doubt, beliefs, actuality, precision or limitation; or it can indicate the source of knowledge or the perspective from which the information is given' (Georgalou 2017, p.178). In Georgalou's (2017) study, these types of stance-taking strategies often co-occur in the same Facebook post. Therefore, it is expected that in the analysis of 'opinion and judgment' posts more than one stance-

taking practice may be employed. Therefore, these stance-taking practices are further sub-categorized

Drawing on Thornborrow's (2015) research which involved conversational settings in the media between two or more people as well as Georgalou's (2017) work on stance-taking on Facebook, this study will make a distinction between opinion and judgment in a more general sense. Opinion-giving in this study will be used as an umbrella term which involves the participants formulating their opinion about something on their timelines in the form of both attitudinal and epistemic stance-taking. Opinion-giving can take the form of expressing their agreement or disagreement with something or supporting and expressing certain ideas, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, judgments, knowledge, evaluations and preferences. This study will approach opinion-giving as an umbrella term which encompasses both positive and negative evaluations. Judgment on the other hand, is a type of opinion-giving, and will be used in its discursive meaning. It is achieved when participants express their opinion in a more evaluative or critical manner with respect to an issue, a person or a group of people. Judgment may also include negative evaluative language or even offensive language that targets specific people or groups or even situations. Nevertheless, the term 'opinion-giving' and 'stance-taking' will be used for all posts analysed in this chapter as umbrella terms, since the two are considered to be closely linked, due to the fact that you take a stance when you express an opinion and vice-versa.

The next section will explore further the different ways in which one can express their opinion according to previous literature, as well as identifying how opinion-giving can be done on social media using a variety of linguistic and other semiotic tools.

6.3 Discursive, linguistic and other semiotic tools for stance-taking and opinion-giving

Several discursive, linguistic and other semiotic tools can be used by people in order to express an opinion. In the literature, studies of various contexts and media ranging from talk shows on TV or radio programmes (Thornborrow 2015), to magazines (Mayo and Taboada 2017), press conferences (Mao and Zhao 2020), as well as social media, and in particular Facebook (Seargeant and Tagg 2019; Chunly 2020; Labben 2022) have

examined various aspects of opinion-giving. A plethora of discursive, linguistic and other semiotic tools may be used to express an opinion. Thus, this section aims to focus on the most prominent ways in which speakers can express an opinion, drawing on previous literature. This task is challenging since, similar to humour in the previous chapter, opinion-giving is a fluid and complex phenomenon which can be achieved in several ways. For instance, opinion-giving can entail externalizing emotions, thoughts, opinions and stances. Some macro-discursive tools for opinion-giving which are related to authenticating one's opinion may include discursive grounding, and storytelling. In addition to these tools, there are several micro-linguistic and other semiotic tools that can be used to express an opinion such as rhetorical questions, irony, or even strategic use of punctuation markers.

6.3.1 Authenticating discursive strategies

Authenticity has been central in research of media (e.g. Thornborrow 2015; Livingstone and Lunt 1994) and on social media (e.g. Marwick 2013; Marwick 2015). Opinion-giving is related to authentic talk as, according to Thornborrow (2015) work, lay participants who express their opinions on talk shows or radio programmes, they employ several discursive strategies which authenticate their public talk in front of large audiences, such as in a radio programme or talk show, or in this case their Facebook timelines. Authentic talk and opinion-giving are therefore closely related especially in relation to self-presentation on various contexts, which include social media platforms.

There are numerous discursive strategies that can be employed by speakers in order to authenticate their opinion. For instance, grounding refers to the discursive strategy in which one provides 'topic-relevant identity as a warrant' for possessing an opinion (Thornborrow 2015, p.94). In Thornborrow's (2015) study of opinion-giving in TV talk shows and radio programmes, participants produced a contextually relevant identity before giving their opinion publicly. It is suggested by Thornborrow (2015, p.95) that participants did this identity work at the beginning of their turns 'in order to legitimize, or authenticate, their identity as someone who speaks from their experience of the particular problem, or who has knowledge of the issue under discussion'. As a result, the identity constructed, together with alleged knowledge provides a warrant for the

opinion they express and hold and thus add to its validity. In another study by Thornborrow (2001, p.465), lay participants in television and radio broadcasts, use grounding in the form of making a 'salient comment on some aspect of their own personal status and identity, before going on to state their opinion, ask their question or say whatever it is they have to say as a contribution to the talk'.

Narrative discourse has also been explored in the literature as a way to foreground an opinion (e.g. Fairclough 1995; Thornborrow 1997, 2015). According to Thornborrow (2015, p.107) there are several ways in which participants can use stories to express or validate their opinion such as telling stories from personal experiences, as well as hypothetical stories and 'known-about' stories from a third-party source. All these methods afford a narrative evaluation 'which has an important function in that it provides the link between the story that is being told and its situated 'point' in this particular telling' (Thornborrow 2015, p.107). In other words, stories are used as a means to express an opinion or evaluation about a specific topic. Similar to other contexts, stories or narratives can be used as strategies to express an opinion or take a stance in CMC (e.g. Baym 2000), as well as Facebook (Georgalou 2017), and by doing so, users inhabit discourse identities related to storytelling.

In online storytelling the definitions of narrative or small stories 'are much looser and more fluid' by highlighting the role of enhanced interactivity and the 'multiple modes of user involvement that can decisively shape a story' (Georgakopoulou 2013, p. 700). According to Georgakopoulou (2007, p.148), small stories can cover narrative activities of 'small and fragmented telling to refusals to tell and deferrals of telling', which can take the form of reporting on events that have some kind of immediacy such as near future events or recent events, or they can take the form of previous and future interactions, mostly face-to-face or online, including shared stories among online users. She argues that small stories research plays a key role in identity construction online and is important in making sense of these identities and the social personas projected through small stories (Georgakopoulou 2007, p.152). Therefore, storytelling and more specifically, small stories can be used by users online as discursive devices for identity construction and as authenticating or persuasive devices to their Facebook audiences (Georgakopoulou 2022; Mäkelä et. al. 2021).

6.3.2 Alignment, Affiliation, and Conviviality on social media

Social media platforms nowadays, not only offer the possibility, but also encourage their users to specific forms of communication and affiliative relationships (Georgakopoulou 2016, pp.179-180). In fact, social media platforms do not simply prompt users to share moments of their lives with wide audiences from different contexts (Tagg and Sergeant 2016), but also to seek validation along while engaging with others (Marwick 2013, p.97). Drawing on Conversation Analysis literature (e.g. Stivers 2008; Guardiola and Bertrand 2013), alignment is closely related to the concept of affiliation. According to Georgakopoulou (2016, p.179) alignment refers to the 'interactional processes of relationship building' and with alignment 'speakers signal, linguistically, paralinguistically and in embodied ways their understanding of their interlocutors' positions'. When users align with what and how a speaker communicates, it 'signals display of support and endorsement of their conveyed stance' (Georgakopoulou 2016, p. 179). Thus, alignment is a form with which affiliation may be achieved on social media platforms. In order to maintain affiliative relationships, the users tend to present themselves in a positive and likable way, which according to Marwick (2013, p. 165) resembles the form of promoting oneself as a 'brand', and hence self-presentation online may often involve a rather self-conscious process.

Online conviviality is a concept closely related to alignment and affiliation online, and refers to 'the desire for peaceful co-existence through negotiating or ignoring difference and avoiding contentious debate' (Tagg et. al. 2017, p. 46). According to Tagg et. al. 2017, p. 47) 'the complex understanding of how people exploit civility as an interactional strategy is captured in the term 'conviviality'. Thus, it is suggested that people online and more specifically on Facebook, negotiate various audiences on the platform, by accommodating to difference in their online interactions (Tagg et. al. 2017, p. 47). The desire of users to project a positive likeable persona and avoid offending, annoying or engaging in conflict emerging from difference with others is a key element of online conviviality in the pursuit of positive self-presentation on Facebook (Tagg et. al. 2017, pp. 47-48). Strategies employed by users to avoid conflict on Facebook include tolerating difference, avoidance tactics such as using the affordances of Facebook to limit the audiences of their posts, deletion of posts and regulating the style,

register and content as a form of context design (Tagg et. al 2017, pp. 52-54). Taking the above into consideration, strategies to avoid conflict such as style, register and content are most relevant for the purposes of the study, since the data of the study only include posts by participants.

6.3.3 Modes of opinion-giving and stance-taking on Facebook

Facebook is a platform which enables its users to express an opinion or take a stance as it offers several affordances to achieve these tasks. Among the most prominent affordances is the prompt 'What's on your mind?', followed by the like and other reaction buttons which involve a range of emotions such as anger, laughter, love, care and sadness, as well as the comments under each post. This study mainly focuses on the first and primary affordance provided by Facebook which urges its users to express what they are thinking in order to post something on their walls. Initially, Facebook's prompt was 'What are you doing right now?' which was then replaced with 'What's on your mind?' in July 2008 which allows more flexibility and creativity in terms of linguistic structures (Lee 2011, p. 111; Georgalou 2017, p. 176). Thus, Facebook urges its users to write and share their feelings, opinions, life experiences, daily activities, views, attitudes, judgments etc with various audiences on their timelines. In terms of posting, nowadays, Facebook offers a range of possibilities for opinion-giving in terms of its affordances. Users can now embed multimodal content to their posts such as videos, images, overlay images, live videos, text as well as links to internet pages which also add extra layers of stance-taking by indicating alignment or dis-alignment to what is being shared or reshared (Georgalou 2017, pp. 177-178).

Several linguistic tools may be used by Facebook users which can be considered more or less direct. Direct ways of opinion-giving or stance-taking can be actualized by means of certain lexical items 'lexical items (verbs, adjectives, nouns, pronouns), stylistic choices (smileys, capitalization, asterisk), grammatical structure (exclamative fronting structure), tropes (metaphor, metonymy) and morphological formations (comparatives, superlatives, word blendings and intra-lexical switchings)' (Georgalou 2017, p.186). Emoticons, in particular, which are part of the platform's affordances, are often associated with expressing emotional stances (Labben 2022, p.6). Users can also

express their opinions on their timelines indirectly. For instance, the use or rhetorical questions can be used to express a stance indirectly (Myers 2010, p.109). Moreover, in Georgalou's work (2017, pp. 189) it is argued that the multimodal nature of Facebook affordances now offers users various semiotic tools to communicate their stances or opinion. These include visuals that enhance the intended meaning of their stance or opinion, or recycle or reshare ready-made stances in particular items such as memes or, song lyrics/titles and, thus, embrace attitudes and beliefs that are included in such intertextual material (Georgalou's 2017, pp. 189-190). All the above strategies may be employed by Facebook users, as discursive mechanisms of stance-taking to construct various identities. Furthermore, these stances can appear 'in multimodal, intertextual or interdiscursive ensembles encasing, responding to and/or adjusting already circulated stances' (Georgalou 2017, p.203). To sum up, opinion-giving and stance-taking either take a more transparent/direct form in cases where opinions and stances are expressed explicitly or can be opaque/indirect in cases of reshared content in which stances and opinions are implied through song lyrics, irony or banter (Georgalou 2017, p.203). In the second case, inferential work may be required by the Facebook user's audiences (Georgalou 2017, p.203). When users take a stance or express their opinions either directly or indirectly, they also maintain or achieve affiliative relationships with their audiences. By sharing their stances and opinions, they contribute to the creation of small communities with people who share the same stances or opinions in an attempt to achieve relatability with their Facebook audiences and create a sense of belonging.

6.4 Quantitative analysis of opinion-giving posts

After identifying the various ways in which opinion-giving can be conveyed through discourse, this section includes a quantitative analysis of the opinion and judgment posts in terms of their format and authorship of the posts, i.e. whether they were participant-generated or reshared by the participants or a combination of both, similar to the analysis of humorous posts in Chapter 5. The rationale for choosing to divide the posts into these three categories lies in Goffman's (1981) production roles in conversation, as explained in Chapter 3.

Applying Goffman's (1981) theory to the Facebook context, similar to Chapter 5, these posts were divided into three categories based on their authorship, a) posts that include opinion-giving content generated by participants themselves and b) posts that reshare opinion-giving content generated by others and c) a combination of both participant-generated and reshared content. With respect to the second category, even though users simply share the content of others, it is still important to examine what users select to share with their Facebook audience, as it contributes to how participants construct various identities through opinion-giving. As it has also been argued in the previous chapter, the choice they make indicates a preference or relatability with these posts and therefore, indicates what identities they foreground to their audience in opinion and judgment posts on their timelines. In addition, the third category of posts can also add to the analysis of opinion and judgment on Facebook, as reshared posts in this case are used as a form of reference that can either support opinion-giving generated by the participants themselves or become the object of criticism in the content that precedes such reshared posts. Moreover, in contrast to humorous posts in which the third category only included 3.78% (n: 21 posts out of 556), the third category of opinion-giving posts, as indicated in Table 3, includes 15% (n: 154 posts out of 1026) of the posts which makes this category valid for further detailed analysis (see section 6.7) Taking all the above into consideration, this chapter will analyse all three categories of opinion and judgment posts.

Name of Participant	Participant-generated opinion-giving posts	Reshared opinion –giving posts (generated by other Facebook users or pages)	Combination of both participant-generated and reshared opinion-giving posts	Total
Andreas	59	4	25	**88**
Andria	13	5	4	**22**
Christophoros	19	122	57	**198**
Christos	12	0	2	**14**
Giorgos	0	4	1	**5**
Loukia	0	75	0	**75**
Maria	15	208	4	**227**
Nikos	281	7	24	**312**
Rafael	48	0	37	**85**
Total	**447**	**425**	**154**	**1026**

Table 3: Quantitative analysis of opinion-giving posts

As identified in Chapter 3, where the posts were analysed based on their communicative function, there are 1026 posts which include instances in which participants express their opinion. 43.57% (n: 447 posts out of 1026) belonged to the first category of participant-generated posts (Table 3). As indicated in the table, all participants generated their own posts when expressing their opinion, apart from Giorgos and Loukia. Therefore, it seems that even though the participant-generated posts were not frequent among humorous posts (only 18%), when participants express their opinion on their Facebook walls they tend to author and generate these messages. In comparison to humour where only male participants generated their own humorous posts, both males and females generate their own opinion-giving posts. This finding will be further explored in the qualitative analysis of the participant-generated posts as the study of how males and females generate their own opinion-giving posts will provide further insights into potential gendered patterns in my data. The main representative of this category of posts was Nikos with 62.86% (n: 281 out of 447 posts) to express his opinion, followed by Andreas with 13.2% (n: 59 out of 447 posts) and Rafael 10.74% (n: 48 out of 447 posts). In terms of topics, participant-generated opinion and judgment posts touched upon politics, social issues and religion.

On the other hand, 41.42% (n: 425 out of 1026 posts) of the posts belonged to the category of reshared posts. As illustrated in Table 3, Maria is the key representative of this category with 48.94% (n: 208 out of 425 posts) of posts, followed by Christophoros with 28.7% (n: 122 out of 425 posts) and Loukia with 17.65% (n: 75 out of 425 posts). Maria and Loukia were also the key representatives of reshared posts in the previous chapter which examined humorous posts. It seems that for Maria and Loukia resharing posts in order to achieve several communicative functions is part of how they use the Facebook platform, when considering the broader sample collected by these two participants.

Finally, 15% of the posts belonged to the final category which combined both the participant-generated practice of expressing opinion and judgment as well as resharing posts generated by others. The key representatives of this type of posts, as illustrated in Table 3, are Christophoros with 37% (n: 57 out of 154), followed by Raphael with 24% (n: 37 out of 154). As a result, for the purposes of the qualitative analysis that follows, I will initially focus on the participant-generated posts which had the highest percentage of posts for expressing opinion and judgment, followed by the reshared posts and then I will also include an analysis of the third category of posts. The qualitative analysis will focus on the key identity aspects conveyed though opinion and judgment posts together with the linguistic and other semiotic tools used by participants to construct such identities.

Overall, the quantitative analysis shows that similar to humorous posts, male participants mainly prefer to generate and author their own posts. On the other hand, female participants, who constructed humorous identities mainly through reshared posts, display a slightly more varied practice in opinion-giving, as I have found instances where they generate their own content. The following section aims to examine further how male and female participants construct identities through opinion-giving when generating their own content.

6.5 Identity construction and participant-generated opinion-giving posts

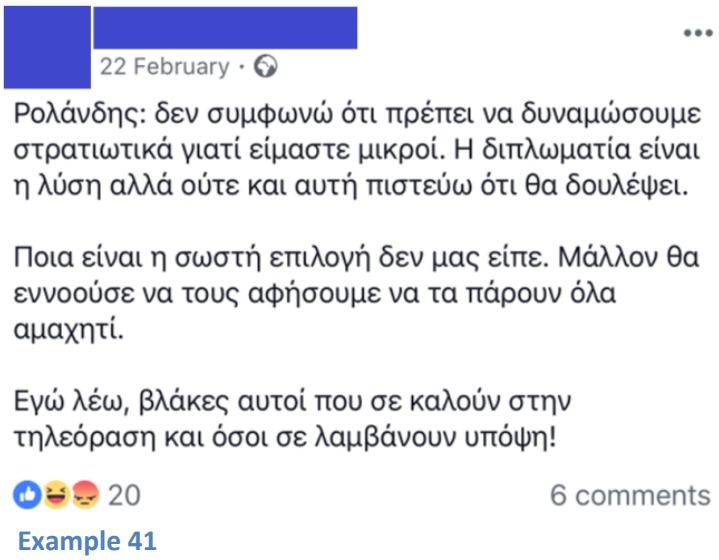
This section aims to examine the specific strategies that are employed in the posts that are authored and generated by the participants in the construction of various identities

through opinion-giving posts on their Facebook timeline. Drawing on the content of the posts and what participants find relevant to share with their Facebook audiences, opinion-giving posts in this category were found to be used by participants to index various identities, primarily related to politics, family relations, sports, music and religion.

6.5.1 Opinion-giving and politics in participant-generated posts

A prominent topic in the participant-generated posts, of primarily male participants (i.e. Nikos, Andreas, Rafael and Christophoros), is politics. These posts include opinion-giving related to political issues, mainly in Cyprus, and express the participants' views about political matters or decisions as well as criticizing politicians or people with political power. These posts suggest that the specific participants orient to constructions of political identities mainly related to local politics and political issues. In many respects, these posts also orient to the construction of political identities that are related to a specific political party the participants' support, as well as certain political ideologies.

Example 41 illustrates how political identity is portrayed through the participant-generated posts.



Example 41

Translation: *Rolandis: I don't agree that we have to strengthen our army because we are [a] small [nation]. Diplomacy is*

the solution but I doubt that even this would work.

He didn't say to us what the right choice is. Maybe
he meant to say that we should let them take everything,
without even fighting.
My view is that those who invite you on
TV and take you seriously are idiots!

Example 41 is a post generated and authored by Andreas and it reveals an orientation towards politics. The first part includes a quote from a politician named Rolandis. Andreas uses the politician's name at the beginning of the sentence to indicate that what follows includes Rolandis' words. Quoting has been a popular practice in digital communication since the techniques available for quoting have become easier to use due to digital reproduction, enabled by the operating system's copy and paste function (Puschmann 2015, p. 28). According to Gruber (2017, p. 2), 'quoting a previous speaker's utterance is the most explicit form of recontextualization in spoken and written discourse'. He continues by arguing that 'by quoting an utterance, the current speaker/writer may convey their stance to their audience in different ways' including dis/alignment with a stance expressed by the original speaker/writer or stance formulations towards the quote content or the quoted speaker/writer (Gruber 2017, p.2).

In this example, Andreas quotes Rolandis and disaligns with Rolandis' stance according to which Cyprus should not strengthen its army because it is a small island. Similar to what boyd et. al (2010, p.6) argue about retweeting on Twitter, quoting Rolandis' words enables Andreas to 'publicly' disagree with the person quoted. Andreas' judgment towards Rolandis' quote is highlighted in the second part in which he uses irony and exaggeration to diminish the value of his quote. Irony is achieved when he provides an explanation of what the speaker might have meant with the quote i.e. 'Maybe he meant to say that we should let them take everything, without even fighting'. The word 'everything' as well as the expression 'without fighting' indicate exaggeration and hyperbole in the explanation, and hence violate the maxim of quality in Grice's (1975, pp.69-74) terms. By doing so, the participant achieves verbal irony, in an attempt to mock what the politician has said.

Moreover, the use of specific pronouns can also be used by participants strategically for the construction of certain identities (Bayyurt and Bayraktaroglu 2001). In this post the juxtaposition of the third-person pronouns *them,* which refers to the Turks, to the first-person pronoun *we* which refers to the Greek-Cypriot community facilitate not only the construction of the participant's political identity but also constructs Turkey as the out-group and Greek-Cypriots as the in-group. Similarly, in Labben's (2022, p.7) study, the pronoun *them* referred to non-Tunisians who were considered as outsiders by Tunisians who belonged to the in-group. In addition, the lack of explicit reference to who 'them' points to indicates that the participant presupposes that the audience already knows who the pronoun refers to and therefore positions himself and the audience as belonging to the same in-group. Therefore, this post is mainly targeted towards the Greek and Greek-Cypriot friends in the network who are aware of the Cypriot history with Turks, also indicated by his choice to use the Greek language and alphabet in this message.

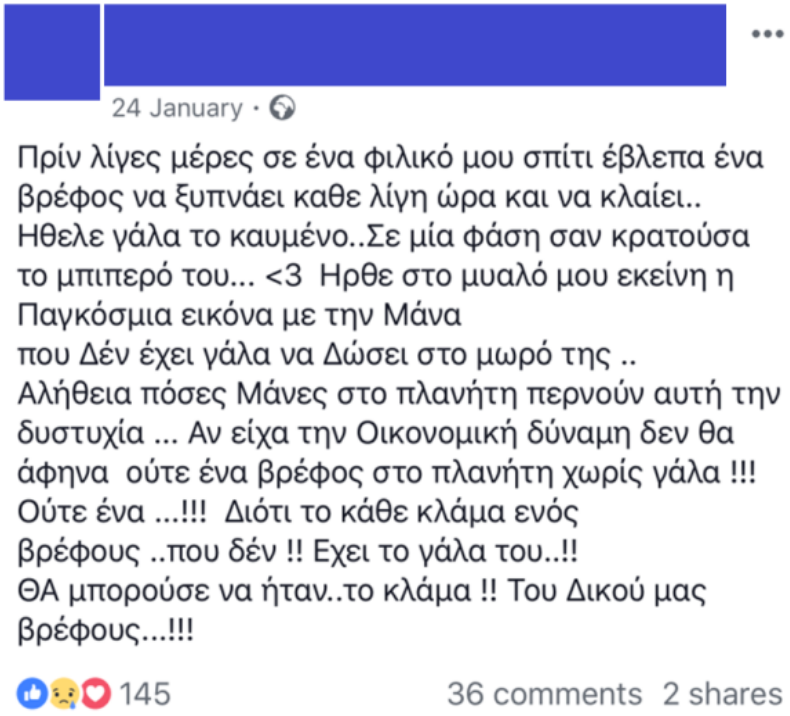
He continues by expressing his stance towards the politician and towards those who invite him or support him in a more direct and face-threatening manner. The use of the adjective 'idiots', which has negative connotations, indicates a form of judgment and is potentially face-threatening for any members of his Facebook audience who support this politician. Considering that overt expressions of criticism, particularly among Greek speakers/writers, are used as a means to align with those who share similar views (Koutsantoni 2005, p. 112), the explicit disagreement and negative evaluation noted in this post may result in creating a sense of solidarity with the Facebook friends who share similar views with the specific participant.

Overall, opinion-giving is mobilised by the participant in constructing the political identity of someone who does not support this politician and expresses his ideological beliefs regarding a resolution of the Cypriot matter which would involve strengthening the military position of Cyprus. His strong disagreement is evident not only through the use of the potentially insulting adjective *idiots*, but also through the use of the exclamation mark which appears only at the end of this final part, rather than the quote of the initial comment.

6.5.2 Opinion-giving and global social matters in participant-generated posts

Another topic explored in participants posts - and especially in Nikos' posts- relates to social matters such as people's relationships, hardships in life and problems in society. The posts are found to express primarily empathy towards certain groups of people in society or expressing the discomfort that these issues bring to the participants. Unlike example 41, (which was critical and judgmental towards other people) this type of posts, illustrated in example 42, orients to the construction of identities relating to empathy and social-awareness.

One of the topics explored is poverty and hunger in relation to children and motherhood, as illustrated in example 42.



Example 42

Translation: *A few days ago, at a friend's house I saw a baby waking up every now and then and crying.. It wanted milk, poor thing.. At one point while I was holding the baby's bottle ... <3 The Global picture of the Mother who does Not have milk to Give to her baby*

came to my mind..
Really, how many Mothers around the planet go through this
misery... If I had the Financial power I would not
leave a single newborn baby on the planet without milk!!!
Not a single one....!!!! Because every cry from a
baby .... who does not !!! Have its milk...!!
COULD be ... the cry!! Of our Own
baby...!!!

Example 42, generated by Nikos, indicates an orientation towards a persona that is characterized by awareness towards social matters and sympathy towards disadvantaged people. The beginning of the post is a story narrated by the participant. More specifically he refers to an event that had occurred a few days before: he was at a friend's house where a baby was waking up and crying for milk. The use of the affective adjective 'καυμένο' (translation: poor thing), which in the context of the narrative serves as an external evaluation (Labov 1972) of the baby as a story character, indicates the narrator's sympathy towards the baby.

Based on the format of the post as well as its content, it can be divided into two sections. The first section includes the narrative by the participant in which he describes this past experience at a friend's house. The second one begins in line 7, where he expresses his opinion about poverty and hunger worldwide. Drawing on Busch's (2021, p.1) study according to which 'punctuation establishes collaborative interactional management and serves participants as a graphic means of communicative and social contextualization in digital interactions' punctuation here also serves interactional goals. According to Busch (2021, p.8), online writing displays 'a tendency to weaken the grammatical principle in interactional writing via text messaging applications, while the communicative tasks of punctuation become more relevant'. Similarly in this post, unconventional punctuation markers are used for emphasis and the two dots at the end of line 6 appear to divide the post into two sections. The first section includes the narrative of the story with the baby and the second part includes the participant's opinion relating to the story above and the social issue depicted through the storytelling. Both sections include unconventional punctuation i.e. capitalization of the first letter of specific words (e.g. 'Global', 'Not', 'Financial'), and the sentences are divided with the

use of multiple dots. Nevertheless, unconventional punctuation becomes more evident in the second section through the use of multiple exclamation marks that divide sentences in even smaller parts in an unconventional manner and the use of, unconventional capitalization not only for the first letter of words (e.g. 'Own', 'Financial'), but also for emphasizing individual words such as 'COULD'. Labben (2022, p.6) has also found that the repetitive use of exclamation marks and the use of capital letters contributed to expressing emotional stance among Tunisian Facebook users in the study. Multiple exclamation marks were associated with an attitude of shock and disagreement (Labben 2022, p.6) that is also evident example 42, and in relation to the social issue depicted through the storytelling.

Positive self-presentation is also achieved in a direct manner in the second section of the post, as he positions himself in a hypothetical scenario which is inspired by the 'real' narrative. In this case, positive self-presentation takes the form of the participant constructing the identity of someone who would feed all the poor children of the world if he had the financial power revealing a charitable persona. This orientation towards positive traits is also noted in previous research examining social networking sites, including Facebook (e.g. Reinecke and Trepte 2014; Chou and Edge, 2012) where self-presentation online indicates a positivity bias, as positive traits are preferred compared to negative attributes. In such contexts, positive self-presentation contributes to the maintenance of positive face i.e. the desire 'to be valued, liked and admired, and to maintain a positive self-image' (Holmes 2009, p.711).

Positive self-presentation on Facebook seems to be used by the participant in order to maintain affiliative relationships with various audiences on the platform. According to Marwick (2013, p. 165) self-presentation online may often involve a rather self-conscious process and users tend to present themselves in a positive, likeable way in order to achieve alignment and maintain affiliative relationships online. Moreover, storytelling in the first section of the post, drawing on the participant's personal experience, is used as a persuasive device by the participant to achieve positive self-presentation, in an attempt to portray an authentic self to their Facebook audiences (Georgakopoulou 2022; Mäkelä et. al. 2021).

6.5.3 Opinion-giving and local culture in participant-generated posts

Locality in terms of references to the local, Greek-Cypriot culture and identity is also a topic that participants explore in the posts they generate and author. Example 43 illustrates how this type of identity is constructed.

Example 43

Translation: *CyBC (Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation) just made a deal to send Bruno Mars and Justin Bieber as a duet to represent us at the Eurovision song contest in order to ensure the first place. Also, CFA (Cyprus Football Association) has announced that in the end 9 foreigners and two Cypriots will play for the National football Team. After all, which country does the Cypriot citizen need to go to in order to represent their country*

on a National level. I prefer to come last [in a competition/tournament etc]
but be proud of my identity. This love for anything/all that is foreign has destroyed Cyprus. There are so many worthy talents in Cyprus and unfortunately
they are lost because some people have the power of ass-kissing and of authority. And I kindly ask CyBc (Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation)
to publish the cost of this production, and the names of those who decide how to spend the people's money.

In Example 43, Rafael generates a post which includes both visual and linguistic resources: he generates a long post to express his judgment about issues related to the local culture and uploads two photos of internationally famous pop artists, Bruno Mars and Justin Bieber, who are referred to in his text.

Rafael's post indicates an orientation towards a local identity in relation to xenocentrism as a trait of the local culture. Rafael is critical of this view and the xenocentric orientation and offers an alternative local identity, one that is proud of the local people and their achievements. At the beginning of the post Rafael appears to announce news in relation to the Eurovision song contest and the Cyprus national football team where non-Greek-Cypriot people (Bruno Mars and Justin Bieber; 9 foreigners) appear to represent Cyprus in both cases. The news is evidently fake; irony is used to comment on the fact that non-Greek-Cypriots have been chosen repeatedly to represent the country in Eurovision and to play for the national team. Through these instances of verbal irony, i.e. when 'a speaker says something that seems to be the opposite of what he/she means' (Reyes et. al. 2012, p.2), Rafael expresses his disagreement towards what he later frames as a local destructive trait i.e. xenocentrism (the love for anything that is foreign). The ironic frame is further underlined by the post's style that mimics the genre of breaking news in the media, as evident in the use of the adverb *just* that evokes the spreading of news in the moment as the events are happening.

He then uses a rhetorical question to highlight the issue, wondering which country the Cypriot citizen needs to go to represent their country on a national level. According to Frank (1989, p. 723) the rhetorical tactic of 'posing questions that expect no answer' has been used historically as a persuasive device. In this case, the

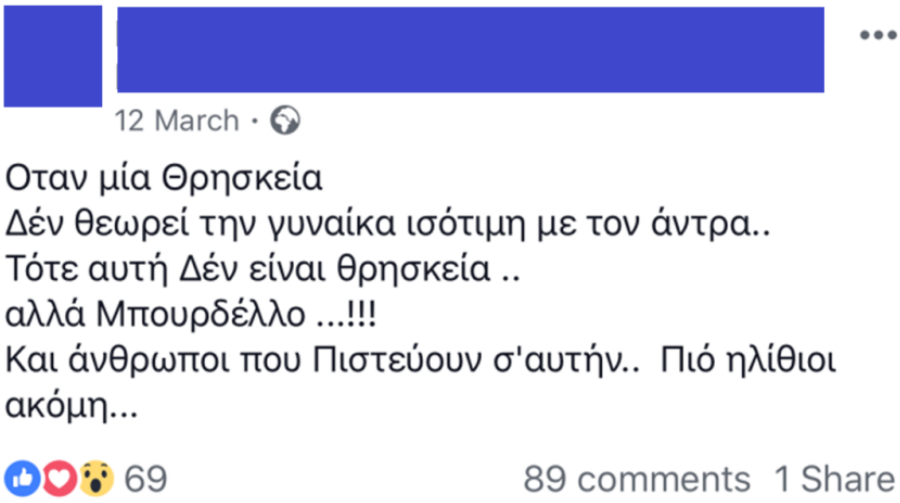
rhetorical question is used as a means to convince his audience that the current situation is problematic, while ironically depicting and critiquing the decisions made by local authorities.

He then continues by stating his opinion on the matter more directly by saying that he, as an individual (cf. use of first person singular pronouns 'I' and 'my') and in juxtaposition with local authorities, would prefer coming last [in a competition/tournament etc] but be proud of his identity. This indicates that the opinion of the participant is expressed in a more direct manner. Rafael uses the word 'identity' *t*o refer to the local identity of being a Greek-Cypriot representing their country. Hyperbole in the form of overstatement and extremity (Norrick, 2004, p.1727), e.g. 'come last', underlines his critical stance towards this phenomenon and contributes to the construction of a persona who is first and foremost proud of their local identity. His local, Greek-Cypriot, identity is further evoked in the statements lamenting the loss of local talent due to corruption and local power struggles.

The post ends with an appeal to the national TV channel to publicize the cost of this production and the names of those who made this decision. Considering that the participant is aware that this request is unlikely to reach the national TV channel (cf. lack of tagging), the appeal is used strategically by the participant in order to construct the persona of someone who is not only concerned about their local community but also does not shy away from challenging local authorities.

6.5.4 Opinion-giving and religion in participant-generated posts

Another topic explored in participant-generated posts is religion, including the relationship of people with God and the role of the church or of Christianity. Example 44 illustrates this type of posts with the participant constructing a persona of someone who challenges religions but also supports gender equality.



Example 44

Translation:

When a Religion

does Not consider the woman equal to the man..

Then this is Not a religion..

but a Brothel…!!!

And the people who Believe in it.. Are even stupider..

In the first part of the post, whose end is marked by the repeated exclamation marks (as opposed to multiple dots that appear to separate sentences or phrases), Nikos expresses his opinion about religion and its relation to gender equality. He argues that when a religion does not support gender equality, then it should not be considered a religion. In the second part of the post, Nikos characterizes those who believe in this type of religion as stupid. Nikos' judgment towards certain religions which do not support gender equality is highlighted through words that carry negative connotations such as 'brothel' and 'stupider'. More specifically, the use of the comparative form of the adjective *stupid* intensifies his critical stance towards those who support these types of religion. As suggested by Mayo and Taboada (2017, p. 42), gradable linguistic features such as comparatives, superlatives, linguistic repetition, etc intensify the 'force' of an evaluation, i.e. how strong or weak the feeling or stance expressed is communicated to an audience.

In terms of indirectness the force of the evaluation, evident in the comparative of the adjectival form ('stupider'), the negative polarity nouns ('stupid' and 'brothel') and the

use of repeated and expressive punctuation (multiple dots and exclamation marks), makes the judgment rather direct and potentially face-threatening for any members of his Facebook audience who support this type of religion. In previous literature on disagreement among Greek men and women (Makri-Tsilipakou 1991, 1995), it has been argued that men usually exploit strong disagreements without mitigation whereas women tend to employ more mitigated forms of disagreement. Example 44, as well as previous examples of male participants, appears to support this argument as the male participants in the study are found to express their opinion in a more direct, unmitigated manner. Overall, through opinion-giving Nikos constructs the persona of someone who supports gender equality and who aligns with religions that support it as well. The ways in which his stance is expressed is through conveying his strong disagreement with religions that do not support gender equality and their believers.

Religion is also explored in other participant's posts in relation to the love for God and being religious. This type of posts, illustrated in example 45, primarily aims at portraying the persona of someone who supports and believes in God.

Example 45

Translation: *Do you know what is the difference when you call and communicate with God? everything is fine and holy, the whole world tells you that you are a really good person, that you are a really good Christian. When finally God himself talks to you, then all people say that we've lost this guy, that he has gone mad, he talks by himself. You should all try every day to give God a call and don't worry when he talks to you I will be with you!!!*

Example 45 includes a post authored and created by Rafael and two pictures uploaded by the participant. The first picture shows Rafael in black-and-white next to one of his paintings and the other one is a phone with the English word 'God' on it in capital letters. A rhetorical question is used at the beginning of the post. Similar to example 43 also posted by Rafael, the rhetorical question is used to highlight the issue i.e. the difference between the act of reaching out and talking to God and the situation of God reaching out to believers and talking to them. As it has been argued, rhetorical questions can be used as persuasive devices (Frank 1989, p.723). However, in this case the rhetorical question is used as an engaging device to attract the readers' attention and make them engage with the post.

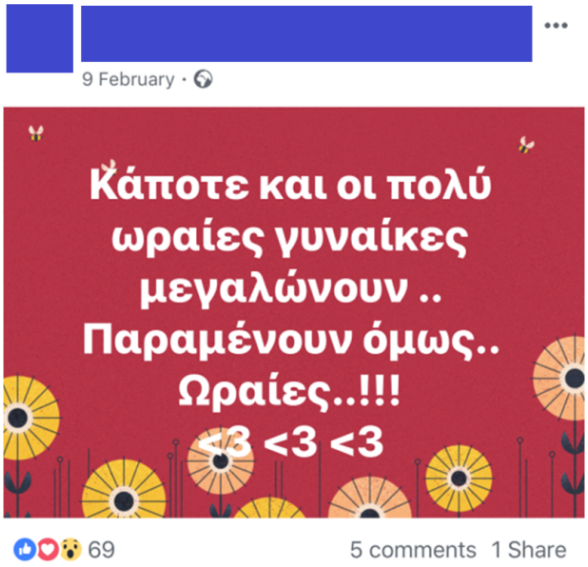
The rhetorical question sets up a scenario where one is reaching out calling and communicating with God. In this scenario, the person who has this behaviour receives strong positive evaluation from other people ('good person', 'good Christian'), intensified by adverbs like 'really'. This positive evaluation is juxtaposed with the evaluation accompanying the opposite scenario, i.e. the situation where God has responded to one's prayers and talks to them. In this case, people assume that those who believe that God talks to them have gone mad or just mumble to themselves. The negative evaluation of this type of religious people is underlined through the use of the verb 'τρελαθεί' (become mad) that has negative connotations. Rafael expresses his opinion related to how people perceive religion and the limits to what you can tell others about such beliefs, by drawing on two alternative narrative scenarios that may be inspired by previous personal experience, i.e. what could have happened to him in the past.

The final part of the post draws on these scenarios in order to urge people to talk to God and admit that God talks to them as well. Opinion-giving, in the form of evaluating types of religious behaviour, is therefore, mobilized in order to construct the persona of someone who prays and believes in God responding to these prayers. Through the use of various linguistic tools such as the use of narrative scenarios, rhetorical question, intensification, and the contrast between positive and negative evaluation by others, Rafael orients towards the identity of someone who talks to and has a close relationship with God.

Religion appears to be employed differently in the two posts discussed in this section. In example 45, the identity of someone who is close to God and religious is projected, whereas in example 44, the identity of someone who critiques religions who do not support gender equality is projected. Nevertheless, in both cases, a positive image of both participants is portrayed as Rafael constructs the identity of someone who has a strong faith and feels close to God and Nikos constructs the identity of someone who only supports religions that support gender equality. Drawing on previous literature (Georgakopoulou 2016; Marwick 2013), positive self-presentation is used by participants in order to achieve and maintain affiliative relationships on the platform with their audiences and to align with audiences who also share the same stances in relation to religion.

6.5.5 Opinion-giving and age in participant-generated posts

Age is another topic explored in the participant-generated posts. In order to examine how identities relating to age are constructed through this type of posts, Nikos' post is used as an example.



Example 46

Translation: *At some point even the very beautiful women*
grow older..
They remain however..
Beautiful..!!!
<3<3<3

Example 46 is a meme-like post generated, authored and created by Nikos. Facebook now offers the possibility to users to create their own meme-like posts with a background of their choice from a range of options and write their own captions on the pictures. In example 46, Nikos expresses his opinion about women who grow old. The persona of someone who admires the beauty of women who have aged is constructed through this example, using several tools.

The use of the positive evaluative adjective 'beautiful' twice in the post to refer to women, as well as the capitalization of the first letter the second time, followed by exclamation marks indicates that the repetition is strategic by the participant. As already mentioned, linguistic repetition can be used in order to emphasize the participants' opinion (Mayo and Taboada 2017, p.42). In this case, his opinion or the force of the evaluation is achieved through the repetition of the word 'beautiful'. Moreover, in terms of the stance in the post the adjective indicates appreciation which 'encompasses resources to capture aesthetic valuation' (Mayo and Taboada 2017, p.42). The

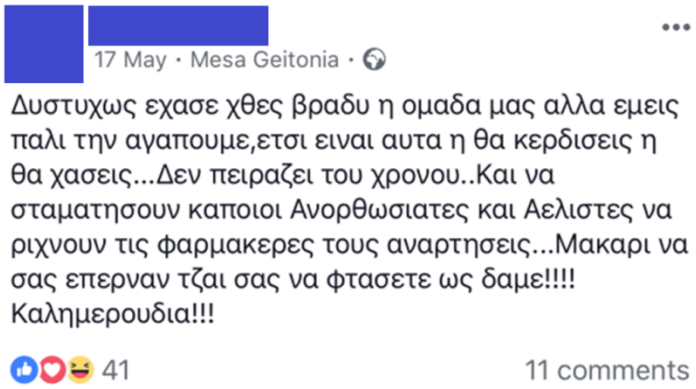
appreciation is directed towards women in general at first and then towards women who have aged.

Example 46 appears to follow similar patterns of unconventional punctuation found in examples 42 and 44 also posted by the same participant, Nikos. Unconventional punctuation in the form of the capitalization of the first letter of the adjective, the use of ellipsis multiple dots to indicate a potential pause, the repetition of ellipsis and exclamation marks at the end, together with three hearts which are formulated through keyboard symbols (i.e. the symbol for smaller than < and the numerical character 3) is used for highlighting specific parts of the post, for making potential pauses. Drawing on Busch's (2021, p. 4) study, the use of several punctuation marks, i.e. exclamation marks, ellipsis, emojis, are characteristics of digital writing.

Unlike example 42, where Nikos projects self-presentation in a more direct manner, in example 46, positive self-presentation is achieved indirectly. In this case, even though the first-person singular is not used, the persona of someone who admires women and believes in their beauty despite age indicates a positive image for Nikos. Moreover, the post is probably targeted towards Nikos' female Facebook friends, especially those who are older as this kind of post acts as a compliment to the specific group of Facebook users. Similar to examples 42 and 44, this post revolves thematically around women and these posts collectively support and/or praise women in terms of gender equality, motherhood and in this case age.

6.5.6 Opinion-giving and sports in participant-generated posts

So far, the analysis of participant-generated posts focused primarily on content produced by male participants, as the majority of posts in this category of posts belonged to the male participants in the study. In participant-generated posts about sports, the analysis focuses on example 47, which is a post authored and generated by Maria, one of the female participants in the study.



Example 47

Translation: *Unfortunately our team lost last night but we still love it, this is how it is either you win or you lose… Never mind next year… And some supporters of Anorthosis and Ael should stop with the poisonous posts … You wish your team had gone this far!!!! Good morning!!!!*

In example 47, Maria expresses her opinion about football and the team she supports projecting the persona of a loyal fan who loves their team regardless of whether they lose or win. In this post the juxtaposition between us (first person reference in 'our team' and 'we'), which refers to the supporters of Maria's team and 'them' (third person reference in 'should stop'), which refers to the supporters of other teams facilitates the construction of the participant's football fan identity. In the last two sentences of the post, there is a shift in how the fans of the other teams are constructed in discourse i.e. from third- person reference 'them' (people talked about) to second-person reference 'you' (people talked to), challenging them directly about how they'd wish their teams would have gone as far as Maria's team. Similar to example 43, the use of specific pronouns is found to be used by participants strategically to construct certain identities. In this post, the juxtaposition of the pronouns 'them' and 'you' (referring to the supporters of other teams), to the first-person pronoun 'we' and 'our' (referring to Maria's team and its supporters), facilitates not only the construction of the

participant's football fan identity, but also constructs other teams as the out-group and her team supporters as the in-group.

In Maria's post judgment is also evident. She urges the supporters of the other Greek-Cypriot teams (e.g. Anorthosis, AEL) to stop posting bad things about her team. In addition, the adjective *poisonous* which carries negative connotations, is used to refer to the posts of the other teams' supporters. Nevertheless, unlike male participants' posts that included negative evaluative adjectives to refer to people or groups, negative evaluation is used here to refer to the posts and not the supporters of other teams in general. This practice indicates that judgment and disagreement are expressed in a mitigated manner compared to previous examples produced by male participants. In addition, mitigation is also achieved through the use of 'καποιοι' (some) that clarifies that she is not referring to all supporters of the other two teams, but only to a sub-section of them. In previous literature, it has also been found that men express disagreement without mitigation whereas women tend to mitigate disagreement, especially in communication among Greek speakers (e.g. Makri-Tsilipakou 1991, 1995).

The Cypriot-Greek is evident through the use of several linguistic features at the end of the post, which together with the topic of the post (local football), contributes to constructing a local Greek-Cypriot identity. Cypriot-Greek dialectal features include the word αγαπούμε (translation: we love) in contrast to 'αγαπάμε' in Standard Greek, the verb 'επέρναν' for the Standard Greek 'καταφερνω' (manage), the word 'τζαι' instead of 'και' (and), and the expression 'ως δαμε' instead of 'ως εδώ'(so far). The fact that the end of the post includes more Cypriot-Greek features may be strategic as this part of the post is more direct and potentially aggressive towards Maria's Facebook friends who may identify with the specific group of people she refers to. As suggested by Tagg and Seargeant (2016, p.351), communities on Facebook can emerge 'in the way in which an invisible audience is perceived, discursively co-constructed and thus imagined into being through semiotic practice'. The choice of a particular code or dialect, as in example 47, can be used to index a specific group as the perceived audience by the participant (e.g. Tagg and Seargeant 2016).

In comparison to the participant-generated posts by male participants, Maria's post appears to be more indirect, as any criticisms appear mitigated. The language

used is not as aggressive compared to how Andreas, Nikos or Rafael were found to express their opinion. For instance, in male participants' posts negative evaluative adjectives like 'ηλιθιοι' and 'βλακες' (both meaning stupid) are used to refer to specific people or groups of people, or in Nikos case the word 'Μπουρδέλλο' (brothel) was used to refer to a specific type of religion. In Maria's post negative terms e.g. 'poisonous' are used to refer to posts, rather than specific groups of people.

6.6 Identity construction and reshared opinion-giving posts

Drawing on the quantitative analysis of the chapter, the resharing of opinion and judgment posts, generated by other users or pages on Facebook was the second most popular category among the posts collected (41.42%). This section aims to examine the specific strategies that are employed in the posts reshared by the participants and how the choice of these reshared posts facilitates the construction of various identities. Reshared content is a more indirect way for users to take a stance, and express their opinions, beliefs and feelings (e.g. Georgalou 2017). Through reshared or 'recycled' content (Georgalou 2017, p.189-190), users share ready-made stances.

In terms of reshared opinion-giving posts, Maria is the key representative of this category (n: 208 out of 425 reshared posts), followed by Christophoros (n: 122 out of 425 posts) and Loukia (n: 75 out of 425 posts). Drawing on the content of the posts and what participants find relevant to share with their Facebook audiences, these reshared posts index various identities related to religion, gender, children, pets, relationships, social matters, life and philosophical issues, age and politics.

6.6.1 Opinion-giving and gender in reshared posts

A topic explored in reshared posts is gender and in some instances gender in relation to masculinity. Example 48 illustrates how identities are constructed in relation to gender.

Example 48

Translation: *You become male because of your genes.*
You become a man because of your age.
You become a gentleman because of your behaviour

Example 48 is a meme reshared by Christophoros. The meme caption includes three sentences that provide definitions for the following terms related to the male gender: *male, man* and *gentleman*. In terms of layout, each term and definition occupy a distinct line. Through the reshared meme Christophoros appears to align with the belief that genetic factors determine one's male gender, age makes somebody a man, and behavior determines whether somebody is considered a gentleman or not. In other words, it is implied in the post that age and genes are not enough to make someone a

gentleman, the latter requires a certain type of behaviour which is not further explained in the post. The juxtaposition of these terms in the meme highlights the importance of the last sentence and the importance of being a gentleman rather than merely a male or a man which are attributes given to anyone due to genetic and biological factors.

In example 48, Christophoros achieves positive self-presentation and self-praise indirectly. He does not include statements praising himself, but instead he reshares statements which indicate his beliefs. According to these beliefs, good and kind behaviour, a prerequisite for being called a gentleman, is what is foregrounded in the post; an ideal he probably aspires to as well, or perhaps, he has even achieved. It is through such associations with positive and favourable attributes that he presents himself in a positive way to his Facebook audiences. This is achieved either by implying that he is a gentleman through resharing the post, which gives an explanation of what makes a gentleman or by positively evaluating himself by showing his agreement with the post with the act of resharing it. As already mentioned in the previous section, research has shown (e.g. Reinecke and Trepte 2014; Chou and Edge, 2012) that self-presentation online indicates a positivity bias, which makes positive forms of self-presentation more likely compared to negative ones. Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face has been used to explain positive self-presentation online.

6.6.2 Opinion-giving and age in reshared posts

Age is a prominent topic explored in the reshared posts by participants as it has been indicated in example 48 that focused on age and gender (e.g. manhood defined in terms of biological age). In order to examine how age identities are constructed further, example 49 illustrates a post by Maria who was also found to share age-related humorous posts in chapter 5.

Example 49

Example 49 is a reshared meme in English that includes an image divided into two separate photos and a caption. The photo on the left shows children playing with a water hose and laughing, whereas the one on the right features children playing on their smart phones. The caption on the meme is in capital letters above and below the two pictures. Below the pictures of the main caption, there is a prompt for fellow Facebook users to share this meme if they agree; such prompts indicate that the practice of resharing is understood as a form of alignment with the content of the post. This post is a portrayal of the difference between how children grew up in the previous generation without technology and the things they would play with like a water hose, and the ways in which the children of today's generation grow up using technology even for playing. Therefore, it depicts the age gap between the two generations and how technology has affected the way children are brought up in today's world.

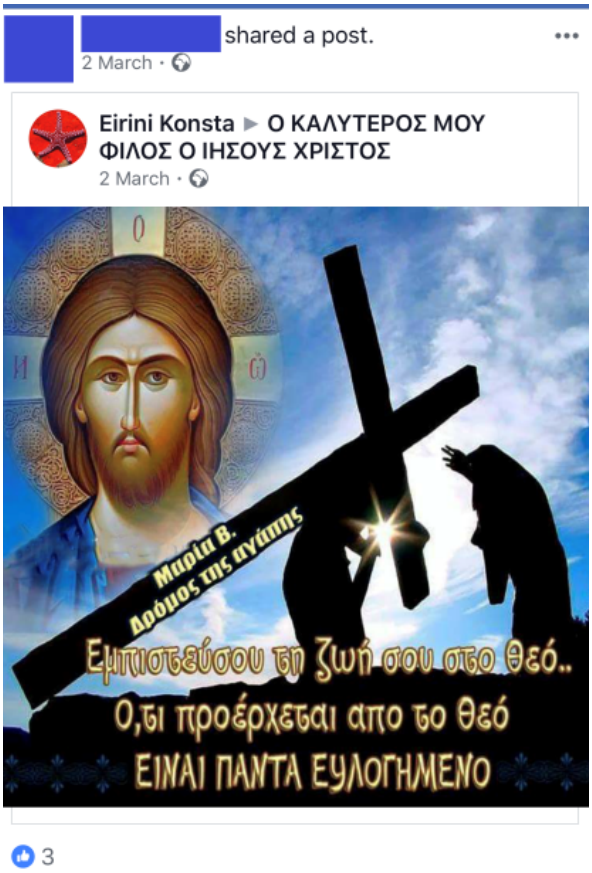
Overall, the post is aimed at people who grew up in the previous generations and who can identify with the laughing children playing with a water hose in the mud. Therefore, people who belong to the age group of Maria are likely to be the main target audience. The adjective 'glad', which has a positive connotation, suggests that people who agree with this post believe that it was better for children to play outside, with a

water hose for instance, instead of playing on their phones and looking at the screens as it is shown in the picture on the right. In addition, the phrase ‘not this’ in the caption referring to photo on the right also indicates feelings of disapproval of or disagreement with the way children are entertained nowadays. Therefore, through resharing the specific meme, Maria achieves to communicate not only her agreement with the post and its caption, but also judgment towards the way children are raised today using technology.

In addition, the post is also directed towards people who reminisce the past and look back to their childhood years. This practice has been observed in social media in the literature (e.g. Georgalou 2017, p.266) as well as in this study in previous chapters (see chapter 5 on Humour). In fact, according to Georgalou (2017, p. 266) who also examined Facebook use, ‘revitalizing the past is an important practice among Facebook friends’. She argues that because of Facebook affordances nowadays which allows users to have a written record of their memories, users can not only stay connected to their Facebook friends in the here and now, but it is also a place of nostalgia. Facebook is a platform where they can remember good times, shared experiences and tastes from the past, which are highlighted in the present (Georgalou 2017, p.266). Through the practice of remembering and idealizing the past, as well as juxtaposing it with a present that is often portrayed in a negative light, Maria constructs the identity of someone who belongs to an older generation.

6.6.3 Opinion-giving and religion in reshared posts

Similar to the participant-generated posts, religion is also a topic explored in reshared posts that included images with captions related to God, and especially Christianity. The key representatives of this type of reshared posts are Maria and Christophoros, with example 50 reshared by Maria illustrating this category.



Example50

Translation:*Trust God with your life.*
Whatever comes from God
IS ALWAYS BLESSED

Example 50 includes a meme that depicts an ecclesiastical image of Jesus Christ and an image of a person carrying a big cross with another person standing in front of them. The post is related to Christianity as indicated not only by the icon of Jesus Christ but also by the image of the two people that resembles the biblical scene of Christ carrying his cross on the way to his crucifixion. It also features a caption on the image (see translation of example 50) and a caption on the cross which includes the name of the person who most probably created this meme and the phrase 'The road to love'. Based on Jewitt (2005, p. 316) who argues that an 'image can be used to reinforce the meaning of what is said, what is written and so on', in this example the photos related to

Christianity also reinforce the caption included in the meme which urges people to trust God.

The identity of someone who is religious and believes in God is constructed through the use of several linguistic and visual tools. In terms of visual means, the post draws heavily on imagery that is shared and recognized by the members of the Christian community, indicating the poster's affiliation with Christian religion and beliefs. In addition, the caption urges people to trust their life to God and expresses the opinion that whatever comes from God is always blessed. This suggests that people are urged to trust and believe in God even in adversities, even when they go through difficult, unpleasant or difficult situations. Through these visual and linguistic means the persona of someone who believes in Jesus Christ and God is constructed. In terms of opinion-giving this post does not include any form of judgment; instead expresses an opinion related to religion in the form of strong advice.

In terms of directness, the first sentence of the post includes the imperative form of the verb 'trust' which is used to convey strong, unmitigated advice. The use of the second person singular indicated in the imperative form is also a marker of directness and addresses Facebook audiences in a more direct manner, rather than a mitigated one. Moreover, the ending of the second sentence includes the capitalization of the words adverb 'always' and the adjective 'blessed' which carries positive connotations especially in relation to religion. Moreover, previous literature suggests that the capitalization of certain words can be used for emphasis as well as indicating emotional stance (Labben 2022, p.6).

6.6.4 Opinion-giving and parenthood in reshared posts

Parenthood is also a topic explored in the reshared posts, especially by Maria. As illustrated in example 51, the relationship between parents and children, as well as the notion of motherhood, is topicalised in the specific post.

Example52

Example 51 is reshared post by Maria, which includes a quote against a blue background referring to motherhood and the relationship between mothers and children. The quote is in English which is a common practice when participants, especially Maria, reshare posts, as the posts have not been generated by them but rather they have been generated by pages which post movie quotes or other quotes about life and relationships. Through this reshared post the opinion about how the relationship between children and their mother can develop is expressed in relation to taking care of each other.

The caption in the meme implies judgment aimed at children who do not look after their mother, on the one hand, and praise for mothers who look after their children, on the other. Exaggeration and hyperbole are evident through the use of numbers and the reference to the rare scenario in contemporary western societies of a mother bringing up ten children. The contrast between the numbers 'ten' and 'one' further highlights the hyperbole in the statement. The use of the adverb 'sometimes' makes the judgment more indirect, as it indicates that it is not always the case that a child will not take care of their mother. At the same time, praise aimed at mothers is also achieved through the use of number 'ten' for the children a mother is capable of looking after, implying that mothers can take the responsibility and put the effort in raising numerous

children. Considering that Maria is also a mother of a daughter, by selecting to reshare this post, she aligns with its content and, indirectly, presents herself as adhering to this ideal standard of motherhood which is the ability to look after her children, no matter how many they are.

6.6.5 Opinion-giving and locality in reshared posts

Another topic explored in the participants' reshared posts is locality and more specifically the Greek nation and the corresponding national identity. This type of identity is 'based on the distinction between the in-group, namely the nation, and the foreigners, those belonging to other communities, the 'others'' (Triandafyllidou 1998, p. 593). Example 52 is a meme reshared by Christophoros which explores this topic, as also visually indicated by the Greek flag included in the meme.

Example 52

Translation:*If they ask you*
If you are a racist
tell them you are
GREEK

Loving your country
is Not racism.

In example 52, Christophoros reshares a post by a group called 'Μένουμε Ελλάδα' (translation: Remain in Greece). The post is a meme with text above it, which states 'Είμαι Έλληνας και είμαι περήφανος' (translation: I am Greek and I am proud). Therefore, the name of the group, as well as the text accompanying the meme, indicate an orientation towards the local, national identity and national pride. In addition, the meme also includes the Greek flag, which also contributes to constructing a Greek national identity both on the part of the person who created the meme, but also on the part of the one resharing it.

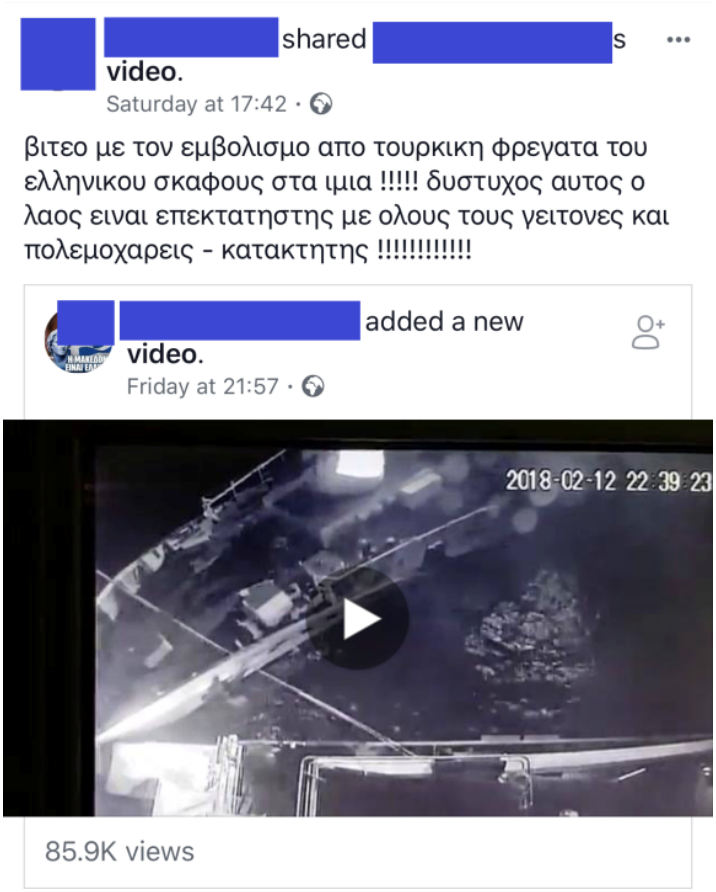
The caption included in the meme also orients towards national and local identities in a direct manner providing an opinion on how to respond in a hypothetical scenario. The post engages with a wider discourse that associates nationalism, national pride or overt admiration of one's nation with racism, xenophobia and prejudice (e.g. Salaita 2006; de Figueiredo Jr et. al., 2003; Hjerm 1998). The suggestion to state one's national identity and renounce racism should be viewed in the context of a counter-discourse that aims to dissociate these two concepts, i.e. nationalism and racism with the use of the word patriotism in contrast to nationalism (de Figueiredo Jr et. al., 2003). According to de Figueiredo Jr et. al (2003, p. 178) a prominent difference between these two concepts lies in their point of reference i.e. 'patriotism is self-referential' whereas 'feelings of nationalism are inherently comparative—and, almost exclusively, downwardly comparative'. In addition, the emphasis on the nation is further reinforced through the capitalization of the word 'Greek' which is followed by the Greek flag. Furthermore, the negation (i.e. Not) is also capitalized to emphasize that Greeks who support their country are not necessarily racists. In fact, it is implied that the participant correlates the love for one's country with not being racist. Therefore, he orients to a persona of a patriot who loves their country, and at the same time is not a racist. This way, he not only orients to a national or patriot identity, but also to an anti-racist identity, and hence indirectly achieves positive self-presentation.

6.7 Identity construction through both participant-generated and reshared opinion-giving content

Based on the quantitative analysis, 15% of the opinion and judgment instances belonged to the category of posts that combined both participant-generated and reshared content. As already mentioned, owing to the multimodal nature of Facebook, users can now recycle or reshare ready-made stances or opinions in particular items such as memes, song lyrics/titles which allows them to embrace attitudes and beliefs that are included in intertextual material (Georgalou's 2017, pp. 189-190). The practice of combining reshared or ready-made content with participant-generated content indicates that users employ the reshared content to either align or disalign with it or as evidence or support for their stance or opinion.

6.7.1 Opinion-giving and politics

A prominent topic explored by participants in this category of posts, as well as in previous categories, is politics, as illustrated in example 53.



Example 53

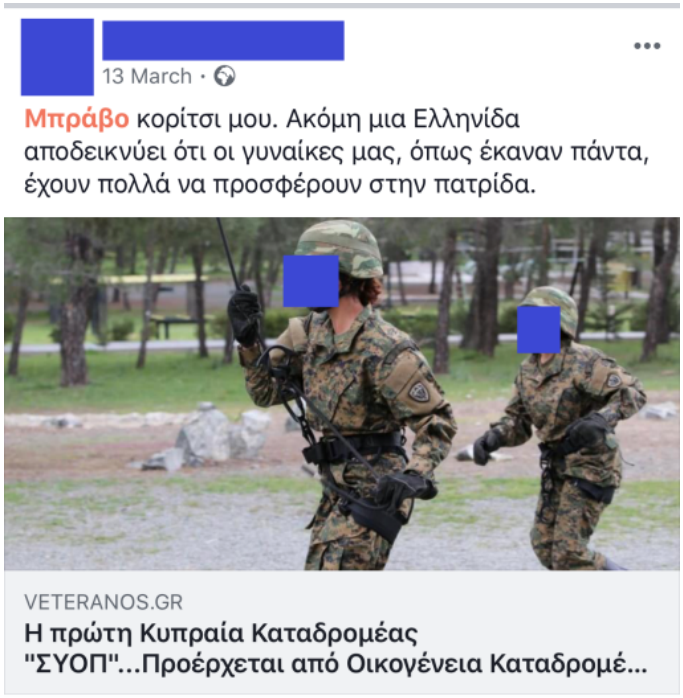
Translation: *video of Turkish frigate ramming a Greek vessel in imia !!!!!! unfortunately this nation is expansive towards all their neighbours and warlike – conqueror!!!!!!!!!!*

Example 53 is a combination of a reshared video from another Facebook user's account along with a caption authored by Christophoros. The video includes footage that captures a Turkish frigate ramming a Greek vessel. The reshared video and the text authored by Christophoros work together to convey his opinion about the Turkish nation and show a politically aware persona. The text is organized into two parts, with the first part describing the content of the video and the second part including a negative evaluation of Turkey as an expansive and warlike nation. In this instance, the video complements the content of the text and is strategically used as 'real' evidence for the stance expressed towards Turkey. This practice is common on social media as previous literature suggests that video documentation and their circulation on social media has played a crucial role in various contemporary social movements (Jones and Li 2016, p. 567) . According to Jones and Li (2016, p. 567) these videos serve as evidence around which 'viewers build bodies of shared knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about events through engaging in exercises of ''collective seeing''. In this case, Christophoros attempts to provide evidence of the incident by resharing the video as proof to his claim that accompanies the reshared video.

Christophoros' opinion is expressed in a direct manner in the second utterance where he expresses his opinion about Turkey as a nation. The lack of any mitigation, as well as, the use of adjectives such as 'warlike', 'expansive', and the noun 'conqueror' that have negative connotations and are related to war, is a linguistic practice used by Christophorosto condemn Turkey for their expansive and potentially dangerous international politics and to express his opinion directly. By expressing his opinion in a more direct manner, Christoforos also orients to a national identity by condemning Turkey's actions in relation to Greece and by characterizing their politics using words with negative connotations.

6.7.2 Opinion-giving and gender

Gender and gender roles are also talked about in this category of opinion and judgment posts, as evident in example 54. It is a post by Andreas who reshared an article from a Greek online newspaper. As evident in the title visible in the post, the article is about the first Cypriot female who became an official commando in the Cypriot army and the link to the article is preceded by a caption written by Andreas and commenting on the specific woman, as well as Greek women in general.



Example 54

Translation: *Bravo my girl. Another Greek woman*
proves that our women,
have so many things to offer to this country, as they have always done.

This combination of the reshared article along with the caption revolves thematically around women's value in the Greek-Cypriot society. The participant highlights the importance of this particular's woman's achievement to enter the army force of Cyprus and become a commando by using 'Bravo my girl' and then continues by highlighting that women have always contributed greatly to his country. In this case, the participant congratulates this woman for her contribution to the Cyprus army since

she is the first female Greek-Cypriot to belong to the special army forces. As indicated in the reshared content, it is highlighted in the title of the article that she also comes from a family of males who have served in the special army forces. The identity of someone who supports women and their achievements and recognizes their contribution to society is conveyed through the resharing this post as well as the caption above. This identity is constructed linguistically through the use of certain linguistic features including the positive evaluation 'Bravo' (Well done) used in the post- also highlighted with a different colour by Facebook which sets the congratulatory tone of the post. Despite the participant's attempt to be supportive of women in the army, the use of the word 'girl' when he congratulates her could potentially be considered as condescending when uttered by an older male addressing an adult female. According to Beltran et. al. (2021, p. 248) words that are apparently positive may in fact indicate benign sexism in the form of words relating to their physical appearance along with 'condescending words that infantilise them'.

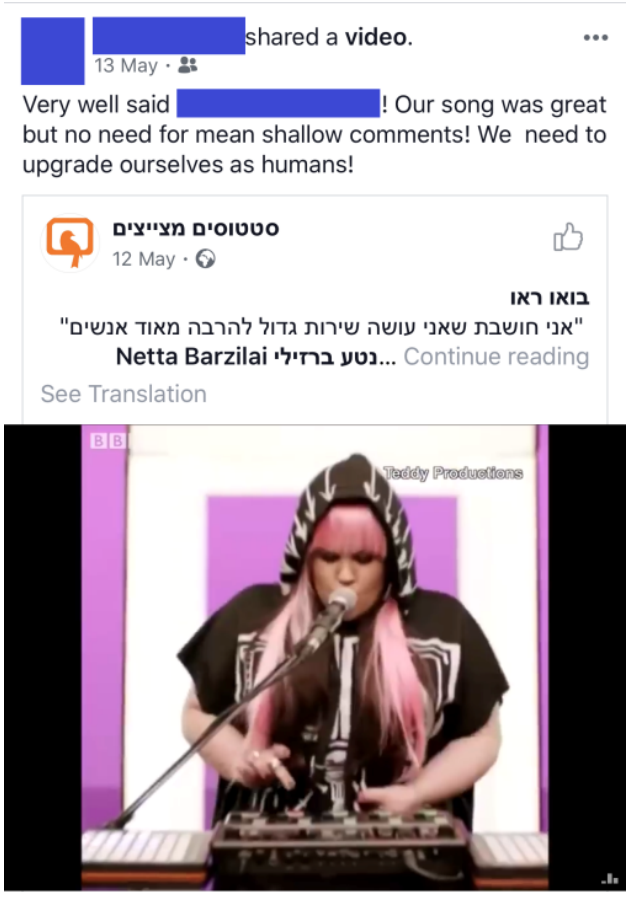
Directness is also indicated through the level of certainty expressed through the verb forms in the post. As already mentioned, previous literature (see Georgalou 2017, p.186) suggests that direct ways of opinion-giving or stance-taking can be achieved by means of use of morphological formations. It seems that directness is used by the participant strategically in order to emphasize his epistemic stance, in this case he takes a stance that is based on certainty which is highlighted with the adverb 'always' to refer to women's contribution to society. Moreover, epistemic modality in the post is constructed through the use of the present tense e.g. 'proves', 'have so many things to offer', but also the use of the adverb 'always'highlights the certainty of the participant regarding women in his country. In addition, the fact that he highlights that women have always offered great things to the country indicates that the participant also uses this article as an example to express his opinion on a greater scale.

Jones and Li (2016, p. 567) argue that videos circulating on social media can act as evidence for viewers to express their opinions and beliefs around shared knowledge. Similarly, the reshared content which includes an online newspaper article is used as evidence to support the claim made in the caption above it. The combination of the reshared post and the participant-generated text is used in this case by the participant

strategically as the reshared article serves as evidence for the participant to express his opinion about women in his country in general, conveying an admiration for the women in Cyprus.

6.7.3 Opinion-giving and popular culture

Popular culture is also a topic explored in this type of posts by participants who appear to affiliate with pop culture and more specifically music. In particular, in example 55, Andria reshared a post which includes the video of the winning song of the Eurovision contest and the singer performing the song on her keyboard. The caption above that is written in English, tags a friend of Andria and appears to agree with an opinion her friend expressed (probably on her Faceook wall).



Example 55

In contrast to other posts in this section, Andria chooses English for the caption of this post to express her opinion, which indicates that the target audience of this post may not only be Greek-Cypriots, but also Facebook friends/contacts from other cultural or linguistic backgrounds, as English is used as an international language. At the beginning of example 55, Andria expresses her agreement with the opinion of her Facebook friend by stating 'very well said' and tagging her friend. The opinion of her friend is not clearly indicated in the post even though Andria provides an explanation of why she agrees with her friend in the post. Moreover, directness is also achieved at the beginning of the post by tagging her friend and expressing explicit agreement to what has been said. Through such positive evaluations of others' statements, online conviviality can be achieved, which is a concept suggested by Tagg et. al. (2017, pp.46-47). According to Tagg et. al. (2017, pp.46-47), online conviviality refers to the 'overarching principle shaping relations and behaviour on Facebook'. A key notion of online conviviality is that people online wish to portray a likeable persona and avoid offending or annoying others. This type of identity construction is evident with the pursuit of attaining a positive public image on Facebook in order to be accepted across various audiences and therefore, avoiding conflict and difference which are key elements of conviviality online (Tagg et. al. 2017, p.48).

As it has been argued in previous sections, the use of specific pronouns can also be used by participants strategically for the construction of certain identities (e.g. Bayyurt and Bayraktaroglu 2001). In this post the first-person possessive pronoun *our* which refers to the Greek-Cypriot song in the Eurovision song contest, facilitates the construction of the participant's local identity as a Greek-Cypriot, as she aligns with the group to whom this song belongs to. By implicitly contrasting 'our' song with 'other' or 'their' songs represented in the embedded pos and video, belongingness to the in-group of the Greek-Cypriot community is reinforced. The collective 'we' pronoun was also found to be used in Georgalou's (2017) research by Facebook Greek users and concerned belonging constructions of 'we' to nationality or certain groups.

Judgment is also expressed in the post towards people who post mean comments about the winning song. Judgment is more indirect in this post as it is expressed in a more general sense i.e. no need for, even though the adjectives 'mean'

and ‘shallow’ which have negative connotations, indicate judgment towards these comments. She ends her caption again by using the first-person plural pronouns more specifically the use of ‘we’ and ‘ourselves’ in order to make her suggestion more indirect. By using the first-person plural pronouns, the suggestion at the end does not seem as criticism or judgment towards her Facebook friends, rather than a general comment addressed to everyone including herself. Previous research suggests that Greek females use more diminutive forms in order to achieve politeness in comparison to males (Sifianou 1992, p.167). In addition, early research also supports that dominance is a characteristic of male language whereas submissiveness is of female language (Zeyrek 2001, p.57). Similarly, in example 55 disagreement and judgment with this type of comments is expressed in a mitigated manner which is a politeness strategy as suggested in the literature (see Yemenici 2001, p. 335), as the participant also includes a suggestion at the end using the inclusive first person plural pronouns indicating that her comment is not addressed to anyone in particular but rather to everyone belonging to the Greek-Cypriot community which is constructed as the in-group, including herself.

The reshared content in this post includes the winning song instead of the song representing Cyprus at the Eurovision song contest which is used strategically by the participant in order to construct the persona of someone who accepts losing in a contest and congratulates the winners even if they belong to the out-group, in this case Israel who won the contest. Moreover, the persona of someone who condemns mean comments towards the out-group is also constructed. In addition, through the participant’s choice of English as the language to communicate her disagreement and judgment towards this type of comments, as well as choosing to reshare the winning song, she addresses her English-speaking audiences, which may include people from other countries which also participated in the Eurovision contest. By orienting to these personas, Andria attempts to portray a positive image for herself.

6.7.4 Opinion-giving and being local

Apart from popular culture (see example 55), local news is also explored in the participants’ posts, either relating to politics, or matters related to the Cypriot or local

society. Example 56 is a post shared by Andreas which includes an article from an online newspaper. As evident in the title visible in the post the article is about the new sports stadium being built in Limassol. It states that the building of the stadium had been postponed and that the president has been overruled by European authorities with respect to the building of the stadium. The article is reshared by Andreas in combination with a caption.

Example 56

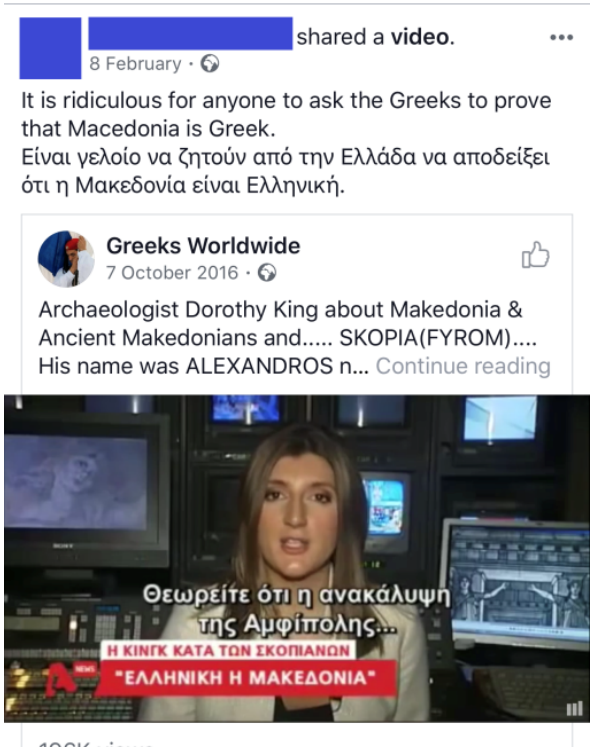
Translation: *It's a pity that the president has announced that he is not going to be a candidate in the next presidential elections!*
He could promise us the stadium for the third time!

The persona of someone who does not support the president is constructed through the use of ironic comments on the news reshared in the form of the online article. Verbal irony, is achieved when the participant appears to regret ('it's a pity') the fact that the president will not run in the next elections, while, in fact, the post criticises the president for empty promises by pointing to the repeated promise of building a

stadium that cannot be built due to the halt of the European Commission, as evident in the title of the embedded article.

The reshared newspaper article is used as evidence to support the participant's judgment towards the president of Cyprus. In order to support his criticism of the president's actions, Andreas uses the article as evidentiary material to support that the president is not the ideal candidate for this position. In addition, the choice of the specific online article by the participant is used strategically; the title of the article also includes negative evaluative language towards the president. For example, the sentence '**Ακυρωσε** τον Αναστασιάδη η Κομισιόν' (The EU Commission **cancelled** Anastasiades) carries negative connotations and implies the president's incompetence or powerlessness, given that a higher authority blocks his proposed plan to build the stadium. In other words, both the reshared content and the caption of the post indicate a negative judgment towards the president and potentially the same political stance towards the president and the political party he represents.

Another topic explored in this type of posts is history in relation to politics. In the following example, Andreas reshared a video from a page named 'Greeks Worldwide' which explores the history behind Macedonia and Alexander the Great.



Example 57

The post in example 57 includes two captions, one provided by the page in which the original video was shared and one by the participant who reshared the post (video + caption). The caption provided by the page is in English and explains what the video is about i.e. an interview with the archaeologist Dorothy King on Ancient Macedonians, FYROM (currently North Macedonia), and Alexander the Great. Andreas' caption is written both in English and Greek which indicates that the target audience for this post includes both English- and Greek-speaking friends. Context-design refers to the linguistic processes which Facebook users undertake to navigate the imagined audiences which collapse into a single platform (Tagg et. al. 2017, pp. 19-20). Language choice is one of these processes, as it facilitates the design of a specific context, according to which Facebook posts are meant to be interpreted by specific audiences. The fact that Andreas uses both English and Greek in his caption indicates that this post is aimed at his Greek- and English-speaking friends.

This type of post is related to identities of history and being aware of the Greek history as well as wider historical and political debates. In addition, Andreas' national identity is also constructed through this post. In order to construct this type of national identity, Andreas uses the reshared post as evidence to support his judgment towards people who challenge the claim that Macedonia is Greek (see Jones and Li 2016). As already mentioned, previous literature (Jones and Li 2016), suggests the use of circulated videos on social media as evidentiary support for users to express an opinion and interact with other users based on shared knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and opinions, especially on political issues. The evaluative adjective 'ridiculous' which has negative connotations is used to characterize the situation in which someone asks for proof that Macedonia is Greek. This is why the video, which includes what the archaeologist Dorothy King has said about the matter, is provided as evidence that archaeologists around the world agree on the matter. Therefore, Andreas' judgment is aimed at those who question this information. The reshared post facilitates the participant in strengthening his argument as it includes an expert's point of view.

6.8 Concluding Discussion

In this chapter, the quantitative analysis of opinion-giving posts indicated that, in contrast to humorous posts, the participants equally engaged in generating their own posts (43.57%, n: 447) and resharing content (41.42%. n: 425). Moreover, in contrast to humorous posts, when participants express their opinion on Facebook, both males and females were found to generate their own posts. This finding may indicate that humorous content, especially in the form of memes, may be more prone to be re-shared by users online. Older participants, in other words, engage with humorous memes, a key part of the online culture, and contribute to their virality and speed of transmission (see Kostadinovska-Stojchevska and Shalevska 2018; Davison 2012). In contrast, when my participants express their opinions online, generating new content has been preferred. This finding may indicate that when participants express their opinions on Facebook, and therefore, take stances on various topics, they may wish to clarify and expand on their opinions, giving space to the expression of both more personal and collective identities that could achieve alignment with various audiences. The generation of new content, rather than memes, provides more opportunities to show any individual or personal traits that could align with others or not. In addition, 15% of posts belonged to the category of messages combining reshared and participant-generated content.

The qualitative analysis revealed that the participants constructed various identities when expressing their opinions about a range of topics on their timelines. Thematically, these identities include identities related to politics, religion, sports, music, gender, age, locality, social matters and parenthood. The analysis indicates that gender may play a role in the ways participants express their opinion and take a stance on Facebook. . In the study, male participants expressed their opinion and were critical or judgmental in a more direct, non-mitigated manner using punctuation for emphasis as well as negative evaluative language to express disagreement and criticism, with potentially face-threatening acts in some cases. In contrast, female participants used mitigated language to express their disagreement and judgment, which aligns with more indirect ways of expressing an opinion (see Yemenici 2001). This finding also aligns with previous literature on gender and politeness (e.g.Yemenici 2001; Sifianou 1992; Zeyrek 2001; Makri-Tsilipakou 1991, 1995). For example, in Makri-Tsilipakou's studies

(1991, 1995) it is argued that men usually exploit strong disagreements without mitigation whereas women tend to employ mitigated ones.

The participants in the study constructed identities in relation to gender not only through mitigated or non-mitigated language strategies, but also through normative gender stereotypes evident particularly in the male participants' posts. For instance, example 46 foregrounds the idea that beautiful women who age remain beautiful portraying a stereotypical image of women who worry about their physical appearance and growing old, reflecting and reinforcing specific standards of femininity related to normative gender representations for women. Additionally, Andreas makes use of the noun 'girl' to congratulate a woman entering the Special Forces in the army. In both cases, and in line with previous literature (see Beltran et. al. 2021, p. 248), language that is apparently positive may in fact indicate benign sexism in the form of words relating to the physical appearance of women along with condescending words that infantilise them (i.e. the use of 'girl' instead of 'woman' to talk about an adult female). Taking both examples into consideration, male participants attempt to convey a positive image for themselves by portraying the persona of a man who acknowledges women's achievements or who consider older women as still being beautiful.

Locality is also evident in the participants' posts, often in relation to politics when expressing their opinion on their Facebook walls. This type of posts included opinion or judgment towards people in power such as the president or politicians, the government, or other countries which may be considered as a threat to the local community, such as Turkey. Opinion-giving has been examined in several studies in relation to politics (e.g.Choi 2020; Krzynzanowski and Tucker 2018; Richardson and Corner 2011; Thornoborrow 2015). Participants also expressed their opinion or judgment aimed at Turkey that was considered as the out-group in contrast to the Greek-Cypriot community which is considered the in-group. The distinction between the in-group, namely the nation, and the foreigners, those belonging to other communities, the 'others'' has been supported in the literature when people construct identities in relation to their nation and local identities (Triandafyllidou 1998, p. 593).

Identities in relation to being local, or also referred to as place identities in the literature (see Georgalou 2017, p.77), were constructed through the use of various

linguistic tools. A place identity according to Georgalou (2017, p. 77) indicated by place references as identity markers i.e. places that are meaningful to the participants for 'personal, professional and national/ethnic reasons'. Linguistic tools that indicate place identities include the use of pronouns in order to distinguish between the out-group i.e. 'them' and the nation i.e. 'us'. The third person plural was used by participants to address the out-group, whereas the first-person plural e.g. 'us' was used to refer to the in-group. This finding also aligns with Georgalou's (2017, p.77) work since place identities were constructed in various ways including the use of personal/possessive pronouns that refer to nationality with *we* being used for the in-group. Moreover, place identities were also constructed in my study through the use of references to people related to a place (e.g. Rolandis, a Greek-Cypriot politician) or events occurring in a place (e.g. the Cyprus national TV channel in relation to Eurovision), the use of toponyms (e.g. Cyprus), visual symbols/metonymies of a place (e.g. the Greek national flag), as well as language alteration (e.g. code-switching between Cypriot-Greek and Standard Greek features in the same post).

Chapter 7: Concluding Discussion

7.1 Introduction

Identity performance on digital media and discourse has been examined in the past by several scholars (e.g. Benwell and Stokoe 2006), with some studies focusing particularly on identity performance on Facebook (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014; Tagg and Seargeant 2015; Chau and Lee 2017; Georgalou 2016; Procházka 2018). In contrast to previous literature, this study examines issues of identity in relation to the use of Facebook by older users. Numerous studies in the past have examined the use of discourse focusing on younger users in digital media (e.g.Hargittai and Hinnant, 2008; Spilioti, 2009; Sophocleous and Themistocleous, 2014; Thurlow and Brown, 2003; Wei, 2011) and on Facebook (e.g. Nazir 2012; Chau and Lee 2017; Yang and Bradford Brown 2016) due to its popularity among younger audiences in the 2010s. Nevertheless, according to Sweney, (2018, n.p.), younger users have now turned to other social media platforms such as Instagram and leave Facebook. In fact, it is argued that Facebook's popularity has now increased among older users as well. This is further supported by Statista (2023a), since recent reports show that users over the age of 35 already account for 43.9% of Facebook's total user base. Even though there are some studies examining the use of digital media by older users (e.g. Georgalou 2015; Lin et. al. 2004; Page 2012; Page et. al. 2013, Kern et.al. 2013), the research in relation to this age group is still scarce, as also pointed out by Van House (2015, n.p.) and Georgalou (2015, p.26).

Given that the term 'older users' can encompass a range of age groups and what is considered as 'older' is often variable (Van House 2015, n.p.), researchers choose a specific definition of older users based on their research questions and the aim of their study. For example, Georgalou (2015, p.26) points out that research on 'generational cohort, other than the 13–17 and 18–22 age groups, still remains relatively scarce'. For that reason, in her (2015) study she focuses on age identities in relation to 5 users of Facebook with a mean age of 28 years old. Moreover, Page (2012), Page et al.(2013) and Lin et. al. (2004) have examined Facebook use by participants over 50 years old. Finally, Sophocleoous and Themistocleous (2014) have also examined code-switching

on Facebook in relation to both young and mature internet users comparing the two age groups in relation to the identities they project. Given the gap in the literature, this study focuses on Facebook older users and, specifically, on people who were aged 45 to 65 years old at the time of data collection. While this age group is popularly associated with the so-called middle age (OED 2023), the generations born before 1973 also have encountered digital media as adults, and as a result their experience with digital media differs from other users who have encountered digital at an early age.

Motivated by the relative lack of studies that examine digital discourse among older users and more specifically people aged between 45 and 65years old, combined with sources which support the growing number of Facebook users, this study investigates how older Facebook users do identity work on their Facebook walls. In order to address this question, the research aims to examine: **(i) what identity aspects older participants of Facebook project through their Facebook wall posts?** and **(ii) how such identities are projected through the use of a range of linguistic and other semiotic resources**. The data consists of Facebook posts of Greek-Cypriot older users during a period of 6 months. The participants in the research include 13 Greek-Cypriot Facebook users living in Cyprus. The participants were recruited using both convenience sampling and snowball sampling and for the purposes of the thesis, 2845 posts were collected.

The qualitative analysis of the study draws broadly on Androutsopoulos' (2014, p.8) theoretical framework on sharing, which includes three stages; 'selecting, which refers to the choice of moments to share; styling concerns how to entextualize what is being shared; and negotiating refers to the audience engagement that follows up on acts of sharing'. Drawing on Androutsopoulos' (2014) framework, and the first stage of selecting what to share, the first research question of the study targeted primarily the content of the posts in order to understand how participants present themselves. Then based on the second stage of users styling what they share, the second research question aimed to answer how they style their posts by using several linguistic and other semiotic resources. The final stage suggested by Androutsopoulos which explores the audience engagement that follows on what users share was not examined in the

study due to ethical implications as it would require further consent by the different audiences of the participants' post.

7.2 Identity Construction

The first research question of my study is related to the types of identities participants construct on their Facebook walls through the posts they share. The content of the posts and the topics explored in each post were used as indicators of the key identities projected. In other words, this research question aims to answer what participants find relevant to share on their Facebook walls and how these are related to the various identities they wish to project on their timelines.

7.2.1 Communicative functions and Identities

Drawing on Androutsopoulos' (2014, p.8) and taking into account the types of events and activities selected for sharing with their Facebook friends, we can infer the ways in which the participants present themselves to their social network and, thus, the range of identities they deem relevant for this type of interaction. One way to examine the activities selected for sharing is through the analysis of the communicative functions that the posts achieve on the Facebook wall. Drawing on Lee's (2011) classification and adjusting it to the needs of the study, by adding some categories as well as excluding others, the posts were initially categorized based on their communicative function. This classification was used as a point of departure in order to identify the purposes these wall posts achieve and what identity work is done through achieving these purposes.

The findings of the analysis of the posts based on their communicative function indicates that the category of posts where participants expressed their opinion and judgment (1026 instances), was the most prominent category in the analysis, followed by the posts in which participants reported their mood (960 instances), then posts with quotations (881 instances) and posts that belonged to the humour category (556 instances). The least prominent category was the one which included discourse related to Facebook (4 instances). While the 'opinion and judgment' posts included instances in which participants expressed their opinion and beliefs about themselves and others and the 'reporting mood' posts included instances in which participants expressed their

inner feelings and emotions either positive or negative, in both cases participants expressed their opinion through conveying their emotions and, as a result, these two categories in most cases overlapped.

Based on the analysis of the posts' communicative functions, the wide range of various identities participants orient to in their Facebook communication became apparent. The analysis of the posts revealed that the identities foregrounded thematically revolved around the participants' public life and their private life.

In terms of their private life, the analysis revealed that participants reported on specific events, such as going to coffee shops and restaurants, and provided information on certain activities in their everyday lives, such as the place where the activities took place and the people they were with. This reporting aspect was prominent in certain categories of communicative functions, such as 'What are you doing right now?', 'Reporting day-to-day activities', 'Reporting significant activities' and 'Reminiscing the past'. When constructing various identities in relation to these categories, participants provided information on certain activities that are either done at the time of posting their message or have occurred in the recent past. This finding aligns with previous literature (e.g. Page 2012; Lee 2011; Georgakopoulou 2016) which highlights that a common practice on Facebook includes reporting on day-to-day and rather mundane activities. Page (2012, p. 69), for example, has found that this type of activity was done in the form of self-reported stories shaped by the relationship of the participants developed on Facebook. Thus, Facebook users choose the content of their posts based on their target audience and such content is limited by the need to balance their desire to achieve social connection with Facebook friends and their need to avoid disclosure that may be considered as inappropriate for acquaintances on Facebook rather than close friends (Page 2012, p.69). In addition, categories such as 'Announcing/Advertising', 'Congratulating', 'Wishes' and 'Addressing target audience' also included content which reflected aspects of the participants' personal life. The content of this type of posts usually indicated aspects of the participants' job or targeted specific Facebook friends in order to congratulate or wish them on their birthdays or initiate a discussion. The 'Greetings' category was also evident in posts relating to the participants' personal life, which included greetings, such as 'Όμορφες Καλημέρες'

(Good mornings) to Facebook friends. Overall, the topics of posts relating to categories in relation to private life included leisure activities, travelling, mood, domestic or professional activities etc.

In terms of public life, the analysis revealed that participants expressed opinion and humour and reshared quotations in relation to social issues, such as political matters, government issues, religion, family or parenthood, as well as wider beliefs or aspects of society. This type of posts was prominent in certain categories of communicative functions, such as 'Reporting Mood', 'Opinion and Judgment', 'Humour', 'Informing about a social matter' and 'Quotation'. Unlike posts focusing on the personal life of participants, public life posts did not draw on Facebook affordances such as checking in, live videos or the use of personal photos. According to Đorđević (2022, pp.76-77), when someone posts an opinion on Facebook, a reaction from their Facebook communities of friends is expected either in the form of likes or reactions which may indicate agreement or disagreement or in the form of comments in which they may support the argument, oppose to it or add their own opinions. Thus, users can negotiate a public persona on the platform while at the same time constructing various identities and building a community (Đorđević 2022, p.77). In addition, humour is evident in the participants' posts and is used mainly to achieve a playful identity which is rather common among Facebook users as previous research suggests (e.g. Deumert, 2014; Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014; Lewin-Jones, 2015). The thematic content of the posts containing humour and their relation with identity is further discussed in the next section.

7.2.2 Humour and identities

As mentioned in the analysis of the posts, the communicative function of humour has been one of the key themes and functions in the data. As noted by Vásquez and Creel (2017, p.59) 'online discourse is often characterized as playful, humorous and creative'. Participants constructed a variety of identities along with a playful identity. Among the various identities constructed, participants were found to orient to normative gender identities in their humorous posts. Normative gender roles involve the stereotypical portrayal of women and men according to the traits they are assumed to possess

(Podesva and Van Hofwegen 2014, p136). In the humorous posts in my data, gender identities were invoked through references to normative gender roles; for example, women were portrayed as wanting to look beautiful, participating in beauty pageants, hiding their age as they grow older or following an unhealthy lifestyle with excessive eating. Self-deprecatory humour was found to be used in order to construct normative representations of women (Chiaro 2018; Russel 2002; Kanai 2019) or to convert post-feminist regulation and the standards that women are supposed to live up to, into 'funny, bite-sized moments' by producing selves that are relatable (Kanai 2019, p. 60). More specifically, female participants shared jokes about middle-aged women that often oriented to the aforementioned normative gender identities. The jokes portrayed a stereotypical belief about women, reflecting and circulating the social belief that women (or men) who belong to an older age group hide their age. Similarly, older male participants used self-sarcasm in relation to changes in their physical appearance caused by ageing such as baldness. Humorous posts also targeted the issue of age, and particularly, growing old. This type of humour relating to ageing and physical appearance may be used by older participants to create a feeling of relatability and solidarity among their Facebook friends who belong to the same age group.

Humorous posts also indicated an orientation to the place identity of participants. Through this type of posts participants achieved to target a specific audience among their Facebook friends; an audience that understands Cypriot-Greek, and in some cases the Greek-Cypriot culture and community, as these jokes commented on aspects of the Greek-Cypriot society such as the political landscape and the local culture (cf. jokes related to the stereotypical belief that Greek-Cypriots do not wish to be separated from their parents or live far from them). In the case of one male participant, being local was also expressed through a joke about politics where Greek-Cypriot stereotypes and prejudices were evident in the use of rather racist jokes (cf. the word Mongolians to refer to Turks). Therefore, this indicates that humour on Facebook and particularly among my participants is culture-specific. The practice of resharing or generating jokes in relation to the Greek-Cypriot community indicates that the participants of the study identify and associate with the specific community and wish to share their place identity and culture with their Facebook friends. In addition, by sharing content related to their

community, participants negotiated and addressed the target audiences of their posts since in an environment of context collapse (Tagg and Sergeant 2016), participants exclude wide international audiences by using Cypriot-Greek features in their posts and constructing place identities.

Taking all the above into consideration, when participants re-share or generate posts related to humour, they invoke several playful identities with the most prominent ones being identities in relation to constructing normative gender roles as well as place identities.

7.2.3 Opinion-giving and Identities

Opinion-giving on digital media, and more specifically on Facebook, is closely related to identity performance, as opinions can act as indicators of identity aspects of the speakers (Đorđević 2022). The ways in which opinions are elicited and situated within any given mediated framework are closely related to the identities of the participants (Thornborrow2015, p. 89). Drawing on the content of the posts and what participants find relevant to share with their Facebook audiences, opinion-giving posts in this category were found to be used by participants to index various identities with the most prominent being related to gender and the local community, and especially in relation to local political issues.

Similar to humorous posts, gender seems to play a significant role when participants express their opinion on their Facebook walls. This was more evident in the posts that the male participants generate and re-share. The findings indicate that my participants attempt to present themselves in a positive way when constructing identities in relation to gender. They often achieve that through orientations to normative gender identities. For instance, a male participant shared a post that positively evaluates the gendered quality of being a gentleman that he associates not only to biology, but also to further behavioural and cultural factors. In another case, a male participant also orients to normative gender identities when commenting on the importance of a woman's achievement to enter the army force of Cyprus and become a commando. His surprise and admiration portrayed in the post, as well as the use of certain linguistic features, which may be considered as condescending (Beltran et. al. 2021, p. 248), suggest

some normative assumptions according to which women are not expected to do jobs that were typically associated with men.

Politics seem to be another prominent topic when participants express their opinion on Facebook, which aligns with previous literature findings (e.g. Choi 2020; Krzynzanowski and Tucker 2018; Richardson and Corner 2011; Thornoborrow 2015). This type of posts included opinion in the form of judgment towards people in power such as the president or politicians, the government, or other countries which may be considered as a threat to the local community, such as Turkey. Politics was also explored in relation to locality and place identities. It was found that participants expressed their judgment aimed at Turkey, which was considered as the out-group and a threat to the nation, whereas Greek-Cypriots were considered as the in-group. Previous literature (Triandafyllidou 1998; Alorainy et. al. 2019; Labben 2022) suggests that the distinction between the in-group, i.e. the nation, and the foreigners, i.e. those belonging to other communities, has been typical of people who construct identities in relation to their nation and local identities. This distinction may be attributed to the long history of conflict between the two nations due to the island's division as a result of the Turkish invasion in 1974, often referred to in the literature as the Cyprus Conflict (Hadjipavlou 2007; Stergiou 2016) or as the Cyprus problem (Philippou 2009). By doing so, my participants may wish to create a sense of solidarity among their Greek-Cypriot Facebook friends. Opinion-giving is therefore used not only to negotiate and interact with their Facebook friends individually, but also to build a community who will support and value their opinion (see Đorđević 2022, p.77). This is achieved by expressing opinions that are in accordance to the expectations and opinions of the audience the participant wishes to affiliate with, which in this case includes Greek-Cypriots and people who may share the same disagreement with the current political leaders of Cyprus or belong to the same political party that the participant supports.

Thus, similar to humorous posts, when participants express their opinion on their Facebook walls, hetero-normative gender identities and place identities in relation to politics seem to be prominent.

7.2.4 Discussion

Taking the above findings into consideration, it seems that the most prevalent identities the participants orient to in the posts analysed are hetero-normative gender identities and place identities. Several factors may contribute to why the older Facebook users of this study foregrounded these identities online. The first step is to acknowledge the complexity involved in self-presentation, and the range of factors contributing to how and why people construct a range of identities on Facebook. Drawing on Block and Corona (2016, p. 508), this issue has often been addressed by researchers in social sciences and humanities using intersectionality theory which urges researchers to consider several dimensions when examining identity and the ways these dimensions interconnect. Thus, intersectionality theory aims to address 'the complexity of identity in the increasingly varied and variable circumstances of the times in which we live' (Block and Corona 2016. p. 508). Moreover, intesectionality theory is not a single framework but rather a range of positions that can be used as a 'heuristic device for understanding boundaries and hierarchies of social life' (Anthias 2013, p. 4). As a result, researchers should be cautious and avoid overgeneralizations and universal statements.

In the current study, the analysis has shown that both male and female participants orient to hetero-normative gender identities on their timelines either by re-sharing ready-made content, which was mostly common among female participants, or by generating their own posts, which was more prominent among male participants. One of the key differences between the ways female and male participants construct this type of identity is that female participants often engage in self-deprecatory humour, whereas male participants orient to positive self-presentation, despite the fact that they often use condescending language aimed at women in this type of posts. This finding suggests that the data exhibit rather gendered patterns in the way Facebook is used among older users. Such gendered patterns that allude to more fixed constructions of gender may run counter to previous literature (e.g. Poster 1995; Papacharissi 2002b; Benwell and Stokoe 2006) according to which identities online are more fluid and people online are encouraged to express themselves freely since status markers are eliminated in the virtual world. 'Identity on the Internet is playful, creative, impressive and limitless, and (so popular discourse would have it) an entirely different proposition

from identity in the 'real world'' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 243). Nevertheless, Manago et. al (2008, p.455) argue that 'social norms are not completely reinvented online; rather, offline gender scripts and roles guide expectations for appropriate behaviour online'. Thus, the participants in this study may endorse normative gender identities on their timelines due to the fact that perhaps this is what is expected as appropriate by their Facebook audiences. If we also consider the age of the participants, and their audiences who are likely to include people belonging to the same generation as them, hetero normative gender identities may be associated to the type of gendered discourses that were prominent in the past.

Furthermore, another factor which may influence the ways participants of the current study orient to normative gender identities is the specific cultural context. According to Hadjipavlou and Mertan (2010, p. 250), the Greek-Cypriot community in the past was a 'dominant patriarchal, nationalist and militaristic environment' in which 'women's views, needs or concerns have had little space to be articulated'. They continue by adding that by 1974, feminism and women's liberation movements had not reached the island life despite modernisation spreading across different aspects of the community. Taking into consideration that most of the participants of the study belong to the Baby Boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964) and some of them belonging to generation x (born between 1965 and 1968), it seems that participants were raised in a generation of hetero-normative gender ideologies on the island. According to Hadjipavlou and Mertan (2010, p. 265), the Cypriot community 'has been male dominated, and patriarchal structures gave rise to social stereotypes, gender prejudices, and sexual division of labour'. Despite changes in women's lives in the last 60 years in education, professional development, financial independence and other aspects, it is only recently that women have managed to acquire positions of power in the Greek-Cypriot community, as evident in the recent example of this year's election of the first female president of a political party in Cyprus, namely the Democratic Rally (DISY).

The analysis has also shown that participants orient to place identities in relation to the Greek-Cypriot community. Place identities have been defined by Georgalou (2017, p.77) as identity markers which are achieved through place references i.e.

references to places that are meaningful to the participants for 'personal, professional and national/ethnic reasons'. In this study, participants' orientation to identities in relation to the Greek-Cypriot community may be attributed to several factors. Drawing on Themistocleous' (2019) work, the island of Cyprus has had a long history of conflict, with the most recent resulting to a geographical division of the island. After the 1974 Turkish invasion the island was divided between the south part, which is inhabited by Greek-Cypriots, and the north part by Turkish-Cypriots. Drawing on Karoulla-Vrikkis (2010) work, Themistocleous (2019, p. 98) argues that the linguistic repertoire of the two ethnic communities is considered as vital in maintaining the ethnic identity of each community. Thus, orienting to ethnic and place identities may be a result of the long history of conflict on the island which is still divided. This finding demonstrates that wider historical, political and social aspects influence the identities Facebook users orient to on their timelines. The age of the participants may also contribute to this type of identities being more prevalent, since the participants of the study belong to the generation that lived through the 1974 war between the two communities and hence, this may highlight the need to project ethnic, national identities. Therefore, by projecting place, national or ethnic identities on their Facebook walls, they may wish to build a community on Facebook, as well as target specific audiences (see Tagg and Sergeant 2016). By building a community of shared history and backgrounds, the participants also achieve a collective identity on their timelines, since the participants' collective history may cultivate and enforce relationships on Facebook. According to Khazraeeand Novak (2018, p. 11) social media provide structures and affordances, such as sharing of grievances and collectively negotiating meaning, which promote group membership and the construction of collective identities. Previous literature (Georgalou 2017; Triga and Papa 2015; Khazraeeand Novak 2018) also suggests that constructing collective identities on Facebook is not limited to the Greek-Cypriot community; instead collective identities have been found to create a sense of solidarity among Facebook audiences in a range of contexts. Therefore, in addition to the specific context, the platform itself and the norms of social media communication may also play a role in the construction of such collective identities (e.g. Khazraee and Novak 2018).

After identifying the most prominent identities and the factors which may contribute to why the participants of the study construct these identities, the following section will address the second analytical question of the thesis. Therefore, it aims to answer how various identities are constructed by the participants using a range of linguistic and other semiotic tools.

7.3 Constructing identities on Facebook through a range of linguistic and other semiotic resources

The second research question of the study examines how the identities, which emerged through the quantitative and qualitative analysis, were constructed through the use of various linguistic and other semiotic resources on Facebook. Based on the data analysis of the Facebook posts, I have noted the use of specific linguistic and other semiotic strategies for the construction of the aforementioned identities which could be divided into two broad categories. More specifically, it seems that some resources are linked to the affordances of the platform whereas others are not. The strategies which are not associated to the specific technological affordances of Facebook include the use of directness and indirectness, the use of pronouns, storytelling, language choice and polyphony. Technologically associated resources include the format and authorship of the posts, script choice, as well as unconventional punctuation.

7.3.1 Non-technologically associated resources

The study has shown that identity construction is mediated through **language choice** with Standard Greek being the primary linguistic variety used by participants. Other linguistic varieties used include Cypriot-Greek and English. Each linguistic variety was found to be used strategically by participants to achieve different communicative goals, target or exclude specific audiences, and hence construct a range of identities (see Tagg et. al 2017; Georgakopoulou 2016; Marwick and boyd 2011). Cypriot-Greek features were embedded in Standard Greek posts, often indicating a shift to Cypriot Greek. This practice may be related to the fact that Standard Modern Greek is learnt through formal education and is associated with formal writing, status and prestige, whereas Cypriot Greek is mainly used for daily oral communication (Tsiplakou et. al.

2017, p. 62; Themistocleous 2019, p. 98). It seems that users primarily orient to standard writing practices, but they switch to Cypriot-Greek to index informality or directness which is also indicated by other cues such as informal or spoken-like expressions and direct questions to their Facebook audiences. Previous research suggests that the internet provides a space for non-standard varieties and dialects previously used for oral communication, to appear in written form (Warschauer et. al 2002, n.p.). Based on previous literature (e.g. Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014), we would expect to find that older users would not use Cypriot-Greek, as mature participants reported in the past that they do not write in Cypriot-Greek, either in online or offline contexts. In addition, previous research indicates that older users show a preference for the standard variety as it indicates greater superiority, status and competence (Fotiou and Ayiomamitou 2021, p.11). Nevertheless, the current study shows a shift to the use of Cypriot-Greek in written communication which may be related to embracing non-standardness on the internet (Androutsopoulos and Ziegler, 2004; Danet and Herring, 2007), but also to embracing the local dialect in written form (Sophocleous and Themistocleous, 2014; Themistocleous 2008, 2009, 2010). Moreover, the study indicates that my participants seem to use Cypriot-Greek not only to create a sense of solidarity and collective identity with their fellow Greek-Cypriot friends, but also to address a perceived audience in a more direct, non-mitigated manner (Tagg and Sergeant's 2016). Finally, English was also evident in the participants' posts, particularly when they reshared ready-made content which indicates that English is still dominant on the internet as a linguistic variety (Thurlow 2018; Leppänen et al., 2009) especially in contexts of viral circulation of formulaic content (e.g. memes). Moreover, English was used in some instances when participants generated their own content, which may be attributed to the translocal nature of new media which enables users to reach wider audiences beyond national and domestic boundaries with the use of English as a lingua franca (Thurlow 2018; Leppänen et al., 2009).

The study has also indicated that **directness and indirectness** facilitated the construction of identities. As already mentioned, one way in which directness was achieved was with the use of Cypriot Greek. The study indicates that gender played a

role in the extent to which directness strategies are employed by participants in identity construction. Directness and non-mitigated language are evident in male participants' posts, whereas indirectness and mitigated language practices are more prevalent in female participants' posts, which also align to previous research findings (e.g. Herring 1994; Tsilipakou 1991, 1995). Previous research (Ng and Bradac, 1993, cited in Mulac et. al 2001) suggests that politeness is achieved through indirect language, which indicates that female participants may wish to achieve conviviality when interacting with their Facebook audiences (Tagg et. al. 2017). In addition, one could argue that female participants manage their Facebook friendships or relationships by adopting a more indirect, non-threatening approach and protect their positive face, i.e. their desire to be liked and approved in Brown and Levinson's (1978) terms. On the other hand, male participants' posts orient to the construction of a sense of solidarity with specific audiences who agree with their opinion or judgment, while at the same time they adopt a more direct style that does not mitigate confrontation with Facebook contacts who may disagree with the content of the posts. Considering that the findings of the study indicate that my participants orient to normative gender identity constructions, which seem to be related to the age of the participants and the patriarchal history of the Greek-Cypriot community, one is wondering whether the gendered pattern in the use of in/directness in my data is also associated with the aforementioned factors.

Another linguistic feature evident in the participants' posts, which facilitated the construction of identities, was the **use of pronouns**. The first-person plural pronouns, such as *we, our* and *us*, facilitated the construction of the participant's national, local and place identities (Georgalou 2017). Moreover, the juxtaposition of the third-person pronouns *them,* which in some cases referred to the Turks, to the first-person pronoun *we,* which referred to the Greek-Cypriot community contributed to the construction of Turkey as the out-group and of Greek-Cypriots as the in-group, which also aligns with previous literature findings (e.g. Alorainy et. al. 2019; Labben 2022). The lack of explicit reference to who 'them' referred to in the posts, illustrated that the participants presupposed that their Facebook audiences already know who the pronoun refers to and, therefore, position themselves and the audience as belonging to the same in-group. At the same time, through the juxtaposition of first- and third-person plural

pronouns participants mainly address Greek and Greek-Cypriot friends in the network who are aware of the Cypriot history with Turks and create a sense of solidarity, inclusion and belonging to this in-group.

This division between the Turks and the Greek-Cypriots is mainly related to the political landscape of the island, which is divided between the North and South, due to the Turkish invasion in 1974. Thus, the Greek-Cypriot community is a community characterized by a long-term conflict between the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots (Themistocleous 2019, p.94). Even though almost 50 years have passed since the invasion, aggressive and antagonistic attitudes still exist on the island and the participants' posts illustrate that certain beliefs are still present (Osam and Ağazade 2004, p.284). Furthermore, considering the age of my participants, it is likely that these negative and aggressive attitudes may be even more prevalent due to the fact that these participants experienced the invasion and the war as children (as noted earlier). Thus, it seems that the use of the 'we' versus 'them' pronouns may serve as linguistic strategies in areas of conflict, since they enhance the ethnic, national and place identities, as well as creating a collective identity on Facebook among its users.

Participants also drew on personal stories to orient to specific personas and construct identities related to different matters, which touch upon society or religion as seen in previous chapters. **Storytelling** on Facebook is a practice that has previously been examined by other scholars (Page et.al 2013; Georgakopoulou 2007; Georgalou 2015; Jin et. al 2015). In fact, social media platforms urge their users to share a story, which has now led to the possibility of uploading moments in the form of stories which appear on people's platforms for 24 hours. This practice has been characterized in the literature as the storytelling boom on social media (Georgakopoulou 2022; Georgakopoulou 2021; Mäkelä et. al. 2021). As already mentioned in Chapter 6, stories can be used by participants as strategies to express an opinion or take a stance in digital media (e.g. Baym 2000; Georgalou 2017) and, achieve positive self-presentation by enhancing positive traits about themselves. Similar to previous literature, participants of the study used storytelling as persuasive devices drawing on personal experience, in an attempt to portray an authentic self to their Facebook audiences (Georgakopoulou 2022; Mäkelä et. al. 2021)

Polyphony was also used by participants to construct several identities on Facebook. Polyphony or voicing were performed in various ways in the study, such as blending different styles, genres, registers or mixing languages or language varieties (Vasquez and Creel's 2017). Polyphony was evident in all three types of messages identified, i.e. in the re-shared content posts, the participant generated posts and those that combined the two. A form of polyphony that was particularly evident in the participants' posts is quoting. Quotes were either re-shared on their own as memes, or together with images, or appeared embedded in the participant-generated posts. The former (re-shared messages) included quotes about life, relationships, social matters and religion by well-known people, found on other Facebook pages which generated posts as memes with quotes. On the other hand, the latter (participant-generated posts) included quotes by people of authority such as politicians in order to criticize the quote in question. Quoting has been a popular practice in digital communication since the techniques for quoting have become easier to use due to digital reproduction, enabled by the operating system's copy and paste function (Puschmann 2015, p. 28). It seems that these intertextual practices in the form of polyphony facilitate the ways participants interconnect with their Facebook audiences by sharing their interests and beliefs. In this way they contribute to the creation of small communities with people who share the same interests or beliefs in an attempt to achieve relatability with their Facebook audiences. Previous literature (Leppänen and Peuronen, 2012, p.387; Shafirova et. al. 2020, p.1), suggests that the internet has turned into a translocal affinity space, where people from different social, linguistic, ethnic backgrounds are united with other people with shared interests, concerns, passions or causes.

7.3.2 Technologically associated resources

This study has revealed that identity construction on Facebook is mediated through the **format** of the posts, as it is enabled through Facebook affordances that facilitate different types of engagement with the platform: i.e. either authoring a new message or (re)sharing content that already exists online (e.g. other Facebook messages or hyperlinks to online news articles or songs). Therefore, Facebook users are presented with the following options in terms of content they can upload on their walls: a) posts

that include content generated and authored by participants themselves, b) posts that re-share content generated and authored by others, typically content from other Facebook public pages and c) a combination of both participant-generated and re-shared content.

While all three options are available to the users, the analysis has revealed that the mobilisation of a particular format may vary depending on the communicative function of the post. For example, the practice of re-sharing existing content has been particularly notable in humorous posts (78%, n: 434), while opinion-giving posts were more equally split across the two main categories: user-generated posts (43.57%, n: 447) and re-shared posts (41.42%, n: 425). In both humorous and opinion-giving posts participants were found to engage with re-shared content. This practice may be attributed to social media norms which foreground activities that enable the rapid, easy and viral spread of information and particular signs (e.g. Blommaert and Varis 2015). This practice of extensive sharing seems to be related to the importance of showing 'presence' and engagement on and with the platform in order to achieve sociability with their audiences (Blommaert and Varis 2015). A mere click on the 'share' button enables people to indicate their 'presence' on the platform, without spending too much time generating their own content. Even though the re-sharing of ready-made content is evident in both humorous and opinion-giving posts, the quantitative analysis revealed that it is more prevalent in the context of humorous content. This may be related to the numerous humorous pages on Facebook, since humour online seems to be an established practice, as evident in the popularity of internet memes which are characterized by their virality (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska and Shalevska 2018; Davison 2012).

This study has also shown that identity construction is also mediated through **script choice.** The primary script in participants' posts in both re-shared and participant-generated content is the Greek script. Previous literature (e.g. Themistocleous 2009; Tseliga 2007; Palfreyman and Al-Khalil, 2007; Zhang and Ren 2024; Tagg and Seargeant 2012) suggests that despite the affordances of digital media and the Unicode, which offers the possibility of using a range of scripts online, a common practice among users was the Romanisation of language varieties such as

Arabic, Cantonese, Thai, Greek and more specifically non-standard varieties such as Cypriot Greek (e.g.Themistocleous 2009; Themistocleous 2010; Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2014). However, the findings of the study indicate that due to the affordances of the platform and the Unicode, different scripts, and more specifically the Greek script has been embraced by users of social media. In addition, previous literature indicates that older users preferred Cypriot-Greek with Greek fonts, in contrast to young Greek-Cypriots who preferred Romanized-Cypriot-Greek online (Sophocleous and Themistocleous 2012). This finding aligns with the current research as it seems that the age of the participants may be related to the use of the Greek script for Cypriot-Greek, in both re-shared and participant-generated content.

Finally, a practice related to the affordances of digital media which enabled users to construct various identities on their Facebook walls, was the use of **non-standard punctuation markers** and the use of **emoticons.** More specifically, unconventional punctuation practices included unconventional formatting, unconventional grammar and unconventional spelling. Previous research suggests that older Greek-Cypriot Facebook users held negative attitudes towards non-standardness, especially the use of Romanized Cypriot-Greek and the use of Cypriot Greek in written contexts (see Themistocleous and Sophocleous 2014). Based on previous literature, thus, we would expect that non-standard writing in the form of unconventional grammar and unconventional punctuation would be scarce in the posts of older Facebook users. Nevertheless, this is not the case in the data analysed, which may indicate a shift to embracing non-standardness at the level of punctuation. The analysis has shown that in the participant-generated posts, participants used typographic features that have been associated with expressions of affect and emotions, such as the use of multiple punctuation marks like dots (...), exclamation marks (!!!!), or question marks (???), the capitalization of specific words or the initial letter of certain words and the use of emojis such as the heart ❤ or smiley ☺ or in the case of two participants, typographic emoticons such as the smiley face(:)) or the heart symbol (<3) (Labben 2022). Considering the age of my participants, it is likely that the use of typographic emoticons may be related to the fact that these participants started using digital technologies at a time when emojis did not exist. As a result, it may be the case that they transfer old

digital practices shaped by the affordances of early digital media to their current use of Facebook. Nevertheless, overall, it seems that non-standardness is prevalent in how punctuation markers are used in my data, indicating that older users also engage with non-standard language practices on the specific platform.

7.4 Contribution of the study

This thesis could benefit both the academic community and relevant practitioners, especially taking into account that the age group analysed represents a growing proportion of Facebook users (e.g. Sweney 2018; Statista 2023a) and that this trend may manifest in other social media platforms too in the future.

Within the field of sociolinguistic research on digital media and discourse, identity performance on social media sites has drawn the attention of scholars during the last decade (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2006, 2007; Fung and Carter, 2007; Georgakopoulou, 2003; Hinnenkamp, 2008; Hinrichs, 2006; Lexander, 2010; Tsiplakou, 2009; Vaisman, 2011). While identity performance and younger users of the internet have been widely researched (e.g. Spilioti, 2009; Thurlow and Brown, 2003; Wei, 2011, Georgalou 2015), studies examining older users have been scarce according to Van House (2015, n.p.) and Georgalou (2015, p.26). This study and its focus on older Facebook users, aged between 45 and 65 years old, contribute to the existing field by shedding light on the language practices and identity construction of the specific age group. Apart from a handful studies (e.g. Georgalou 2015; Page et. al. 2013; Kern et. al. 2013), we know very little about this group of users, compared to young people, despite the fact that there is a surge in older users on Faceboook, as people over-55s was considered the second-biggest demographic of Facebook users in 2018 (Sweney 2018).

Methodologically, this study has offered a new classification system for the study of communicative functions on Facebook. The suggested categories draw on Lee's (2011) classification of Facebook status updates but are adjusted in line with more recent Facebook data and recent changes to the platform. For the coding of the Facebook posts a combination of a top-down and a bottom-up approach was used, moving from the general coding system provided by Lee (2011) to the more specific categories which emerged from my data. For example, the category of 'Everyday life'

in Lee's study was divided into two different categories for the purposes of my study, namely category (3) Reporting day-to-day activities and category (4) Reporting a significant activity. Even though these two categories were similar in the sense that they referred to everyday activities, the former category consisted of routine activities whereas the latter referred to life-events whose importance was highlighted with linguistic and other semiotic means. This distinction was deemed necessary due to the affordances of the platform, since it now offers the possibility of announcing significant activities/events such as getting married or engaged or graduating or starting a new job position.

In addition, the proposed classification included some new categories such as 'Reminiscing the past', 'Congratulating', and 'Wishes' which again were considered necessary due to the affordances of the platform. The platform now offers the possibility to users to share a memory in the form of a post that had been posted previously, or in the form of posting nostalgic recollections. Previous literature (e.g. Youn 2020; Gross 2018; Georgalou 2017) suggests that social media, and especially Facebook with its memory-triggering features such as 'On this Day', have become platforms for nostalgic recollections and revitalizing the past is an important practice among Facebook users. Similarly, Facebook now highlights formulaic language for congratulating people through the use of bold orange letters for the word 'Congratulations' or 'Μπράβο' (translation: Bravo) and other visual features such as confetti for this type of posts. Expressing wishes is also facilitated by Facebook affordances, since Facebook reminds its users of friendship anniversaries and urges its users to share this with their Facebook audiences, as well as reminding them about birthdays of their Facebook friends. Formulaic expressions such as 'Happy Birthday' or 'Χρόνια Πολλά' (in Greek) are again highlighted through bold orange letters and confetti. Thus, including these three categories in the analysis of communicative functions can be useful for future research on Facebook and indicates how Facebook has evolved throughout the years.

Last but not least, this study has shed light on identity performance of Facebook users who are 45 years old and above. More specifically, it examined the various identities the participants of the study project on Facebook and, illustrated that gender seems to affect identity construction in my sample to a large extent. It was found that

participants of the study orient to hetero-normative gender identities. Moreover, the study has identified the use of various linguistic and other semiotic resources employed by older users to construct several identities on their Facebook walls. The findings suggest that hetero-normative stereotypical language practices such as the use of direct, non-mitigated language by males and the use of indirect, mitigated language by females are prevalent in the participants' posts. This study contributes to the wider volume of research (Bolander and Locher 2020; Georgakopoulou-Nunes and Bolander 2022) that argues that the online sphere and any practices developed there are not separate from offline practices and communication. More broadly, the distinction between online and offline becomes more and more blurred.

Beyond the academic community, my work is also relevant to professionals working in media and communications, and to marketing practitioners. Digital marketers targeting older populations on social media platforms could improve the placement of advertisements using insights into the content preferences, communication methods, and engagement patterns of these users on Facebook (for example, engagement patterns may refer to which posts users tend to react to in the form of likes or comments and which posts they choose to (re)share on their timelines). More generally, media and communication professionals operating in the offline world could also find value in my study, since these professionals could use the findings of this thesis to tailor their messages, content and communication strategies for older audiences, by understanding which identities these users orient and relate to.

7.5 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

The study has shown that older Facebook users project several identities on their timelines using a variety of tools and, overall, it complements existing research on identity performance on social media and more specifically on Facebook. Nevertheless, despite its contribution, some limitations exist which could also be addressed or resolved in future research.

Firstly, a potential limitation of the study could be the relatively restrictive sample of participants and messages collected for this study. While thirteen (13) Facebook users originally participated in the research, the posts of nine (9) participants were

analysed for the purposes of the study (overall 2822 posts). The reason for discarding the posts of the four (4) participants was that they only produced a very small amount of posts during the period of data collection (e.g. Antonis only posted twice during the 6-month period, Vicky had 8 posts, Evgenia 12 and Christiana only posted once). In the case of Evgenia, the participant stopped posting during the data collection, whereas after the end of this period she continued posting on Facebook regularly; indicating that certain participants' practice was influenced by the research (cf. Observer's paradox, Labov 1972). While the study draws on data produced by only nine participants, the overall number of posts (n: 2822) can be deemed sufficient for the type of quantitative (primarily descriptive) and qualitative analysis undertaken in chapters 4-6. In terms of representativeness, the use of snowball technique for 5 of the participants (Andreas, Christos, Rafael, Nikos and Andria) is likely to have generated a rather homogenous group of people who may have similar socio-economic background and wider socio-political beliefs. In order to address this issue, my two acquaintances, who do not fit the participants' criteria (and hence would not participate in the study) helped me recruit four more participants and expand the initial pool of subjects. Considering that these four participants, namely Christophoros, Loukia, Christiana and Maria, do not belong to the network of the people who were initially recruited through the snowball sampling technique, it is likely that the study included a range of people with a wider range of characteristics and traits. Taking all the above into consideration, the disadvantages of snowball technique are potentially not as severe, as the emphasis of a primarily qualitative study like this one is on the specificities and richness of interaction of individual participants and the group they belong to, rather than the population as a whole.

Another limitation of the study is that it primarily draws on screen-based data, i.e.. the texts that appeared as final products on the participants' Facebook walls. Due to the time constraints of the PhD, interviews were not conducted with the participants after collecting their posts; such interviews would yield further information about the participants' attitudes and views towards their practices on Facebook. The significance of interviews in the study of online communities has been underlined by Androutsopoulos (2008, n.p.) who argues that 'systematic observation and interviews

with Internet actors can be used to overview the online field or community under study; to elicit participants' awareness of linguistic heterogeneity; and to alert researchers to emic categories and views, which may act as correctives to their assumptions and interpretations'. The interviews could, therefore, enrich the findings of the study and enhance the study's interpretation of key findings.

While this study proposed a new categorisation of communicative functions of Facebook posts, the methodological issue of subjectivity in coding remains in such categorisations. Future research could include inter-rater reliability tests in order to overcome this limitation. According to Fink (2010, p. 158) 'interrater reliability refers to the extent to which two or more individuals agree'. Enhancing the interrater reliability of the current categorisation would involve asking for more observers or researchers to categorize the posts or a sample of the posts. Moreover, future research could use broader categories which could rearrange these 17 categories so that for the coding of the posts, as well as their analysis, is less time-consuming for the researcher and their categories appear mor replicable to other studies.

As it has been argued in previous chapters, the age group of middle-aged Facebook users is under-researched in the field of sociolinguistics and digital media. Therefore, further research could be conducted to examine how older users interact and perform identity on Facebook or other social media platforms such as Instagram or Twitter (now also known as X). More specifically, the factor of age has been studied in relation to identity performance and opinion-giving, especially since the majority of scholarly attention has been on how celebrities or politicians express their opinion (e.g. Clarke and Grieve 2019; Ott 2017). In addition, more recently humour has also been examined in relation to millenials on Instagram Reels (e.g. Kräussl, 2022) as well as women in Middle East (e.g. Hurley 2023). Thus, examining humour and opinion-giving on these platforms in relation to older users could potentially contribute to studying identity performance among older users. Additionally, further research could examine whether there is a link between age and the ways in which social media users construct identities related to gender, as participants of the study mainly constructed various personas related to hetero-normative gender identities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Consent Form

Consent Form

Language Use on Facebook

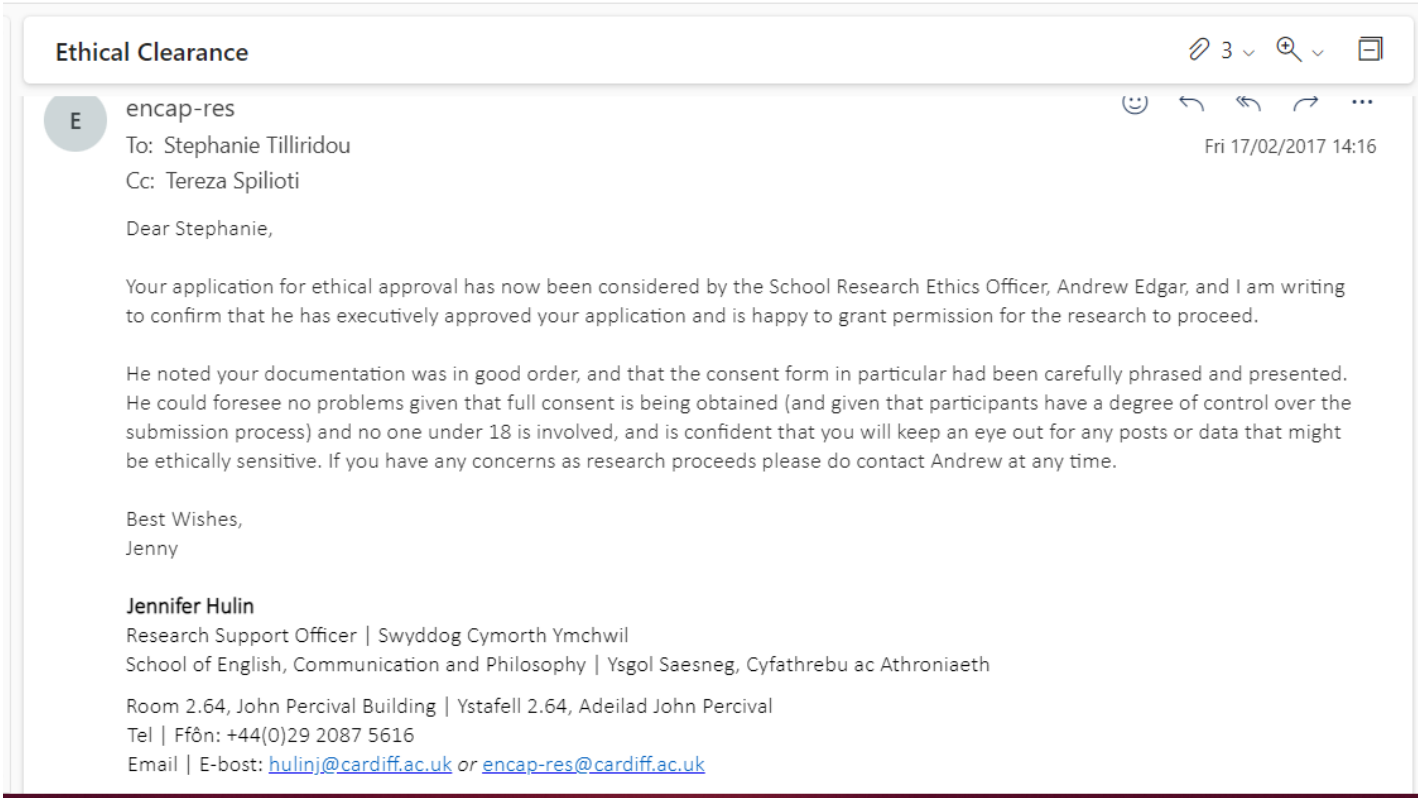
- I understand that my participation in this project will involve:
  (tick as appropriate)
  - ☐ agreeing for the researcher to observe and collect all my Facebook wall posts during a period of 6 months
  - ☐ recording and forwarding to the researcher a written record of my Facebook chat exchanges with another participant for a period of 6 months (provided that the other person has given their informed consent)
  - ☐ being interviewed by the researcher
- I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with *the researcher, Stephanie Tilliridou (TilliridouS@cardiff.ac.uk)*
- I understand that the information provided by me will be held confidentially, such that only the researcher and her supervisor can trace this information back to me individually. The information will be retained for ten years and up to January 2028 when it will be deleted/destroyed. I understand that I can ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time.
- I understand that information provided by me for this study, including my own words and images, may be used in the research report and publications, but that all such information and/or quotes will be anonymised. Faces and other identifiable visual information will be concealed.
- I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback.

I, _____(PRINT NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Stephanie Tilliridou, School of English, Communication & Philosophy, Cardiff University, under the supervision of *Dr. Tereza Spilioti.*

Signed:

Date

APPENDIX B: Ethical Clearance



Ethical Clearance

3

E

encap-res

To: Stephanie Tilliridou

Cc: Tereza Spilioti

Fri 17/02/2017 14:16

Dear Stephanie,

Your application for ethical approval has now been considered by the School Research Ethics Officer, Andrew Edgar, and I am writing to confirm that he has executively approved your application and is happy to grant permission for the research to proceed.

He noted your documentation was in good order, and that the consent form in particular had been carefully phrased and presented. He could foresee no problems given that full consent is being obtained (and given that participants have a degree of control over the submission process) and no one under 18 is involved, and is confident that you will keep an eye out for any posts or data that might be ethically sensitive. If you have any concerns as research proceeds please do contact Andrew at any time.

Best Wishes,
Jenny

Jennifer Hulin
Research Support Officer | Swyddog Cymorth Ymchwil
School of English, Communication and Philosophy | Ysgol Saesneg, Cyfathrebu ac Athroniaeth

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Email | E-bost: hulinj@cardiff.ac.uk *or* encap-res@cardiff.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: Sample of data

For ethical considerations and in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, a sample of approximately 20% of the data (n: 570 out of 2845 posts) is available at the following link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/tpa8cax6gx1z2x483x73w/APwnR9yGFfBkU-IP7haYMBQ?rlkey=8ubjobz7tur5adq1unuyvrnu4&st=2zg8c1vo&dl=0

The provided sample consists of the first 100 posts collected from participants with over 300 posts during the entire data collection period, (i.e. Christophoros, Nikos, Rafael and Maria), the first 50 posts of participants with 100-150 posts (i.e. Andreas, Andria and Loukia) and the first 10 posts of participants with 0-70 posts, (i.e. Giorgos and Christos). The number of posts included for each participant was chosen to be representative of the relative frequency with which each participant posted during the 6-month period of data collection. The first posts from each participant were first checked to verify that these posts were representative of the participant's overall activity during the entire data collection period. Accordingly, these posts were included in the sample as a way to demonstrate the full range of posts present in the participants' timeline.