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Experienced inequality in the social media structures – a feminist perspective

Uncovering the gender inequality of social media platforms

Marketing
Master's thesis

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In marketing research, social media has been a topic of interest since its early days of existence. The social networking sites are nowadays formed as platforms that facilitate critical activities for businesses, organizations and societies. Furthermore, the platforms have penetrated into people's lives, providing or limiting the possibilities to function in our society. The social media companies have tremendous power in users' lives, but yet it is unclear who's goals are prioritized in these platforms and whose are not. Surprisingly, only little of the social media studies have focused on how the platforms are structured and thus, this study addressed the issue. This research aimed to answer this research gap by gaining an understanding of *the experienced inequality in social media structures through taking a feminist perspective*. Feminist perspective in this study referred to the idea that social medias made by humans cannot be value-free nor objective. Thus, the analysis for inequality must regard the biases of our society.

The empirical study in this thesis was conducted as qualitative research and in two parts: first conducting a content analysis to further define the social media structures and then studying the experienced inequality by individual interviews. The study followed an abductive study as it combined earlier theories from platform structures, feminist theories regarding online spaces and user experiences on social media, and finally combining it with the knowledge gathered from the empirical study.

The study results indicated that the experience of inequality in the social media structures was common across different genders and races, but the experiences of inequality are more intense and personal on gender minority users and people of colour. The social media structures defined in this study were affordances, algorithms and content moderation. The central findings were that on gender minority participants the experience of alienation was highlighted but the feeling of unsafety on the platforms was universal. The study produced valuable gender and race sensitive data for the purpose of developing social media platforms more equal.

Key words: social media, feminist perspective, user experience

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Sosiaalisen median alustat ovat olleet markkinoinnin tutkimuksen kohteena aivan niiden syntyhetkistä lähtien. Nykypäivänä sosiaalisten medioiden rooli on merkittävä niin yritystoiminnan, yhteiskunnallisen keskustelun kuin ihmisten välisen yhteydenpidon kannalta. Alustoilla on siis kasvava valta yhteiskuntamme rakenteissa. Viime vuosina on kuitenkin herännyt kysymys tämän vallan käytöstä ja sen jakautumisesta – kenen etuja sosiaaliset mediat ajavat ja kenen eivät. Aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa epätasa-arvon kokemukset sekä ei-binäärinen tieto ovat jääneet vähemmälle huomiolle liittyen sosiaalisten medioiden käyttökokemuksiin. Tämä tutkielma vastasi tutkimusaukkoon pyrkimällä *ymmärtämään epätasa-arvon kokemuksia sosiaalisen median rakenteissa feministisen perspektiivin kautta*. Feministinen perspektiivi tässä tutkielmassa tarkoitti periaatetta, että sosiaalisen median alustat heijastelevat yhteiskunnassamme vallitsevia vinoumia, mikä tulee tutkimuksessa ottaa huomioon.

Empiirinen tutkimus suoritettiin kahdessa vaiheessa: ensin tutkimalla sosiaalisen median rakenteita sisältöanalyysin kautta ja seuraavaksi keräämällä aineistoa yksilöhaastatteluista. Tutkielma seurasi abduktiivisen tutkimuksen periaatteita verraten aikaisempaa teoriaa uuteen kerättyyn aineistoon.

Tutkimuksen tulokset valottivat, että monet sukupuolet sekä etnisyydet kokivat epätasa-arvoa sosiaalisen medioiden rakenteissa, mutta epätasa-arvon kokemukset olivat intensiivisempiä sekä henkilökohtaisempia sukupuolivähemmistöillä sekä ei-valkoisilla sosiaalisen median käyttäjillä. Rakenteet, joita tämä tutkielma analysoi olivat käyttömahdollisuudet, algoritmit sekä sisällön moderointi. Yksi keskeisimmistä löydöksistä oli, että sukupuolivähemmistöillä nämä rakenteet aiheuttivat vieraantumisen sekä ulkopuolisuuden tunnetta, mutta turvattomuuden tunne oli yhteinen eri sukupuolille sekä etnisyyksille. Tämä tutkielma tuotti arvokasta sukupuolieriteltyä tietoa kokemuksista sosiaalisen median alustojen rakenteissa sekä nosti esiin alustojen kehityskohteita.

Avainsanat: sosiaalinen media, feministinen perspektiivi, käyttökokemus

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research background and focus

Social media platforms transform the ways of social interaction - on a personal level but also institutionally. They provide space for many conversations or gatherings and play an important role in civic actions. (Myers West 2018.) In marketing studies, social media has been under scrutiny for over almost 10 years, since the platforms facilitate also critical activities for businesses and organizations (Ngai, Tao & Moon 2015). Although social media platforms function as a medium rather than as institutions, a discussion on platform accountability and transparency has risen after many concerning events like the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Mazur and Patakyova 2019, 221). Furthermore, social medias are built around structures that have been developed only quite recently and that affect our everyday-life environment. Surprisingly only little of the social media studies have focused on the structures, and thus, this thesis seeks to address the issue.

In many cases, the digital infrastructures are run by people of power who may own very different viewpoints and values from the people on whose data the systems rely upon. These digital infrastructures are found, for example, on social media platforms that have penetrated into people's lives (van Dijk & Poell 2013, 2). More recently, public interventions have interrupted the privately-owned social media platforms by demanding accountability for their biased qualities (Ananny & Gillespie 2016). Since the interventions, data scientists have proposed questions "whose goals are prioritized in these platforms and whose are not?" and "Who benefits from these social media platforms and who is predominantly overlooked or actively harmed?" (Hargittai 2015; D'Ignazio & Klein 2019).

The Guardian (theguardian.com 2019) stated, "The issue with feminism is, that it has begun to feel too familiar." Meaning, that the public interest in feminist actions happening in society has reached their saturation point. The article sees the problem of feminism as how it's presented in our society as social media outcomes. Mainstream audiences are not yet willing to question the structures on a personal level and require the comfort of stability. But the oppression that minorities face is real and remains in many cases underreported. The public interest is not correlating with the need of feminism. Especially now in the times of rapid technological development when new

spaces and possibilities are created, the spaces should be constructed to welcome everyone equally. To be able to create these safe spaces, research has to be done first. This is one of the research gaps, this thesis aims to answer – what are the experiences that are common in unjust spaces.

Nowadays, data is not only used to depict our society but also to transform and mold it. Especially in online environments, such as social media platforms, data and data products have a great influence on the decisions of people who create and control these platforms. In theory, the bits and algorithms are neutral and without prejudices, but the people constructing, gathering, and managing the bits are not. Also, the data gathered and implemented into the platform structures is a reflection of society that until this day is still biased. (D'Ignazio & Klein 2019.) Only 8 % of software developers, 16 % of employees in Silicon Valley, and 14 % of the associates in technology venture capitals are women (statista.com 2020; fortune.com 2020). The data on gender minorities doesn't even exist. The founders of the nine most used social media platforms are also men. In conclusion, the people building our online reality are men, more specifically white men. This causes a risk of bias in our data products, if data from the margins doesn't exist or it isn't taken into account, the products serve only the already privileged user groups. The discussion on the effects that these biases have on user experience lack deeper scientific knowledge or understanding.

Rosser (2005) explored the relationship of feminism and technology through eight different feminist theories. In this thesis, the feminist lens is built upon the Socialist and African American feminism where the purpose is to recognize the role of race and racism and how it intertwines with patriarchy as well as how products (as in this case social media platforms) made by humans cannot be value-free nor objective. From social feminism this thesis derives also the viewpoint of capitalism reinforcing the gender inequality. We explore the intricacies of the feminist lens further in the chapter 3.1.

Firstly, the term *structure* generally is defined as “*the way in which the parts of a system or object are arranged or organized*” (dictionary.cambridge.org 2022). In this context of social media platforms, structure is considered as the possibilities the platform enables for the stakeholders and how they are organized. We will later discuss the term *affordances* in the chapter 2.2 which can be considered as a synonym for the term structure that is often used in the literature of digital platforms.

In recent years, researchers have taken steps forward to uncover the discriminating structures of social medias (Bivens & Haimson 2016; Hill & Johnson 2019; Myers West 2018). But as established by D'Ignazio and Klein (2019), relevant data from marginalized groups is still missing in order to fully reveal the oppressive systems on social medias. The aim of this thesis is to breach this gap around gender specific data on social media user experiences and *gain understanding of experienced inequality through taking a feminist perspective*. Vaitla et al (2020, 16) demand proactive efforts in the science community to recognize the events when generating gender-differentiated data is possible. Only then, will there be a chance to diminish the negative outgrowths and correct the biased data products beforehand.

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the experienced inequality in social media structures through taking a feminist perspective. To reach this purpose, it's crucial to determine the scope for this study by identifying the structures of social media platforms. Feminist perspective needs to be adopted when identifying the structures and recognize their implications to user experience. Finally, the motivations of users and user experience itself is defined in the context of social media. By carrying out the literature review and empirical research, this research pursues to enlighten the gender and racial inequalities that still lay in our offline and online environments. The following research questions are determined to cover the research purpose addressed above.

- What kind of structures do social media platforms feature?
- How the structures appear through a feminist lens?
- How does the user experience form in the social media structures?

The first question is proposed for the identification of the social media platform structures. Literature review is conducted to outline the most crucial factors about the structures and their functions. By defining these structures, it's possible to understand the relations of social media companies to their platforms as well as to the society, and vice versa. The second research question then proceeds to introduce the feminist perspective of this study. Using a feminist perspective refers, not to politics, but to the fact that this study investigates the platforms structures from the user's perspective

highlighting the location of power. Here, the study proceeds to gain literature insight on the structures with critique, previous notions on underlying power relations and gender inequalities. This thesis embraces multidisciplinary by combining computing, gender and marketing studies. In the final research question the study focuses on the concept of user experience considering the social media structures and social media itself. The third chapter derives theoretical framework from uses and gratifications, social capital and other user experience theories.

The empirical study was conducted as a case study on two platforms, Facebook and Instagram. They were investigated with qualitative research methods, more specifically with content analysis and semi-structured individual interviews. First, the theory was operationalized by finding key equivalents to abstract elements from the social media platforms. Next, the interviews were conducted to answer the question of user experiences on social media, on a general level and specifically on the structures. The meaning of these interviews is to uncover the gender inequalities in social media platforms by gaining a deep understanding of the different user experiences. The individual interview method was chosen for its ability to facilitate a private conversation as the research discusses a sensitive topic.

This study will benefit the research community, society in general and companies, that would like to provide more inclusive platform services or online sites. When widening the scope, this thesis fits into the category of data feminism as well as social sciences. The incentive for this study is a feminist perspective on data gathering and analysis, where the principle is "What gets counted, counts". (civic.mit.edu 2016) The sentence refers to a concept of visibility in decision-making that is based on data. The research around user experience in social media platforms has often been limited to binary data gathering so bringing forward the unheard voices of people outside the binary is necessary. Vaitla et al. (2020, 17) state that for societal welfare, data disaggregation is vital and that the lack of accurate data is barring policy-making on gender violence, sexual harassment, and other critical topics. This study is aiming to be a part of a solution by following the principles of feminism.

2 Structures of social media platforms

2.1 Social media platforms in the context of marketing and commercialism

As social media platforms (SMPs) are increasingly becoming more important interaction tools in people's lives, marketing research has in recent years studied the field even more. The influence of these platforms reaches many aspects of life: social, commercial, business, educational, and political. Social media usage worldwide is expected to grow in the next five years to almost 4.41 billion in 2025 (Statista.com 2020b). This increase in use is reflecting positively on the attitudes and behaviours toward new technologies, as addressed by many researchers. People are ready to engage with new features and technologies more eagerly (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi & Algharabat 2017, 1177). The continuous shift towards even more commercialized platforms is one of the largest forces shaping the SMP structures and that is why this chapter begins with analyzing the interface of marketing and platforms.

In the article by Dwivedi et al. (2020) the contribution of social media to marketing research is examined on four different levels: company, environment, marketing strategies, and outcomes. To begin with the company-level analysis one must acknowledge how the change in consumers' lives has affected the change in companies' marketing strategies as a result. SMPs enhance the two-way interaction between companies and consumers making it possible for the companies to engage and attach consumers to the brand. In addition to new marketing tools and technologies, SMPs have influenced the way companies interact with customers. Filo, Lock, and Karg (2015) found that companies now allocate a remarkable amount of resources for building customer relationships on SMPs. Wang and Kim (2017, 16) elaborate on the role of social media in customer relationship management (CRM) and claim that managers are now integrating social media into their current CRM systems. This has created a new term of Social CRM which means the integration of traditional CRM activities to social media applications in a new more collaborative way. Adapting to new environments leads to better performance.

The environment of social media that Dwivedi et al. refers to in their article consists of new technologies and new ways to interact. What the social media companies offer to their business customers, advertisers are improved sales and brand awareness with low marketing costs. For consumer brands, the shift from brick-and-mortar to e-commerce

has meant that digital customer paths become highlighted in the pursuit of market shares. (Dwivedi et al. 2020.) In addition to providing marketing opportunities, SMPs nowadays have embedded shop features for brands to use. Dwivedi et al. continue by arguing that these emerging new possibilities of targeted marketing have led to privacy and data concerns we discuss also in this thesis. Arora (2019) discusses the cultural aspects of social media and how they influence the interaction on platforms. She divides them into two main categories: (1) the impact of national culture, and (2) cross-cultural motivations on social media. Arora states that these cultural aspects should be taken into account when companies are creating their marketing strategies.

Marketing strategies are nowadays adjusted to fit the media scene of societies meaning that social media is a crucial part of advertising and relationship building. Islam, Raheem, and Hollebeek (2018) studied online brand communities (OBCs) as part of a marketing strategy. Examples of these OBCs in the article were brands such as Coca Cola and Nike – Coca Cola now (2020) has 3,3 million followers on Twitter and Nike 124 million Instagram followers. The identified benefits of OBCs were improved brand trust, and loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and increased purchase intentions. Consumer's self-brand image and value compatibility were seen as key motivating factors for engaging with brands on social media.

Finally, Dwivedi et al. (2020) focus on the marketing research of outcomes of social media in business use. According to the studies, social media marketing has led to positive outcomes such as customer retention and an increase in purchase intentions. A company's social media presence has also been studied to have a positive effect on the company brand in form of brand equity, sustainability, and engagement. Syrdal & Briggs (2018) researched social media engagement and asked what it actually consists of. They found out that sometimes engagement is performed in a way that is not measurable and not showcased in marketing metrics such as in likes, comments, or shares. They propose a definition for social media engagement to be "A psychological state of mind experienced when consuming social media content in which an individual is highly absorbed in the content and experiences a sense of excitement." Negative outcomes of social media presence are also discussed in an article by Aswani, Kar, Ilavarasan, and Dwivedi (2018) that the negative outcomes are possible if the social media marketing is not managed properly.

Revenue for social media companies streams from advertisers and more specifically from users' clicks on ads. For instance, on Facebook, advertising income is shared

partially with the publishers and developers that host ads on their app-interfaces. The following Figure 1 is a simplified depiction of Facebook's value creation model. (Fumagalli, Lucarelli, Musolino & Rocchi 2018.) This creates a composition, where SMPs act as intermediaries between advertisers and consumers. In this text, this composition is further explained from the viewpoints of users' equality.

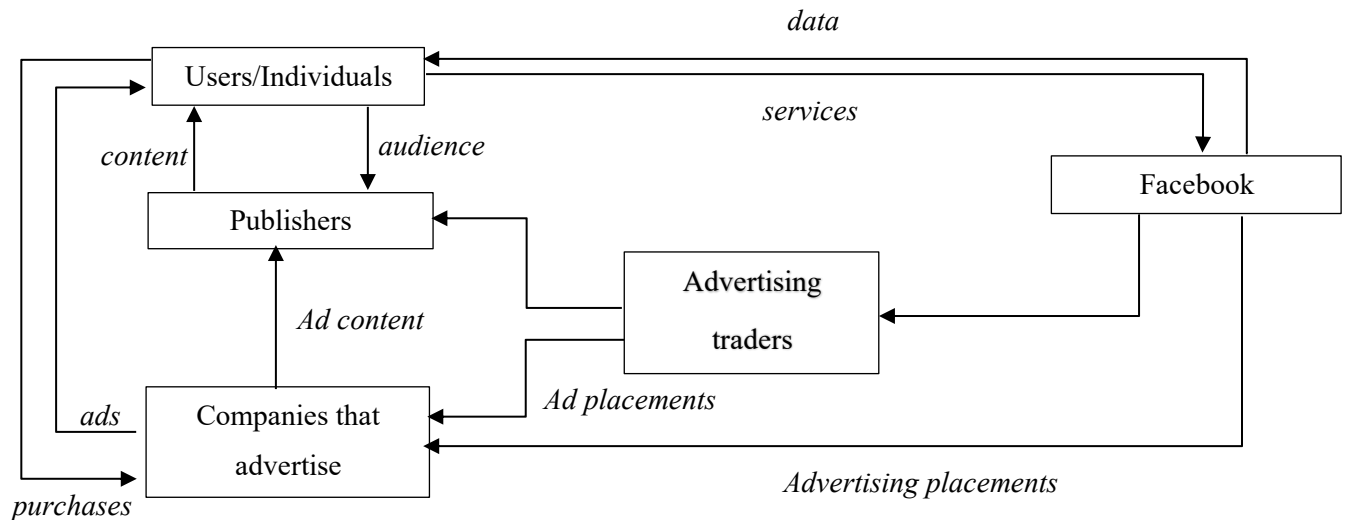


Figure 1 The monetizing system of Facebook (Fumagalli et al. 2018)

In the Figure 1 one can see how value is created in the Facebook platform. Facebook owns nowadays multiple other social media companies like Instagram, where this business model is also applied. Compared to other online platform business models like Uber's or Foodora's, Facebook establishes a model where labour isn't directly recognizable as physical or knowledge efforts. The process flows from Facebook selling user data and ad placements for advertisers or advertising traders, who then proceed to produce advertising content for publishers or directly to users. User's emotional reactions are turned into value in the process of many phases. (Fumagalli et al. 2018.)

2.2 Affordances as a structural element of social media platforms

The structures and design of an environment, digital or physical, has an impact on human behavior. The architecture of online spaces defines how users interact with each other and related to the platform. Many scholars have pointed out that the structures of digital platforms hold power to influence the norms or quality of communication (Papacharissi 2009; Wright & Street 2007) and that they also affect the probability of which the user is establishing democratic ideals (Freelon 2013). In these following

sections, we will discuss the structures of digital platforms, more precisely, social media platforms. (Bossetta 2018, 471.)

Tarleton Gillespie (2010, 384), the principal researcher at Microsoft, defines the term *platform* as a description of an online service of the content intermediary. The article discusses the concept of platforms using Youtube, which is a social media, as an example. According to Gillespie platforms need to be accommodating, in addition to users, advertisers, major media producers, and policymakers. Digital platforms operate on a specific business model, and not all digital platforms rely on content creation. Zutchi and Grilo (2019, 546) argue that the digital platform business model functions on the business-to-customer side and the business-to-business side creating value for both. They present examples of digital platforms, such as Booking.com and Airbnb.com, which both intend to connect service providers to their customers. Digital platforms have evolved in the last ten years remarkably and transformed into more complex systems like iOS or Android which provide open ecosystems for developers and service providers.

SMPs have been studied also in the context of technology and means. Ngai et al. (2015, 771) analyzed the term “social media” in two parts: the social component and the media component. They saw that the interactions performed by people refers to the social part of the term as the second part of “social media”, the media, consists of the technologies used for interaction. Social media applications (SMAs) are part of the technology that facilitates the actions carried out by the users. Wang, Pauleen and Zhang (2016, 6) describe SMAs as synchronous tools for creating and sharing content of various types and facilitating a numerous amount of concurrent communications. In this study, we are using the definition of social media by Bucher and Helmond (2017, 244) according to which *social media platforms* are digital intermediaries connecting different stakeholders, like end-users, developers, and advertisers, who each have their own agendas on a platform.

As in The SAGE the Handbook of Social media, we begin our analysis on social media *affordances* as they are the epitome of the other structures discussed in this thesis. Firstly, needs to be acknowledged that in this chapter 2.2, affordances are discussed as their own entity, although they extend to other structural elements discussed later in this thesis – like algorithms and content moderation. Affordances are a concept originally created by a psychologist James Gibson in 1977. Gibson's main acumen was that we don't perceive our environment as itself but observe it through its

affordances. (Bucher & Helmond 2017, 236.) At the time Gibson was referring to affordances as all possible actions with an object when considering the user's physical capabilities. The concept of affordances was further developed by Don Norman in 1988 to "*only actions which users consider possible*", which is the definition we use in this thesis. Affordances were also studied by Bill Gaver in 1991 and Rex Hartson 2001, who listed seven types of them:

- perceptible
- hidden
- false
- physical
- cognitive,
- sensory
- functional

In the first one, perceptible affordance, the object itself has characteristics that indicate possible actions for users. Hidden affordances, on the other hand, don't show clear action possibilities and the user must rely on their former experiences to navigate towards achievable actions - for example, a user hovers to a suspected button. False affordances are when an object has characteristics that suggest certain actions, which are not possible. (Interactiondesign.org 2020.) The fourth one, physical affordance, supports or facilitates the user physically to do something, whether as the cognitive affordance supports or facilitates the user to think or know something. A sensory affordance is described as a design feature that supports or facilitates the user in sensing the situation and functional affordance supports the user in accomplishing work. (Hartson 2003, 315.) Affordances don't have to be only visual, also sounds or feelable affordances are common - they are described to be information about action and interaction, not perception. (Bucher & Helmond 2017, 237).

In social media literature, SMPs are often described to have "affordances and constraints". These features are also connected to research regarding mobile technology as most of the social media use happens on mobile devices. (Schrock 2015, 1229.) Affordances are conceptualized into high-level or low-level affordances depending on the abstraction level. High-level affordances are defined on technologies, media, and platforms' existence. Low-level affordances mean more concrete solutions on social medias and surfaces, as well as features on a media, such as Twitter's 140-character

limitation. Low-level affordances modify the higher-level ones as the properties of more materialistic features give new possibilities for action and interaction for the users.

(Bucher & Helmond 2017, 240.)

These affordances listed in the beginning of the chapter are used to describe the user experience on a social media platform. But as discussed earlier social media platforms have two sides, consumer and business sides. Argyris and Monu (2015) defined in their research the social media affordances for businesses, and especially to help identify how corporations can use social media in external communications. The affordances found are presentability, monitorability, self-expression, reach, connectivity, engagement, recordability, and availability. These affordances support the communication activities that corporations execute. In the research, it is argued also that social media platforms are providing possibilities for all the listed affordances except the availability.

Availability by Argyris and Monu refers to the extent to which a posted content is provided on social media. On social media platforms, a consumer has access to posts published there, but it's unlike that the user would scroll through the content to reach some specific information. In other words, the content is not categorized for searching possibilities. The organizational affordances are important for the platforms business model, since the possibilities provided attract client organizations to use social media.

Affordances function as a base for user gratification and experience. The more elaborate affordances the platform environment provides, the bigger the user gratification and the user base, there probably is. Affordances can be interpreted in various ways by users which has led to a claim that in order to investigate the motivations behind the use of a social media platform, one should study the affordances of it. (Hayes, Carr & Wohn 2016, 173–174.) The section 4 will dissert further on the topic of user motivations of use in the social media context.

The reason user motivations are worth mentioning when discussing social media structures, is its strong linkage to affordances (interactiondesign.org 2020). In terms of user experience, the affordances aren't traditionally seen as experience nurturing, but Pucillo and Cascini (2014) have created a framework explaining the connection. Crucial to the framework is Hassenzahl's (2010, 22) model of user experience – according to the author there are three goals in user experience: motor-goals, do-goals, and be-goals. The motor-goals refer to automatized actions, like typing on a computer, do-goals are more conscious actions, such as sending a message, and be-goals are hedonic goals individuals try to fulfil to gain pleasure. Can be seen, that the motor-goals

answer the question *how*, do-goals answer the questions *what*, and be-goals the question *why*, when using the interface. These goals are, according to Pucillo and Cascini, the basis for understanding affordances and user experience designing. Sending a message requires affordances to inform the sender or typer that messaging is possible – such as the capability for typing. Pucillo, Becattini, and Cascini (2016) continue to discuss the relation of UX and affordances, and state that as experiences ultimately emerge in the user’s mind, affordances play an important role as a stairway to an experience.

Many researchers have identified various functional affordances on social media platforms, the results have varied based on the abstraction level and the goal of the research. Functional affordances are the most researched type of affordance in the field of social media studies. As previously stated, functional affordances are possibilities on the platform that helps a specific user or user group to achieve some goals. (Namisango, Kang & Beydoun 2021.) On the following Table 1, is showcased some research around the identification of social media affordances in the last six years. Most of the articles that performed user-centered analysis on affordances identified affordances from two categories: relational and functional. Relational affordances hold a presumption that SMPs afford certain possibilities to users because of their interaction with the environment (Willems 2020, 4). The platforms have changed drastically in the last six years, which makes the older research findings less accurate. In future research, the findings should to be evaluated in the light of current social media structures and incorporate the new features.

Table 1 Affordances in social media literature

Authors	Affordances
Fox & Moreland 2015	Functional affordances: Connectivity, visibility, social feedback, persistence and accessibility
Schrock 2015	Functional and relational affordances: Portability, availability, locatability and multimediality
Evans, Pearce, Vitak, and Treem 2017	Not specified: Anonymity, persistence and visibility

Leidner, Gonzalez & Koch 2018	Functional affordances: Networking, organizational visibility, information gathering and sharing, innovation
Willems 2020	Relational affordances: Infrastructure, home-based access and temporality

Affordances have been a common topic in recent studies regarding social media. Their nature and relation to different uses has been investigated as well as the conceptualization of the term affordance. Research findings in the Table 1 were chosen to this comparison for of their focus in user affordances rather than organizational perspectives.

To summarize the Table 1 even further, *persistence*, *availability/accessability*, *connectivity*, and *visibility* affordances appeared the most in the literature. Persistence is described as durability by Evans et al. (2017, 41). Linked with other terms, such as recordability and archivability, persistence refers to the durable quality of the connection SMPs provide. Availability is explained in the article by Schrock (2015, 1237) as the epitome of being multifaceted, direct connection and high frequency. Users strategically tune in and out of social interactions depending on the situation – for instance turn off post notifications from Instagram. This can be associated with accessibility as Willems (2020) emphasizes the importance of home-based access in participation to public conversations and communication. SMPs have transformed the spatial context of interacting with peers, organizations or audiences. Fox and Moreland (2015, 169) claim connectivity to be Facebook’s most notable affordance as it enables users to become aware of each other and the content of others. Leidner, Gonzalez, and Koch (2018) offer another perspective to connectivity which perceives the users as more strategic actors. They refer to connectivity as active networking. The last affordance, visibility is referenced in most of the articles. Evans et al. (2017) state that visibility is more than “being visible or seen” – that it extends to data and information visibility and presence. According to Fox and Moreland (2015) another key aspect in visibility is information sharing possibilities. Information has become accessible and visible for millions of users on SMPs.

Most SMPs function on Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that are open for developers to integrate their features into the applications. APIs are the interface between users and the server. (Medium.com 2019.) This method of building an online

environment defines how all the mentioned affordances are available or presented to the users or businesses. While Open APIs are providing new methods of participating and experiencing, Robert Bodle (2011, 320) argues that they also compromise user privacy, data security, autonomy, and contextual freedom. APIs are widely used for data mining. Bodle explains that especially third-parties, advertisers, for example, are interested in the valuable data that consumers produce by sharing, liking, and commenting on social media. APIs shape the affordances and give them basis to be built upon.

2.3 Algorithms as a structural element on social media platforms

According to one definition, in computer science, an algorithm is a distinct procedure for resolving computational problems (britannica.com 2020). Dourish (2016) reminds in his article that algorithms are often defined as “a sequence of operations”, but the sequence in question might not be laid out as a traditional stream of text lines in the program. Dourish explains that algorithms can also be distributed in a program. In this text, we will use the definition of an algorithm by Pedro Domingos (2015) that algorithm is a set of instructions on how to perform a specific task. On SMPs algorithms are used to organize and categorize content, often based on user’s former actions and interests (Forbes.com 2016).

The environment of computational systems that are operating SMPs has a different character compared to our offline world. Algorithmically structured environments are defying the permanent nature of affordances in new ways. (Bucher & Helmond 2017, 248.) Van Dijck and Poell (2013) compare algorithmic logic to scheduled content on mass media broadcasts - channels and magazines programmed their audience to be captivated by their content by broadcasting shows in a certain order. Before social media channels began to dominate the mediascape, this programmed content on mass media was a matter of people-knowledge and analyzing the audience. Nowadays, programming and creating a content flow means different things than in the mass media era. *The two-way traffic* between social media users and programmers is a process that has transformed the technological and social transmission of content.

Two-way traffic means, according to Dijck and Poell (2013), that programmers and social media employees convey the algorithms and users optimize them further with their behavior. Some users actively challenge the algorithm in order to transform the content they receive on SMPs. Min (2019, 2) argues that platform user’s ability to modify the algorithmic stream depends on their awareness level of the functioning

algorithm. This modifying was noted to be happening through liking specific pages and friending specific people on the platforms. Although common perception of algorithms as discriminating, mystical forces in front of which humans are powerless is, according to Min, mostly true. As a conclusion can be said that as what comes to the user's side, there are many possible reactions to the two-way traffic structure of SMPs.

What is quintessential in algorithms is what their relationship with data and society is (Doursih 2016, 3). We will discuss the algorithms of oppression through a feminist lens later in this thesis, but it's necessary to address the role of data and data science in algorithms beforehand. On SMPs, algorithms are driven by data, collected from users' behaviors. These algorithms present content in a personalized manner and allow advertisers to target content to users. A study conducted by Pew Research Center found that about half of the users on Facebook aren't comfortable with the way the platform categorizes them and almost 75% of them weren't even aware of the data that was gathered. (Hitlin & Rainie 2019, 2.) The findings around data and algorithmic structures raise issues about privacy and data ethics.

The utilization of big data services on social media is the underlying enabler of algorithmic structures. This datafication of media branch originates in 2007 when the first open-source software was developed enabling data processing across computers (Arsenault 2017, 9). In the article by Arsenault, it's addressed how social media companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube have been able to monetize user-generated content due to data collection. These data mining opportunities have made SMPs lucrative for third-party organizations, such as advertisers, which has evoked challenges in privacy policies. Social media companies have regulated the data that is accessible for third parties, but fail to be transparent and update on their regulations. (Law.yale.edu 2018.) Regulation will be addressed further in chapter 2.4.

Concern on data ethics is continuously emerging in public discussions on social media. One of those ethical issues is considering *context*. As social media platforms are mostly built on APIs, almost anyone can download, for instance, the whole of Twitter and its data. Large amounts of data are easy to access and the trend of data sourcing as a solution has enchanted many companies. Daniel Kaufman, an economist on the Revenue Watch Institute has named this data as zombie data, meaning data without real value or purpose (Gurin 2015, 71). Özkula (2019, 84–85) introduces three types of context that should be considered in ethical social media data research: data, cultural, and commercial context. To elaborate on the contexts, Özkula refers to data context as

the qualities data holds in terms of form, size, specificity, and its collection methods. The cultural context consists of geo-cultural norms, such as platform-dependent practices and grammar. Finally, the commercial context includes the platform's ownership and infrastructure.

Algorithms have been under discussion for the expectations set on them. In general, they have been claimed as a liberating, disruptive technology that will help society evolve to its next stage (Financialtimes.com 2020; Forbes.com 2020). But it has been stated that their liberating features only present themselves when considering the steps taken away from government centered, traditional policy making in society. Algorithms are predictive and pervasive in nature since user's past actions define the direction for future. This shows the conservative side of algorithm technology instead of the disruptiveness. On the contrary, they do offer the user a feeling of safety as the user tries to pass through the immense amount of content on SMPs. Algorithms provide easiness and pleasure which serves the consumeristic goals of companies using them. (Shepherd, Zefiro & Baade 2020.)

In addition to algorithms modifying the relationship between society, medium and individuals, the algorithms take part in the new configuration of social networking and collective action by creating or limiting possibilities of participation. They are strongly linked into the affordances discussed earlier as well as to content moderation which is the topic of next chapter. The linkage with affordances becomes visible when analyzing algorithms as socio-technological artifacts, that have been designed to create certain patterns in use. Algorithms for example foster participation by modifying the online environment to be more pleasurable for the individual user and creating possibilities. (Milan 2015, 1–3.) To clarify, affordances are the epitome of social media structures and in the structure hierarchy, algorithms are beneath them. The linkage with content moderation will be explained below in the chapter 2.4.

2.4 Content moderating structures of social media

The story of the birth of SMPs can be recalled as a chaotic summoning of ideas. The founders of these platforms wished to seize the social aspects of the internet but while the platforms grew their user base, the chaos seeped its way into the platforms itself. Tarleton Gillespie (2017, 254) emphasizes the dangers of platforms; pornographic content, violence, abuse, illegality, and hatefulness. To avoid the threats, social media

companies such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Tumbler, Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat all regulate the social activities and conversations they host.

The traditional legal obligations regarding speech are misfitting for these online environments as social media companies receive demands from policymakers, governments, private companies, and activists to curate the speech in a certain way. The role of legal regulation has shifted from governments to private companies in these online platform environments, which proposes a need for investigation on this governance that is practised *by* social media. Since social media companies have opposed to further regulatory control from governments, the concern that arises is, to what extent users are willing to give up their fundamental rights to gain access to these platform services. (DeNardis & Hackl 2015, 761.)

Themes that have dominated the platform governance literature, are the studying of new institutions in the field of internet surveillance as well as addressing infrastructures of the platforms. According to DeNardis and Hackl (2015) to elaborate on these main themes, one must examine how national legal institutions regulate social media and also, examine what happens at the crossing of moderation practiced by users versus the governance practiced by social media companies. Different governments have taken their stances on regulating social media – from denying all use to waiting for the private companies to take the matter in their own hands. One of the most famous conflicts between government regulation and a social media company is when Google decided to pull out of China after the local government requested Google to filter its search results (Gillespie 2017, 259). Ananny and Gillespie (2017) point out a challenge in controlling the platforms; as many of the social media companies are from the US, they enjoy their position in the free market system, and the legal obligations set on them often end up watery as the profit for markets overrides the responsibilities.

New global institutions that are in policymaking roles of online platforms are, for instance, Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), Regional Internet Registries, and World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (DeNardis & Hackl 2015, 761). In Finland, laws regarding actions taken in social media fall into other categories than SMP laws. Consumer protection laws and criminal laws apply to social media, for instance, in the context of marketing to consumers or provocative speech against a group of people (*unofficial translation*). (Finlex.fi 2020.)

The largest social media companies often provide a public document labeled *Community Standards* or *Community Guidelines*, which defines the prohibited and

permitted content on the platform. They are used for *content moderation* on these platforms. Guidelines vary depending on the social media but commonly, the forbidden contents are hate speech, provoking to violence, impersonation, and graphic content. Terms used in these guidelines are often broad and lack precision as they need to be adaptable globally – the acceptance of nudity, for instance, differs whether using a social media service in the United States or in the Middle East. Along with the public document, the companies have a non-public one that provides a detailed version of the community guidelines and the means to implement them. These company internal documents may change according to the content trends the users are posting, government regulations, and universal norms. (Myers West 2018, 4369–73.) Content moderation is the mechanism in which regulation is put to use. In this thesis moderation follows the definition of Grimmelmann (2015, 42) “*the governance mechanisms that structure participation in a community to facilitate cooperation and prevent abuse.*”

SMPs use different techniques for moderating content. Platforms use user-driven moderation which will be discussed later also in chapter 3,4, social media moderation companies, and artificial intelligence (Medium.com 2020). User driven moderation means moderation that is prompted by the user – such as reporting harmful comment. The moderation companies on the other hand are outsourced workforce, that scroll through the platforms and remove unwanted content according to the instructions of the SMP. AI moderation techniques vary depending on the data that needs to be classified. The main distinction between these methods is that one aims to match the analyzed content to previously rendered content and the other tries to classify the content to different categories, such as "hate speech". (Gorwa, Binns & Katzenbach 2020, 3.) These acts of moderation can occur proactively as keyword filtering or matching of hashes – unique strings of data that are unpacked from the content. In this case, the content is automatically blocked from the social media site and never published. Given the techniques above, social media companies are able to maintain the required speed for content moderation on the enormous volume of content published. (Liansó 2020.)

Twitter co-founder and CEO Jack Dorsey gave an interview in 2019, where he was asked about the number of employees working around content moderation. As an answer stated that “*We want to make sure that we're, number one, building algorithms instead of just hiring massive amounts of people because we need to make sure that this is scalable...*” (<https://ted2srt.org> 2019.) The need for large scale solutions against online harassment and trolling on major SMPs is increasing. The repercussions of social

media harms are extending over to societies as users tend to bond less in local communities and spend more time in spaces recommended by algorithms. As the response of Jack Dorsey indicates, social media companies are utilizing artificial intelligence in moderating SMPs. (Gillespie 2020, 1–2.) As already established in the chapter 2.3 the algorithms are prone to reflect the biases in society, which puts them in a questionable position as conversation monitors.

Content moderation is increasingly shaping our views on politics, society, and norms. Concerning public discussion outlets, De Zwart (2018, 284) discusses the distinction between traditional media – newspapers, and broadcasts – and social media platforms. One characteristic found is that traditional media is directly accountable for the content they publish when the social media companies are bound to respect the content the users post. Mazur and Patakyova (2019, 221) support this view of platforms being the outlet of political and societal conversations as well. They draw the need for accountability from examples, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal and rohinya crisis. In Cambridge Analytica scandal, the data of over 50 million users of Facebook was used by a company called Cambridge Analytica to build an algorithm for political advertising. The advertising was targeted to influence the voting behavior in many countries. Facebook was aware of the actions that compromised their users' privacy but didn't report them. (hs.fi 2018.) To further emphasize the political connection to social media platform conversation, de Zwart introduces a case where former President of United States Donald Trump and his Twitter account @realDonaldTrump blocked about 40 Twitter users who criticized his actions. This led to the blocked users being unable to participate in the conversation of president's political views or see what he posted about them. The Court ruled that this violated the First Amendment of USA's constitution. De Zwart also states that moderation systems lack transparency, which makes the users reliant on the visible affordances - flagging or reporting unwanted content or blocking certain people – with false or correct reasoning.

Myers West (2018) in her article examined user's interpretations on the social media content moderation practices. The conclusions were that many users found themselves confused and frustrated after a banned account or removed content. This indicated that platform content moderation systems were removing content but not educating the users how to avoid that being happening.

To summarize this chapter, one can say that content moderation by platforms is a complex system with societal and cultural impacts which need yet further clarification.

The act of moderation can be defined as a structural element for its nature to modify the interactions of different stakeholders on these platforms. (Gorwa 2019, 854.) Nooren, van Gorp, van Eijk and Fathaigh (2018) see that the platform governance will develop into more normative direction instead of relying on the current rule-based regulatory practices. But nowadays the content moderation and platform governance are formed by the following elements.

- User dependent moderation
- Employed fact-checkers or third parties
- Algorithmic content moderation
 - Matching content data with previous content data
 - Proactively classifying the content by using data hashes or keywords

This section has also highlighted the found need for transparency on the content moderation practices. Suzor, Myers West, Quodling, and York (2019) specify that the platforms should answer questions like: Which content violated the rules? How the content practice violation was identified? Who was the decision-maker responsible for the moderation actions? How were the content rules applied? The authors also emphasize that platforms should focus especially in clarifying the grey areas of prohibited content, as users are becoming speculative when facing uncertainty and unclear instructions.

3 Feminist critique on social media platform structures

3.1 Feminist lens through history

In the first chapter, we further outline the shape of the feminist lens used in this study. This thesis uses terms *lens* and *perspective* interchangeably. As we already established earlier, the feminist lens is formed upon the Socialist and African American feminism in order to recognize the role of race and racism and how it intertwines with patriarchy and false objectivity. To acquire a full understanding of the research around feminist theories, we must begin by stating that there isn't one, unified feminist theory. Neither is there an agreement about categorizing the theoretical contributions of feminist research. Nevertheless, there is a common interest between the theories in the characteristics of gender equality. As a reader, one doesn't have to be involved in politics or even convinced about the relevance of feminist theories in society. The increased discrimination and violence against women and gender minorities and growing economic bipolarity speak for themselves on how feminist action is required. (Brisolara, Seigart, SenGupta & Amariles 2015, 4.)

In marketing research, feminist theories have been linked with consumer psychology and behavior. According to Maclaran (2012, 462), marketing studies have historically derived perspectives on gender and power relations from feminist approaches. However, Maclaran also addresses how marketing research and feminist theories have always struggled with a debate whether using feminism in marketing is exploitation or empowerment. Hearn and Hein (2020) also agree on the existing differences in philosophy but see that the marketing field could gain from feminist theories, especially in consumer research. They propose that marketing research could take into consideration the construction of power and knowledge in marketing as well as the actions in the marketing field that enforce gender inequalities. In contrast, Hearn and Hein highlight the complexity of de-centring men from marketing in relation to the strong patriarchal systems in societies.

The common perception is that the history of feminist literature criticism began in the 1960s as the second wave of feminism emerged. Although it has to be recognized that women did engage with literature before the second wave of feminism, they just had limited possibilities to author texts. The medieval and 18th-century literature acknowledged the relationship between gender and textuality, and this is considered

critical in creating the base for feminist literature. In this study, we will focus on feminist literature origin from the 20th century as it focuses more on the subject of feminism rather than femininity or the concept of womanhood. (Plain & Sellers 2007, 6.)

In a book by Plain and Sellers (2007) they discuss the emerging of the second feminist wave and the literature associated with the movement. They found that the "totalizing" studies were a significant influence on second-wave feminism. Totalizing studies focused on the oppression of women but mainly through men. The literature had only a few references to female authors for which Plain and Sellers criticize the literature - for using a "he" normative. Studies centered around what actions men did to support the systematic oppression of women. Later in the 1970s, the perspective gained diversity, and the stereotypes of women were studied not only via male-gaze but what experiences and feelings women had about their space in society.

Modern-day feminism in literature is called fourth-wave feminism or postfeminism. In 2013 Kira Cochrane wrote an article on TheGuardian.com that welcomed fourth-wave feminism and announced that the new breakthrough of feminist activism had happened. According to some, postfeminism is fitting together with the third-wave objectives; disrupting the white, heteronormative and middle-class viewpoint (Rivers 2017, 10). What Cochrane finds distinctive about fourth-wave is the technologies used and the reactions received. Munro (2013, 23) has similar notions on the fourth-wave feminism as Cochrane but continues to elaborate the idea of technologies to internet platforms as they serve as powerful tools for 18- to 29-year-old women to unite. Although fourth-wave attempts to cover the issues of feminism being a mostly white-middle-class movement, intersectionality remains as a concern. In this text, we will use the principles of data feminism presented by D'Ignazio and Klein (2019): examine power and embrace pluralism.

When addressing oppression, also privilege must be discussed. According to Black and Stone (2005, 243) privilege is defined as advantages, entitlements, and dominance of a certain group or culture that are received solely as a birthright. Often, the lack of membership in the privileged groups is seen as laziness or as a result of no effort, but privilege must be dismissed from personal merits and intelligence. Black and Stone emphasize how intersectionality must be included in the analysis of privilege; minorities inside minorities need recognition in order for the analysis to be fully inclusive.

Introducing the concept of Matrix of domination, Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 223) discusses how the complex power relations in our society are composed and experienced. She emphasizes how, the previously discussed, privilege is always relational to others. In the matrix of domination are four levels on which power can be categorized and further descriptions of the power in societal context. These are listed in the Table 2 below.

Table 2 Matrix of Domination (Hill Collins 1990; Klein & D'Ignazio 2019)

Structural level of power	Organizations, institutions, laws and policies
Disciplinary level of power	Management and administration of oppression, puts the laws and policies into execution
Hegemonic level of power	Culture and ideas of power
Interpersonal level of power	Individual's experience of power, Consciousness of power

To further explain the Table 2, the matrix of domination draws the general discussion on intersectional feminism from a single-axis approach that focuses usually on the interpersonal level to a broader set of domains (Gouws 2017, 23). The first level of power, structural domain, consists of organizations, institutions, laws, and policies such as governments. A simplifying example given by D'Ignazio and Klein (2019, 25) is the voting right set for male citizens in the US in 1868 which purely discriminated women. The disciplinary level of power means management and administration of oppression. An example of such could be gendered profiling on SMPs, racial profiling on criminals or other situation of categorizing people in a societal context. Hegemonic level of power involves the cultural views of power – who has it and who is entitled to use it. Examples of this in society are media dismissing racism or the ideology of colourblindness. The final level of power is the interpersonal level which can be explained as individual's experience of power and outlets of everyday racism.

To summarize, the feminist perspective in this study means that the following concerns are taken into account when analyzing the social media structures and study results.

- The different levels of power (Table 2) influence the social media platforms each in their own level and create bias.
- Data products made by humans cannot be value-free nor objective since humans are not and the data is replicating a society that is biased.
- Themes of patriarchy, racism and accessibility are especially considered in this thesis.

These views form the feminist perspective in this thesis. In the next sections, the perspective is applied when analyzing the structures that were introduced in the previous chapter 2.

3.2 Affordances through a feminist lens

We begin our analysis by examining the social media affordances. One concept, that is a common categorizing method in our society but also has potential to increase inequality, is gender. Gender is one of the oldest and most established categorizations in our society. Nowadays, we can see gender displayed in cultural spaces and occasions, and social media spaces are no different from that. Before proceeding to analyze gender further, it's crucial to establish the social structures around gender. While gender is constructed in the society, it's not based on equality but on imbalances of power. (Rode 2011, 396.) Ortner (1974) examined the cultural aspects of gender and claims that femininity is associated in the western culture to nature and body and masculinity with culture and the mind. This extended in Ortner's analysis into the argument that femininity is seen as an extension of masculinity. However, as Rode (2011) concludes, the gender is a complex construct and needs to be further studied in our modern environments.

The decision of computer programmers to bring gender into the platforms lays a set of presumptions on gender expression. (Bivens & Haimson 2016.) Gender categorizing happens on many levels of social media: affordances, algorithms and content moderation. They all are structures that participate in creating a gendered environment for users. In addition to gender binary structures, norms and roles affect the appearance of gender. As gender expression is related to the egalitarianism of the geological location from which a person is using the social media platform, in this text, we will assume the location to be in the western part of the world (i.e. Finland, Sweden, USA).

First, we will discuss the gender and its relation to social media structures through a set of theories and second, find a link to the structural elements of affordances that are identified in this thesis. The first theory discussed is *the objectification theory*. This theory is used to explain the gender conforming behaviours on social media, especially on women. According to the theory women are conditioned to evaluate themselves on the outsider's perspective and base their worth on the standards dominating the society, like having a certain appearance. This means that as women are functioning in an objectifying media environment, they begin to internalize the perspective of valuing themselves based on desirability and appeal. (Fox & Vendemia 2016, 594.) In some cases, this applies to other genders as well. Breslow et al. (2020) conducted a research on sexual minority men (SMM) and found that social media applications cause similar psychological effects on SMM users too.

The objectification theory first was introduced by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) to provide insight on women's experiences living in a culture that objectifies the female body. According to the theory, objectification happens when a woman's body or body parts are separated from the subject and seen as an object existing for others to use or gain pleasure from. Fredrickson and Roberts found that this phenomenon occurred in the visuals of the American media: women's bodies were treated as objects more often than men's bodies and women of colour were often depicted with racial stereotypes. According to researchers this objectification of a person has negative psychological impacts such as body shame, anxiety and stress (Moradi & Huang 2008; Mercurio & Landry 2008.)

The study of Fredrickson and Roberts is over 20 years old, but it can be applied to online environments as mentioned earlier. Online environments are available for users at all times, and often in frequent use throughout the day. This can elevate the risk of online objectification and the nature of it might be even more haunting when compared to offline objectification. (Breslow et al. 2020, 26.) The researchers have found that social media accelerates the phenomena by exposing users for easy comparing metrics, such as likes and comments. Social feedback is important for human beings and it has been baked into the affordances of social media which makes it a structural element on these platforms. These affordances on SMPs are the possibilities to *impressions* (likes, reactions, comments, shares) and *editable content*. It's possible for users to actively choose the image or information they share to others. This according to researchers, can

cause the feeling of being monitored by other users and lead to excessive self-awareness. (Fox & Vendemia 2016, 594.)

Ahmed (2017) explored the user experiences of transgender (trans) people in online spaces and acknowledged that transgendered people used social media platforms when exploring their gender and identity. We've discussed in this chapter how gender is situated in the affordance structures of social media and could draw conclusion that gender is a remarkable factor in the relation between the person and the affordances. The discrimination against trans people is rooted in the society: trans legislation in Finland is lagging behind other progressive countries, binary categorization is being strong in our cultural sphere, and prejudice against trans people is existing in different communities. Rode (2011, 399) proposes a new approach to designing new technologies and interfaces: *Gender Sensitive Design*. This approach would embrace and practice "technical femininity" and other forms of flexible gender definitions. Although some articles were found about the situation of gender in the social media setting, a lot is yet to uncover.

The next theory we take under examination is the theory of *context collapse* and its relation to gender. Social media platforms enable a phenomenon called context collapse which can be described as a temporary flattening or vanishment of the boundaries that separate individual's audiences in the offline world (Marwick & boyd 2011, 9). A concrete example of context collapse could be this: An individual is a passionate LGBTQ+ rights activist at local events and attends demonstrations actively, but their workplace doesn't know about their activism. To hold these audiences separately, in different contexts, has become difficult in SMP settings which has enabled or caused a context collapse for many users.

The phenomenon has been investigated also in relation to gender and gender performance by a few scholars. (McConnell et al. 2018; Colliander et al. 2017; Draper & McDonnell 2018.) Alsaggaf (2019) examined the context collapse among Saudi women on social media. The researcher noticed how the participants controlled and monitored their actions as well as the impression they give off on Facebook. Women used "strategically defensive" methods to avoid judgement of these collapsed audiences. High self-awareness and -regulation were detected features in their social media use – which were enabled by Facebook's affordances.

The gender-based violence that women and marginalized groups face on online spaces can be in the form of intimidation with physical violence, shaming, or

discrediting the creator (Sobieraj 2018, 1706). Cuen and Evers (2016) investigated tweets regarding a news anchor Megyn Kelly after the former USA president Donald Trump had refused to attend an election debate hosted by her. The results of found slurs from 80 000 tweets were following: *bitch* (n=423), *bimbo* (n=404), *blonde* (n=128), *whore* (n=88), *cheap* (n=66), and other slurs (n=172). The words used for attacking a professional journalist centered around her body or appearance rather than proficiency. This, according to Sobieraj is common in gender-based violence against women. In the next chapters, this thesis presents the structures for gender-based discrimination on social media focusing first on the algorithms and then to the content moderation practices.

3.3 Algorithms through a feminist lens

There's a diversity crisis regarding gender and race in the area of AI. This is stated in the study conducted by West, Whittaker, and Crawford (2019) in the AI NOW Institute. Only 18% of AI Authors in the leading conferences of the sector are women. In major social media companies like Facebook and Google under 15% of the AI research employees are women. The study continues to mark how the data and technology industry are also prone to give privilege to white women over minorities and other races. D'Ignazio and Klein (2019) urge professionals to examine how the privilege is baked into our data products - such as social media platforms.

The gender and racial issues in data science are complex and need further research to be generalized, but the main factors of these challenges on datafication and algorithmic platforms are easily identified. Data reliable platforms are modeled by a small group of people and then scaled to fit the audiences. When data is managed by a group of people mainly from the dominant groups, results are inherently excluding the perspectives of others. This is usually unintentional and can be detected from the ignorance of being in an unquestioned position of power. Some describe this error as the *privilege hazard*. (D'Ignazio & Klein 2019, 28.)

Marketers benefit from the data sourced from social media platforms. Demographic data has been pivotal for creating market segments and now, via SMPs marketers can combine behavioral data with demographic information. As discussed earlier in chapter 2.4 this monetizing of user data is the business model of the most used international social media companies. This practice of online marketing can be seen as a circular system where the algorithms propose advertising and content based on the user's

previous actions and then revise the content after the user's reaction. What is problematic in the system, is that the algorithm changes or updates itself only if the user's actions are unprofitable or deemed unsuccessful by marketers. This algorithmically organized content may also shape how we perceive ourselves or others. Identity-building through "marketing logic of consumption" is stripping the power from individuals. (Bivens & Haimson 2016, 2–5.)

In social media platforms, the first data collected is the information needed for signing-up. This data collection is non-negotiable and often difficult to change afterward. Many users struggle to select between the binary category; male and female. In 2014 Facebook announced that it's changing the gender category system adding 50 terms such as genderfluid or transsexual. This was hailed by activists and thanked by people of gender minorities. (theguardian.com 2014.) However, the binary on SMPs, such as Facebook, continues to thrive through other data collection methods: indirect labeling based on data gathered from strategic partners or assumption-based labeling utilizing algorithmic data. Advertisers, the paying customers of Facebook, require this binary data which ensures its firm status in our digital environments. (Bivens & Haimson 2016, 7.) Buolamwini & Gebru (2018) investigated three different facial recognition tools with AI technology in terms of gender and race. They found out that all three tools in question recognized white men with the most accuracy as with black women the facial classifiers performed poorest. Thus, can be claimed that algorithms function according to the bias found also from our society.

Nakamura (2015, 106–108) points out the unpaid labour of women, especially black women, without which social media platforms would be even more discriminating as they are now. In addition to the workforce of mainly women of colour in East Asia employed to assemble electronic devices and chips, women often carry the burden of proof to dismantle and call out racism and misogyny in environments regarding social media companies. Neff (2012, 125) studied the digital labour in Silicon Alley start-ups and argues that the employees were expected to do cheap or free labour such as giving speeches at events. Often the employees first accepted the job due to a personal interest in the matter, but the unpaid work was unevenly divided to people with the ability or capacity to put personal effort into the work. Like the venture labourers in Silicon Alley, women of colour who post, tweet, comment, report, and share content in social media in order to respond to discrimination, perform unpaid labour. Due to this labour SMPs are safer to use and attract users to form groups, interact, and communicate in safe spaces.

D'Ignazio and Klein (2019) explain the problematic features of free digital labour. They state that in capitalistic societies time is often money, and we might ask whose time is spent and whose money is being saved. In this case, it's members of minorities who spend their time building a safer SMPs environment which saves the money of platform administrators.

Recent research around social media platforms has focused on the concept of power and especially on the encoded power on these networking applications. Rettberg (2020, 2) calls this phenomenon as *environmental power* which differs from disciplinary power. Environmental power modifies the surroundings of individuals to encourage a certain type of behaviour rather than rules the individuals directly. The concept of environmental power was first introduced by Michael Foucault in 1979 (ks. Foucault 2008). Rettberg conducted a study on a fitness social media app Strava and became aware, how data shown to the individual users is always situated and might blur the impression of data transparency.

Situated data can be considered as a building block of the environmental power. A feminist scholar, Donna Haraway (1988) was the first to present a theory of situated knowledge which criticizes the data visualization for a “God trick”. Haraway saw that knowledge or data is usually treated as if it would be a completely neutral depiction of reality, when in fact, the data usually has been gathered and analyzed from some selected perspective. Rettberg (2020, 8–9) gives an example of situated data by showcasing a world map in which all the running paths recorded in the fitness app Strava for six months are displayed as lighted routes. Instead of giving a realistic image of the world, the map shows only data from a selected user base, on a selected time frame, dimming the contexts of use and reducing other attributes on the map. Rettberg claims that many of the users aren't aware of the extent of the data exploitation they face since the situated data appears to benefit the user more than the third parties. Most of the data is processed by artificial intelligence machines. In the case of Rettberg's study the data of the running routes can be processed to calculate recommendations for moving from place A to B. This is an example of environmental power – the algorithms using trajectory data from a social media application to recommend, for instance, driving routes.

Creating a map of running paths around the world, as in the previous example, requires a vast amount of data. Social media platforms enable this collection of data on massive volumes which is necessary for implementing the environmental power.

Different data set types can be called “big data” and “little data” depending on the size of the data set. Commonly, “big data” is associated with quantitative research and is distinguished by its volume and relationality. (Luka & Millette 2018.) In the article by Mulder, Ferguson, Groenewegen, Boersma and Wolbers (2016), the researchers studied the process of creating “big data” with crowdsourcing methods in a humanitarian crisis environment. They discussed how some of the critical information that emerged in the crisis was overruled by the volume of other data. The already amplified voices of the crisis were made even more noticeable as the marginalized groups were left underrepresented in the data sets leaving out the complexity of reality. Markham (2013) on the other hand examined the concept of data framing which relates to the issue of big data simplicity. According to the article, big data might lure us to focus on one perspective or story and not see what is outside the given data frame.

3.4 Content moderation through a feminist lens

Social media platforms provide an important site for self-expression and social collectivity, but users have only little influence on platform governance. Platforms offer different methods for expressions and practice different tactics to foster the conversation and content in their environments. Although, in many cases, content moderation is justifiable but in some, the moderation causes consequences to users who already are in the margins of society. According to research, the act of content moderation is often characterized as silencing users’ voices or restraining their freedom of expression. (Myers West 2018, 4367.)

Before further addressing the controversies in control and moderation on social media, equivalent structures must be recognized in our society. *Social control theory* has been utilized in explaining violence against women in the offline-world. Hill and Johnson (2020, 1681–1685) studied the theory further and suggested that it could be applied to online environments as well. They define social control as norms, systems, and institutions that ensure the hegemony of dominant cultural models by punishing contradicting behaviors. Janowitz (1975, 84) specifies that social control refers to the capacity with which a society can control itself without coercing. Hill and Johnson claim that there are multiple factors influencing women's behavior, one being fear of sexual assault. According to the study they conducted, males were less likely to engage in social control behaviors, meaning that females police their behavior more on internet environments. The limitation of the study was a binary measure of gender. Sobieraj

(2018) also supported this view by discussing women's visibility in online environments. According to Sobieraj, online environments do offer spaces of freedom to marginalized groups and women, but as the digital services have matured the power has accumulated to mainly privileged groups.

Social media platforms are using artificial intelligence (AI) as a solution to moderate the enormous amount of content on their sites as discussed in chapter 2.4. Gillespie (2020, 3) proposes that in the case of social media moderation, automatization cannot be labeled directly as a positive development. The article presents arguments to support this view. Firstly, punishing an individual for violating guidelines is a process in which communities and societies determine and assess the shared values. Furthermore, a comprehensive value system that should be implemented, doesn't exist. Secondly, when AI is responsible for the decisions that determine good content and prohibited content, we as a society, miss the opportunity to ask the profound, ethical questions regarding societal issues behind prohibited content. Thirdly, Gillespie raises a question about whether platforms are already too large. If SMPs are constantly failing to moderate their environments at the current scale, the mentality of "growth at all cost" should be taken into consideration. Having said that, we must remember whose goals are prioritized and whose are not. Facebook has a penetration percent of 15,9 in Africa when the percent in North America is 68,5 (Internetworldstats.com 2020). If platforms "should not grow anymore" it's the underprivileged people and parts of the world that are left out.

Community guidelines were briefly discussed in chapter 2.3 as to what their general role in platform regulation is. However, Gerrard and Thornham (2020, 1276) argue that community guidelines are inadequate to represent the dynamic features of social media platforms. Some rules defined in community guidelines documents are more stable than others; terrorism and crimes have a different significance compared to toxic communication such as supporting eating disorders or sexualizing bodies. Community guidelines are a central element of platform governance, and the platform structures, as they consciously define the values implemented into the platform. In 2018 Tumblr announced in their community guidelines to ban all adult content, including "female-presenting nipples". This stance indicated a valued perspective and that the platform categorized bodies into genders and acceptable or unacceptable. These actions taken by the platform were meant to prevent the pornographic contents on the site, but as Gerrard and Thornham propose, these content guidelines need to be evaluated against the underlying politics where female and male bodies are treated differently.

Another example of unnecessary censoring is the case of Celeste Barber. Instagram influencer Celeste Barber noticed that Instagram was practicing biased content moderation when she posted a photo mimicking a supermodel. Her photo was a part of her content series where she copies models and other celebrities recreating their photos. After posting she received multiple messages that her followers were unable to reshare the picture and a message that the post "goes against our community guidelines on nudity or sexual activity," appeared on the screen. The original post shared by the supermodel didn't experience the same problem. Instagram later addressed the issue and promised to fix their bias, but as this isn't the first time the platform is called out on body-shaming, the future stays unsure. (TheGuardian.com 2020.)

4 User experience on social media platforms

4.1 Elements of user experience on online spaces

The concept of experience has been studied in various marketing contexts: consumer, product, service, and brand experiences in offline or online environments have been under scrutiny. Schmitt and Zarantonello (2013, 29) see that the consumer experience is the most general term in the listing and that it has dominated the managerial papers in the context of marketing-related or commercial experiences. Consumer experience literature focuses on the consumer and their senses, activities, and perceives of, for example, marketing activities. Hence, the theory can be extended to customer experience analysis for companies to evaluate their tools and techniques in experience creation. Experience as a concept has been defined by many scholars over the course of 60 years. One of the first definitions was introduced by Maslow (1964) from a sociological and psychological perspectives. According to the definition peak-experience is *perceiving the reality of being that is momentary and ends in a positive effect*. Another definition was presented by Solomon and Corbit (1974) when they recognized a pattern in hedonic experiences:

1. A peak of stimulus
2. A hedonic or affective adaptation while the stimulus continues
3. A level of steadiness while stimulus continues
4. An after-reaction which ends the stimulus
5. A state where the experience starts fading and finally disappearing

This listing forms a base for the moment of experience. Nurkka, Kujala and Kempainen (2009, 450) continue to explain the term *user experience (UX)* as following: *the experience the individual gets when they interact with a product in some specific condition*. They also clarify the participants of this moment which are the user, the product and the surroundings or context of the event. The aspects that influence this moment are the user's values, emotions and physical attributes. As from the product's side such as aesthetics, usefulness, and form also impact the experience. Finally, the context of use plays a role in defining the cultural and social aspects.

To the analysis of what UX actually is, Hassenzhal and Tractinsky (2011, 95) provide three perspectives: the experiential, the emotion and affect, and one that views

UX beyond the instrumental. The next Figure 2 showcases the key elements from these perspectives and as one can tell, UX situates in the middle of these three perspectives capturing some elements of each one of them.

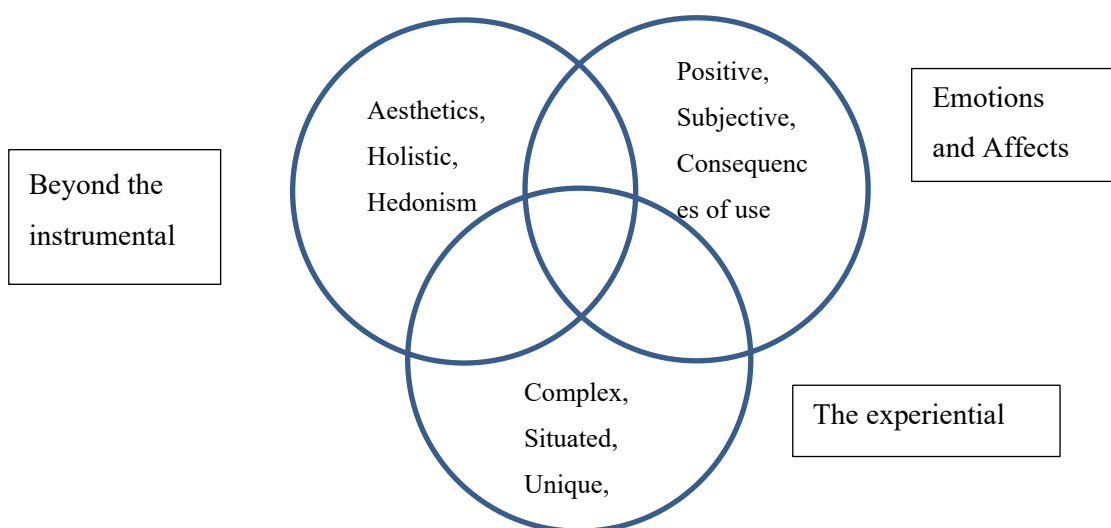


Figure 2 UX perspectives (Hassenzhal & Tractinsky 2011, 95)

The first perspective in Figure 2 is the “beyond the instrumental” which emphasizes the importance of aesthetics along with usability. The non-essential features such as hedonic qualities on interfaces are important for user experience as they stimulate, and foster user’s personal growth. The second, “emotions and affect”, views that affect is a mediator in creating the experience in technology use and emotions are the consequences of the use. Commonly, this perspective focuses on positive emotions and affects. Third, “the experiential” perspective that centers around temporality and situatedness. Here is also assumed that UX consists of separate elements, such as user’s expectations or goals, and from these elements the experience formulates itself. In this thesis the essence of UX is seen similar with Hassenzhal and Tractinsky: as an experience that forms while using technology that recognizes use as a subjective, complex and holistic event.

User experience can be examined from a psychological perspective. Can be stated that a positive user experience improves satisfaction towards the user interface. Krishen, Berezan, and Raab (2019) studied the positive user experience on social networking sites and concluded that to achieve this positive outcome, a user must find an emotional connection, interactivity with peers, and a sense of belonging. The findings are supported also by research conducted by Berezan, Krishen, Agarwal, and Kachrooc (2018). According to their article, the virtual user experience is also dependable on the

generation. Relatedness and a sense of belonging are important especially to the younger generations as when older generations seek the social media platform to reflect themselves in order to be satisfied. Both of the articles highlight the importance of interaction, which is at the core of platform existence, or at least the companies claim it to be.

This literature review has highlighted many of the dark sides of using social media. To become such dominating actors as SMPs have become, users undoubtedly gain also good aspects when engaging with the platforms. One of the identified perks of using social media is increased *social capital*. (Fox & Moreland 2015, 169.) The term “social capital” has first emerged in a scientific setting in 1916. According to Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2010, 873), it encases the benefits users receive from social interactions and relationships, such as emotional support, access to experience-based information, and exposure to diversity. Häuberer (2011, 38) similarly links social capital to social relationships but continues to add reputation and status credit to the concept. Firm relationships build trust among peers and thus, may provide status credit. The firm relationships also are exchangeable to material or symbolic value which forms a safety net around an individual in a social construct.

The concept of social capital has then been applied to online contexts as well. Ellison et al (2010, 873) argue that social capital is rooted in the structures of social systems, and since SMPs have the ability to reshape the social systems, SMPs can have implications on social capital. Aksar, Danaee, Maqsood, and Firdaus (2020) view that after the digital change individuals could participate in easy-entry online communities, the term social capital has become even more crucial. In a social media setting this subject has been investigated focusing on social media activities, and only few studies have been made regarding emotional or motivational experience on the platforms (Aksar et al. 2020, 992). However, Fox and Moreland (2015, 169) emphasize that the positive impact of users finding their peer groups, especially among the members of racial, sexual, or gender minorities, is substantial. Aksar et al. analyzed the research on gender differences in gaining social capital on SMPs and concluded that women participate in bonding on social media sites more actively than men but experience a lower level of conversion to social capital.

4.2 User experience designing and affordances

User experience (UX) is often associated with the term user experience designing. User experience designing regarding online environments means ensuring that all the user's possible actions on the interface, app or website, are thought through and controlled. This form of designing guides the users on social media platforms and creates the dialogue between the user and platform affordances. Social media companies are constantly developing their platforms to match users' expectations on the user experience. The way these platforms are arranged and constructed from different elements is part of the system to maximize the effects, whether that means a "purchase" or a "follow". (Garret 2002, 21.) In this section, the user experience and design of it are addressed in social media platform context. Finally, the aim is to draw their relation to the structures identified in this thesis.

From the concept to concrete solutions, the user experience design can be divided into different layers (Shahzad 2011, 1078). Garret (2002, 1079) introduced a model of the five elements of UX design that form a base for the interface. They are stacked on top of each other from conceptual elements to more concrete ones. In Figure 3 the elements are visualized into a layered form presenting the key concepts of each layer.

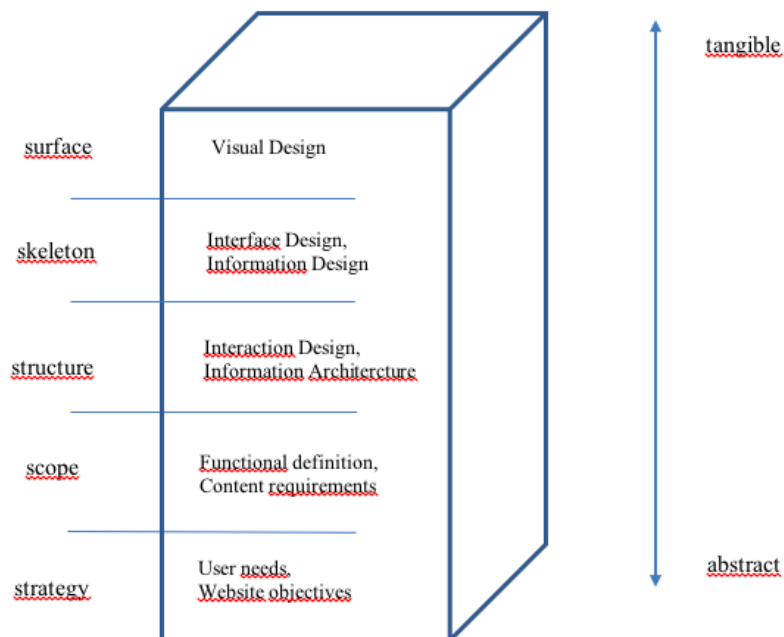


Figure 3 Five elements of user experience design (Garrett 2002, 1079)

The layered Figure 3 is explained by Garret term by term. The strategy on the bottom layer refers to the other terms on the same level: identifying user needs must be combined with the site objectives. Site objectives guide the business goal set for creating the interface. On the next level, defining the scope means deciding on the functionalities and content requirements of the site or application. These functionalities are then placed into a skeleton in the structure phase – here it's also necessary to define the technology-related issues. Finally, in the skeleton phase, it is designed how elements like buttons or headlines are placed on the interface and ultimately visualized in the surface phase. Shahzad (2011, 1080) has also identified ontologies for these phases starting from the Scope phase. These are from bottom to the top: vocabulary, domain ontology, user interface ontology, and graphics ontology.

4.3 Motivations for social media use

In this thesis, the controversies of social media platforms have been highlighted purposely. But social medias like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat gain popularity and new users, constantly declaring their place in the everyday life of many people. User's tune back in on an hour-basis daily with these platforms, seeking different forms of gratification. The addictive nature of social media platforms is also one creating the issue of a possibility to power abuse since users are not able to control their use. Uses and gratification theory is one of the theories to explain the motivations of individuals using media content and the relationship with the recipient needs and active media use. In this theory, the audience's capabilities as active participators are emphasized rather than dismissed, alike in older theories. (Tanta, Mihovilović & Sabljć 2014, 86.)

The origins of this theory are in 1973, as it was introduced by Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch. Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) aimed to explain people's mass media consumption and use patterns. Rubin and Perse (1987) elaborated the theory that motives and expectations guide individuals in media use. Nowadays, the UGT is suitable for examining audiences' consumption of social media. Scholars have studied the social media via UGT for example to gain insight on engagement with brands, recommendation systems, advertisement sharing mechanisms, and its implications to social capital (Lim & Kumar 2019; Kim 2014; Plume & Slade 2018; Phua, Jin & Kim 2017).

How users behave differently on social media can be explained by diversity in user personalities and conditions or individual's needs and expectations. When examining the

user gratification approach, one must take into consideration the interaction of needs, expectations, and available media selection. In a need-based use there might not be any correlation between the use of the platform and the appreciation towards the platform. (Leiner, Kobilkr, Rueß & Brosius 2017, 194-195.)

Uses and gratification is strongly connected to user engagement. The definition of user engagement according to McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2016, 200) is *a level of user experience with online technologies that facilitate users to communicate, create, and share content with other users and groups in their social networks*. Zheng, Cheung, Lee, and Liang (2015, 92) claim that some researchers have used engagement as a synonym for involvement, activation, and loyalty, to name a few. Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory explains the engagement on SMPs. In the following Table 3, is presented literature findings of social media platform motivations for use.

Table 3 Research findings on motivations for social media use

Research	Social media platform	Motivations for use
Whiting & Williams (2013)	Not specified	Social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance about others
Basak & Calisir (2015)	Facebook	Satisfaction: status seeking and entertainment
Williamson et al. (2017)	Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram	Identity clarification, relational development, social control, information storage and entertainment functions

Rodgers, Mclean & Gordon et al. (2020)	Facebook	Connection, popularity, appearance, and values and interests
Qin (2020)	Facebook	Information-seeking and self-identity

Limitations regarding the Table 3 are that demographic features have not been taken into account when comparing the motivations for social media use. For simplification, the Table 3 disregards the quality of the use. In light of Table 3, self-identity and status-seeking are strong motivations behind social media use. They are the qualities that are mentioned most, at least in some form, in the articles. Status-seeking is defined by Basak and Kalisir (2015, 184) as the level to which sharing data and content through social media is seen to be impactful in improving social status in one's social community. Popularity, appearance, and relational development are qualities that can be connected to status-seeking. Values, identity clarification and expression of opinion are, then again, connected to self-identity. McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2016, 204) compared theories from 2009-2013 and from those theories, they found that social interaction was perceived as the strongest motivation for social media use. In ten years, the shift has happened in motivations for using social media from connection within the physical community, to a broader selection of interactions.

The motivations for use in the Table 3 are profound emotions for psychological satisfaction. According to the Self-Determination Theory (STD) motivation can be sectioned into autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation. The distinction between the types is that autonomous motivation is composed of internal and external motivations that create a feeling of volition. Controlled motivation, on the other side, consists of external motivations where reward and punishment act as behavior stimulus and where actions are caused by internalized regulation, like avoidance of shame. (Deci & Ryan 2008, 182.) After analyzing the theories, can be said that the social media companies motivate people to use their platforms by fulfilling psychological needs. In the chapter 4.1 the elements of user experience in the online spaces are further addressed.

In most cases, the motivations for use have been investigated as a homogenous cluster of users, ignoring potential differences in user groups. Although, by recognizing how gender affects the motivations for use, the platforms could leverage the information for creating their interface more relevant for users. (Krasnova et al. 2017.) This proposes a clear research gap which this study is intending to fill – by collecting gender specific data, the behavioral sciences will receive more specific data on motivations for use.

4.4 Theoretical framework

After gathering previous theory about user motivations and gratifications regarding social media use, the new information must be aligned with other literature review findings. Creating the theoretical framework of the findings is summarizing the literature review and building a base for the empirical research. In this study the framework consists of three factors which reflect the research questions set in the beginning. Here, the chosen method is to display the factors in a figure that showcases the key themes from each three factors. In the following Figure 4 the research key factors and themes are presented in relation to each other.

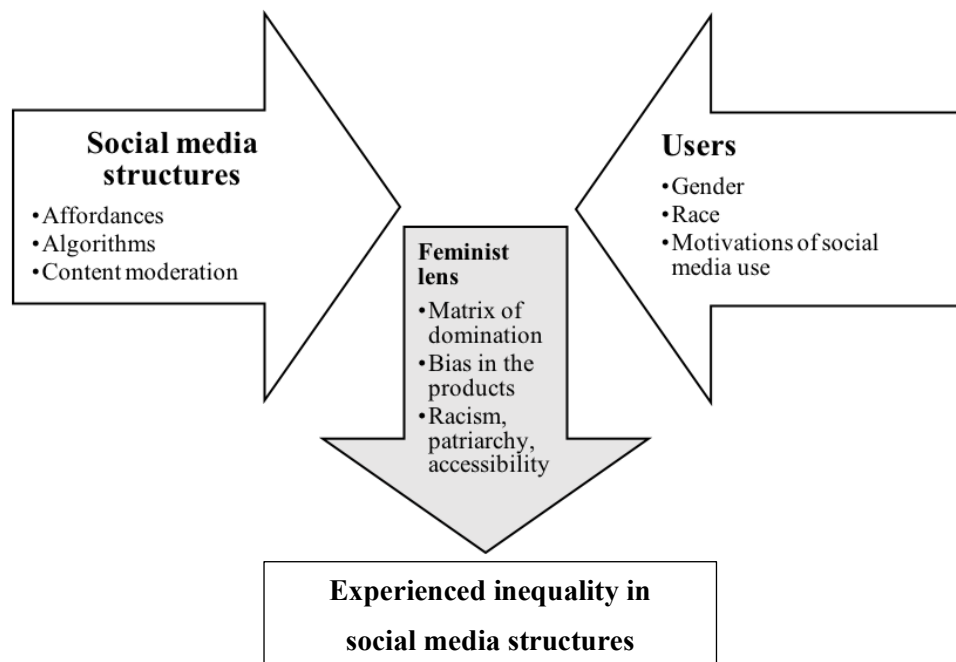


Figure 4 Theoretical framework

The Figure 4 showcases the theoretical framework and its different components. Understanding the inequality that the social media platforms cause to users is the premise of this study. The theoretical framework demonstrates the different elements in order to gain the understanding: the structures of social media platforms, the feminist perspective, and the users themselves. All of these will ultimately influence the experienced inequality on social media. Each of the themes presented in the arrows were first examined through literature review and then studied in the empirical research.

This study advanced as following: first, the structural elements of social media platforms (affordances, algorithms and content moderation) were established and examined in relation to feminist lens. However, the feminist lens is the viewpoint for the whole study, which is why it is the combining factor in the theoretical framework. Then theories of motivations of social media use and user experience formulation were analyzed, and finally, the study proceeded to interview the users themselves. This framework is suitable for analyzing the relations between social media structures, users and the experienced discrimination and inequality that these platform structures create. It exposes the hierarchy of the themes discussed in this thesis. Must be noted, that the modeling is a simplified version of the elements. In reality, the inequality issues of social medias form complex entities that intertwine with offline environments – here they are condensed into keywords of the themes.

5 Methodology

5.1 Research approach

In this section, I will introduce the methods utilized in the study to reach the objective: to understand the experienced inequality in social media structures through taking a feminist perspective. The purpose of the methodology is to explain how the research question is approached in the empirical section (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 13–14).

The study in this thesis was conducted as qualitative research since the aim was to provide a deeper understanding of the research question. The subject has been investigated only with quantitative methods, which proposed a clear research gap and a need for qualitative data. The qualitative method was chosen also for its ability to explore an unknown phenomenon while maintaining the context. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.) Sensitivity to detail and "humanistic approach" were qualities that the topic of this study required, which also supports the decision of choosing the qualitative method. Many of the nuances regarding the topic of gender and social media have remained unexamined although quantitative researches have been conducted on the topic. The qualitative method is suitable for providing these nuances as it seeks to find an understanding of the experiences of the specific phenomenon (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas 2013, 398).

The framework constructed from previous literature served as a base for this study, and to that framework, the empirical part aimed to provide further information. Thus, the study created knowledge by linking previous theories and empirical research and could be classified as an abductive study. An abductive study strives to gain knowledge from both theoretical and empirical sources creating a dialogue between them. Based on the new information, it's then possible to adjust the original theoretical framework. (Dubois & Gadde 2002, 559.) In contrast, the deductive approach draws from the theoretical framework to a testable hypothesis. This is commonly utilized in a setting, where a prior theory must be tested in a new environment, or at different periods. The third approach for comparison is the inductive research method where research data acts as a canvas for the theoretical analysis. In inductive approach the research proceeds from specific hypothesis to generalization. (Vaismoradi et al. 2013; Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.)

5.2 Data collection strategy

This research was conducted in two phases: first by content analysis and then by individual interviews. The content analysis method was performed first in order to find solutions to the first research question. The second and third research questions were then covered by conducting the interviews. By combining the chosen methods, this research utilizes primary and secondary data to fulfill the purpose of the research. In the first method, content analysis, research is carried out by choosing documents or material to analyze. They could be transcripts, visuals, documents or as in this study, websites. (Guest et al. 2013, 28.) The use of secondary data was necessary to create a comprehensive understanding of the structures in the current social media environment and to be able to reach full potential when collecting the primary data.

Wheeler (1988, 34) discusses content analysis and proposes it to be suitable for researching values, beliefs, or other cultural elements displayed in a document. As stated by the author, the method was originally used to analyze cultures from a distance. In this thesis, the content analysis is performed on two selected social media platforms. As Wheeler continues, the possibilities of content are to analyze elements to form depiction of cultural manners. This is suitable for analyzing the structures of social media platforms, since they are a product of our culture and society. In addition to this, the platforms serve as a cultural, societal and political playground for users, as addressed in this study. The content analysis was carried out as a case study of two SMPs. According to Rashid et al. (2019, 1) case studies are suitable for performing a comprehensive investigation of a specific phenomenon while maintaining its context. That could be considered as a fitting method for explaining abstract concepts of structures in social media settings. Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1279) present a concept of conventional content analysis approach, which seeks to describe a specific phenomenon through the secondary data. This approach is fitting for the purpose of this study, when the secondary data serves as a basis for demonstrating the structural elements derived from theory.

Individual interviews were chosen to be the second data collection method for this research. In qualitative research, individual interviews are one of the most used methods. Conducting research by interviewing the examinees individually has traditionally been considered a suitable approach for sensitive topics (Kruger, Rodgers, Long & Lowy 2018). To understand the experiences of social media users, one must

gather rich data of the examinees. This research method is known for its ability to collect detailed information about the interviewees' beliefs, thoughts, or knowledge regarding a specific phenomenon. The individual interview method is believed to provide a reflection of the reality in case, the interview questions and settings are formed correctly. (Lambert & Loisel 2008.) Since this research aims to provide full understanding on user experiences and revolves around sensitive themes, like gender and discrimination, individual interviews were considered the most appropriate research method.

Although, the individual interview is a common method in qualitative research, there are various types of submethods in interviewing techniques. One way to categorize the interviews, is to divide them into structured, semistructured, and unstructured interviews. In structured interviews the structure is often formatted carefully and standardized across the examinees. Semistructured interviews, on the other hand, allow dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee. Thus, the researcher then takes part in creating the knowledge. Semistructured interviewing has become the most widespread form of qualitative interviewing. The final category, unstructured interviews which provide only little structure in the interview situation. For example, when studying a life story of an interviewee, this method is proven to be appropriate. (Brinkmann 2014, 284–286.) After reviewing the interview methods, it could be concluded that semistructured interviews fit the purpose of this study most accurately. To gain descriptions of experiences, dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee is vital. To categorize further, the interview method more specifically will be individual interviews. This approach was selected for the sensitivity of the topic and for the purpose of highlighting individual's own experiences.

The logical reasoning of qualitative research can be divided into three kinds: induction, deduction, and abduction. They are means to classify the idea generation process in the study and reveal the order of systematic investigation. Beginning with inductive reasoning which refers to research deriving theories from empirical data. In inductive research one doesn't aim to test or prove a theory, nor does the researcher have a saying in what is essential in the study. The opposite, deductive research functions in reverse to inductive research, focusing on the theoretical basis and then testing a known paradigm in a new setting. This study is using abductive reasoning which is considered to be in the middle of the first two perspectives. In an abductive study, the researcher takes influence from previous theories and tries to find connections

between the new empirical data and former findings. This gives also the possibility to criticize the findings concerning the earlier literature. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.)

Following the abductive pattern was found to be the most suitable for this research since hosting a conversation between the existing theories and empirical findings is crucial for the purpose of this research. As stated earlier, this study discusses personal experiences which can be held as matters of sensitivity and vulnerability. Experiences, whether concerning gender or user, require agency on a personal level. By focusing on agency, the examinees will be viewed as independent actors as opposed to trying to fit experiences under established theories. (Burke 2012, 122.) Thus, the findings were reflected onto the already formed information but held valid and as a possible material for critique on the existing theories. As the Table 4 showcases, the research utilized the earlier literature by finding key concepts to form a base for the empirical research.

Table 4 Operationalization of the research questions

The purpose of the study		The purpose of this study is to understand the experienced inequality in social media structures through taking a feminist perspective.			
Research questions	Key concepts			Themes	Instructional questions for analysis
What kind of structures do social media platforms feature?	Affordances	Algorithmic structures	Content moderation	Understanding the social media structures.	How affordances of networking, information gathering, and visibility are implemented?
	Connectivity, persistence, availability/accessibility, visibility	Two-way traffic, content personalization, advert targeting, liberating qualities	Governmental regulation, Community Guidelines, AI moderation		How is targeted advertising visible? What are the Community Guidelines and how are they implemented?
How the structures appear through a feminist lens?	Gender sensitive design, objectification theory	Privilege hazard, binary system in advertising, unpaid labour, data mining	Social control theory, the role of AI, women's sexualization	Understanding where the inequality stems in social media context.	Example interview questions
					1 When using Facebook/Instagram, do you feel like the icons and other visual elements are

					easily understandable and do they feel correct for the purpose? How would you improve them? 2. Have you ever experienced that Facebook or Instagram would not be accessible? Why?
How does the user experience form in the social media structures?	Formulation of experience, Social capital, The five elements of UX, Uses and gratifications, Three perspectives to UX		Understanding how user experience forms in the platform structures.	Example interview questions 3. What type of benefits do you experience when using social media platforms? 4. What are the tasks you usually perform on social media? Why?	

In the Table 4 is presented the operationalization of the research questions. It showcases the structure of the research methods beginning with the content analysis and proceeding to the semi-structured interviews. The table also presents the different relevant findings from theory and how they are reflected on the data collection. The primary data collection was designed to follow a structure where first, the oppressiveness of the SMP structures is examined and the feminist research angle reached. Then secondly, the analysis on structures is combined with the collected data on user experiences. Rowley (2012, 263) states that for semi-structured interviews the questions need to be designed to find the answers to the ultimate research questions, but also recognize the form of interaction with the interviewees. To find the most accurate interview questions, the content analysis was conducted first as a guiding method for the right interview questions and then the knowledge was deepened through the interviews.

Phase 1 Content analysis

The empirical data for the study was gathered through a content analysis of social media platform sites (Tables 5 and 6) and semi-structured, individual interviews (Table 6). The platforms chosen for the content analysis were Instagram and Facebook. They were chosen for their popularity and advanced level of advertising features, algorithms and content possibilities. Additionally, Facebook and Instagram have proven record of displaying the equality issues transpired in the literature review.

Table 5 Information on analyzed SMPs

Social media platform	Description	Source and form
Instagram	A social networking site for sharing, capturing and photos and videos.	External, desktop site and application, main menu and features
Facebook	A social networking site for connecting with people, sharing updates and sending messages.	Extrenal, desktop site and application, main menu and features

The Table 5 presents the platforms chosen for the study and some of their main features and purposes of use.

Table 6 The list of screenshots used in the content analysis

Number of screenshots	The platform	Additional info
24	Instagram	All screenshots are from the mobilephone application
22	Facebook	13 Of the screenshots were from desktop application and 9 from mobile version.

Both of the SMPs provide a desktop and application versions, which were both observed for this research as clarified in the Table 6. Performing the content analysis gave assistance in concretizing the platform structures discussed in literature review, rather than creating new information. The process relied heavily on already established theory which was covered in the chapter 2. Facebook and Instagram share the same owner, Meta Technologies. Hence, this study offers a profound review of Meta's structures across its most accomplished social media platforms. The data itself consisted on screenshot picture files (n=46) taken from social media platforms, Facebook and

Instagram, which were edited for anonymity. Data collection for content analysis was completed between September 2020 and March 2021.

Phase 2 Interviews

The interview participants were selected according to the research agenda and participants were categorized in three groups for the purpose of this study. To find appropriate data for understanding the gender differences in user experience, the first categorization of the interviewees was the dividing into cismen, ciswomen and individuals of gender minorities. Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity is the same as the sex assigned in birth (Merriam-webster.com 2021). To reach intersectionality, this research also encloses ethnicity as one of the categorization attributes which creates the second categorization. The participants were acquired through both a public announcement on Instagram, and private messaging channels. For practicality, the number of the interviewees in each group was limited to maximum 7 people. In the analysis, the interviewees are referred as according to the Table 7.

The most remarkable criteria for selecting the interviewees was that the participants needed to use the social medias under scrutiny. Other individualistic characteristics were not mandatory in order to become a participant. However, participants were divided into categories according to their gender as presented in the Table 7, which set limitations for the number of similar participants in terms of gender and ethnicity. The participants were contacted through different digital channels: email and personal message services. The message as a whole is available in the Appendix 2. In the message, it was important to clarify the purpose of the study, highlight the voluntary nature of this request and address the topics that will be discussed. What comes to language, most of the interviews were held in Finnish, since it was the mother tongue of most participants. It was important to create a safe and comfortable environment for the interviewees, and the switching of the language into Finnish supported that intent. The interviews were carried out either face-to-face or via video chat service since also having a visual contact helped creating an open space between the researcher and participant.

The Table 7 shows an outline of the participants' information.

Table 7 Information about the interviewees

Alias	Gender	POC/PWC	Language	Medium	Duration	Age and years on social media
CM1	Cisman	white	Finnish	Face-to-face	39 min	Age 31, +10 years
CM2	Cisman	white	Finnish	Zoom	45 min	Age 28, +10 years
CM3	Cisman	POC	Finnish	Zoom	28 min	Age 28, 9 years
CM4	Cisman	POC	English	Zoom	57 min	Age 44, +10 years
CM5	Cisman	POC	Finnish	Zoom	36 min	Age 25, +10 years
CW1	Ciswoman	white	Finnish	Face-to-face	38 min	Age 25, +10 years
CW2	Ciswoman	white	English	Face-to-face	42 min	Age 25, +10 years
CW3	Ciswoman	POC	Finnish	Zoom	57 min	Age 20, 7-8 years
CW4	Ciswoman	POC	Finnish	Zoom	46 min	Age 23, 9-10 years
CW5	Ciswoman	POC	Finnish	Zoom	63 min	Age 24, 9-10 years
GM1	Man, trans background	white	Finnish	Zoom	37 min	Age 22, 7-9 years
GM2	Man, trans background	white	Finnish	Zoom	42 min	Age 20, 8 years
GM3	Man, trans background	white	Finnish	Zoom	45 min	Age 23, 9-10 years
GM4	Man, trans background	white	Finnish	Zoom	32 min	Age 22, 7-8 years
GM5	Man, trans background	white	Finnish	Zoom	55 min	Age 24, 10 years

The interviewees listed in the Table 7 were limited based on their gender and whether they were Person-of-colour (POC) or white and their use of social media platforms. They all are referred with alias names such as GM1 – gender minority, CW1 – ciswoman and CM1 – cisman participant. As Westwood et al. (2019, 409) state, purposive sampling in

a research could benefit inclusivity and help gain insights on the issues that minoritized groups face. Here, the purposive sampling is visible in the categorization of the participants – gender and ethnicity. Although this study categorized participants into categories, the nuances of gender and ethnicity are noted in the study.

5.3 Data analysis

Content analysis began with proposing the instructional questions and coding the data. Having divided the structures into three sections: affordances, algorithmic structures, and content moderation, this investigation followed a similar pattern. For practicality, the material was collected from the social media platform websites and applications utilizing only the pages one could access from main menus and the features found on them. As Santander et al. (2020, 903) address, that the traditional research methods may be ineffective on social media analysis as the platforms provide an immense amount of data. In this study, the same phenomenon was faced, and the data sets were flattened to be used as non-reactive pictures. Also, one could notice the proliferate nature of social media platforms to which Santander et al. also refer, as during the data collection Facebook application updated the main menu tabs. Although this proposed no challenges for this research, it was taken into consideration when analyzing the data.

The coding was performed with the software called NVivo. First, the samples of data were classified according to their platform and then added to nodes that were derived from theory (Appendix 1). Nodes were divided to represent the three main structural classifications (affordances, algorithmic structures, and content moderation), and then further named after the specific instances of the structural elements. These instances were labeled under themes found from the literature review. Second, the analysis consisted of identifying the structures and instances from the data samples. Many of the pieces of data had representations of multiple structural instances and were categorized accordingly. On the contrary, some features were repetitive from page to page, they were treated as “Accessible at all times”. The results of this data analysis were then reflected to form a base for the interview questions by choosing the most valuable and common structures visible on the sites. They were chosen also according to category: out of three main categories, *affordances* theme earned five interview questions, *algorithmic structures* three questions and *content moderation* two. This was calculated purely on how the themes were weighted in the content analysis. Consequently, the

themes can be seen after each interview question in Appendix 3 and the remarkable structural elements chosen for interview are highlighted.

To clarify the role of Appendix 1, it's quintessential to provide instructions for interpretation. Appendix 1 showcases the number of instances in each coded category, nodes. One node is for example a "Data visualization" which are represented in the left column. As earlier mentioned, the material was collected from social media sites and applications consisting of in total of 46 screenshots. Since the screenshots depicted social media platform themselves, multiple structural elements could be found from one screenshot. From the column "Number of coding references" can be concluded how many individual occurrences of the particular node (i.ex. Data Visualization) the data set contained. Some of the nodes had sub-nodes, which is why the next column presents "Aggregate number of coding references". For example, the node named after the structural element "Platform uses power, UXUI" has a sub-node "Describing other people's actions", and their occurrences are together presented in the third column. The fourth and fifth columns are related similarly, but they describe the number of items coded under the node. If the numbers match in all of the columns 1-4, it means the structural element (i. ex. Governmental regulation) was found only once per one picture (main tab view on the platforms). These findings are further explained in chapter 6.

The interviews acted as the primary source of data in this research. In qualitative research, the data must be reduced to only the relevant parts and displayed transparently (Brinkmann 2013, 112–113). For this purpose, a systematic qualitative analysis of interview data was chosen. Malterud (2012) introduces a systematic text consolidation (STC) method for qualitative analysis that provides a strategy for managing the amount of data a researcher might receive from performing qualitative interviews. The STC method, which this research was following, progresses as follows:

1. Getting an overview of the data by reading the original interview transcripts
2. Sorting the texts into "meaning units" which serve the research question.
3. Going through the units or categories and providing more specific descriptions of the category such as finding links to former theories.
4. Transforming the descriptions into comprehensive statements.

These phases serve as a basis for interview data analysis. This method recognizes the interview statements as experiences which is distinctive for a phenomenological approach. Objects are being condensed into their very essence through these four steps. (Malterud 2012.) The first phase began right after the interview session as then the other

factors, that were not visible in the transcription such as intonation, were possible to be taken into notice. Then, in phase two the operationalization of the research question was utilized to find meaning units and further elaborated in phase three by connecting theory comprehensively into the findings. The abductive research approach was not dismissed as in phase three, the new arising themes were also noted. In phase four, the data were categorized into relevant and irrelevant sets and the relevant information was transferred into this study.

5.4 Research ethics, reliability and validity

Considering the topic of this thesis, the ethicality of the study is crucial to be evaluated. The research is conducted with interviews where the interviewees are regular individuals and representing themselves. The study topic revolves around gender and personal experiences, which can be considered as sensitive topics needing additional caution and carefulness. In the process of conducting research, there might be some contradicting interests as the researcher aims to generalize the results and participants keep their privacy (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wyaden 2001, 93). For these reasons, evaluation of research ethics is mandatory.

According to Roth and von Unger (2018), the research community has made significant development in ethical questions over the last 60 years. The authors emphasize the importance of treating the research moment as an event with participants and their own complexities. They see that the factors forming an ethical study *are acknowledging power relations, having informed consent from participants, and nurturing confidentiality*. The concept of informed consent was also highlighted by Byrne (2017). According to Byrne, the term means making sure the participants are fully informed that they are being researched, about the purpose of research, possible risks or benefits involved in the process and that they are given the possibility to withdraw consent at any time. The empirical data collected in the interviews was treated with confidentiality and anonymousness was ensured in all phases of research.

In this study, the power relations that needed to be recognized might stem from the setting of researcher-interviewee, but also from gender or ethnical differences. As the researcher, I had to check my privileges: as a white cis-woman I belong in the ethnical majority of the societal setting in this research, as well as fit in the gender norms held in

the society. Informed consent was essential for the research and it was ensured by informing the participants of the purpose, methods and processes. They were given the possibility to opt out regardless of the research phase or time. Also, confidentiality was accomplished by respecting the anonymousness of the interviewees and collecting only the data essential for the research.

In academic research the other key components to evaluate are validity and reliability. These measures are used in quantitative as well as qualitative research. The first of them, validity, can be explained as the extent of which the research can give a right answer to the research question. Reliability on the other hand is the measure to which the research can produce the same results with the chosen methods – how well the research is repeatable. These two terms help to determine the objectivity of the research. (Kirk & Miller 1986.) However, according to Appleton (1995) often these two terms are inadequate for measuring qualitative research for which Appleton presents a set of four terms to address the issues in validity and reliability: *truth value*, *applicability*, *consistency* and *neutrality*. This thesis will continue to analyze the research method using the terms presented by Appleton.

To begin with *truth value*, the term addresses the credibility of the study by comparing the research results with the data source and proposing a question, whether the interpretations are plausible. In this study, truth value was assessed through double-checking the answers and finding common ground with the interviewees. Appleton continues to clarify the term of *applicability* as the external validity of the study. This term refers to how generalizable the findings are and the extent of their representativeness regarding the research subjects. Applicability was ensured by recognizing the biases of this study: one of them being the bias of inflated assessment. This refers to a bias where the researcher rates their subject with high importance which then leads to them overlooking the occurring flaws of the study. Another possible bias of this study is called oversight where methodological errors are being disregarded. (Reich, Green, Brock & Tetlock 2007, 634.) *Consistency* refers to reliability as it is achieved when the findings and empirical data are in line with each other. Finally, *neutrality* according to Appleton is when researcher is able to be unbiased and leave a clear trail of the decisions made. These two final criteria were implemented in data saving-methods – the research material may be provided as documents for those who wish to see them. The coded data can also be traced to its origins.

6 Unveiling the experienced inequality

This study was conducted in two phases. A content analysis was performed by analyzing screenshots (n=46) from the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. Then 15 participants were interviewed in individual interviews. The results are showcased in a similar manner to the literature review: one structure at a time. Each structure has their own chapter where first the content analysis results are displayed and following this, the interview results presented. The interview results are mirrored into the results from the content analysis.

6.1 Affordances

6.1.1 The content analysis on affordances

This thesis discussed affordances in the chapter 2.2 where the framework revealed affordances to play a central role for user gratification on social media platforms (Hayes et al. 2016, 173–174). Affordances, according to their original definition, are *all possible physical actions with an object that the user can engage in* (Gibson 1977). In the light of Table 1, the most significant affordances on social media platforms are persistence, availability/accessibility, connectivity and visibility. In the content analysis the instances found from screenshots were matched with these four categories. Most of the instances fell under some of the established categories, but some had to be categorized according to other affordances.

The literature review also revealed, how in social media context affordances are often discussed simultaneously with their counterpart, constraints (Schrock 2015). The constraints often refer to the boundaries the platforms have set for users to function. In the content analysis the constraints are taken into account as the Platform uses power and Restricted options for interaction categories.

The data analysis on the platforms, Facebook and Instagram, suggests first that visualization is the most significant affordances as visible in Figure 5. However, by connecting similar affordances of *suggestion to interact, facilitating in-real-life relationships* and *restricted options for interaction* they can be linked with affordance of connectivity that was addressed in the theoretical framework. As a result, connectivity becomes the most common affordance found on the platforms. The important affordance of the platform availability/accessibility was also supported in the content

analysis, but persistence was not found to be relevant. The Figure 5 describes the categories in relation to each other, organized by the number of references coded in the category. All instances that had five or under five coding references were not named in the figure. They're connection to the former literature is listed in the Appendix 1.

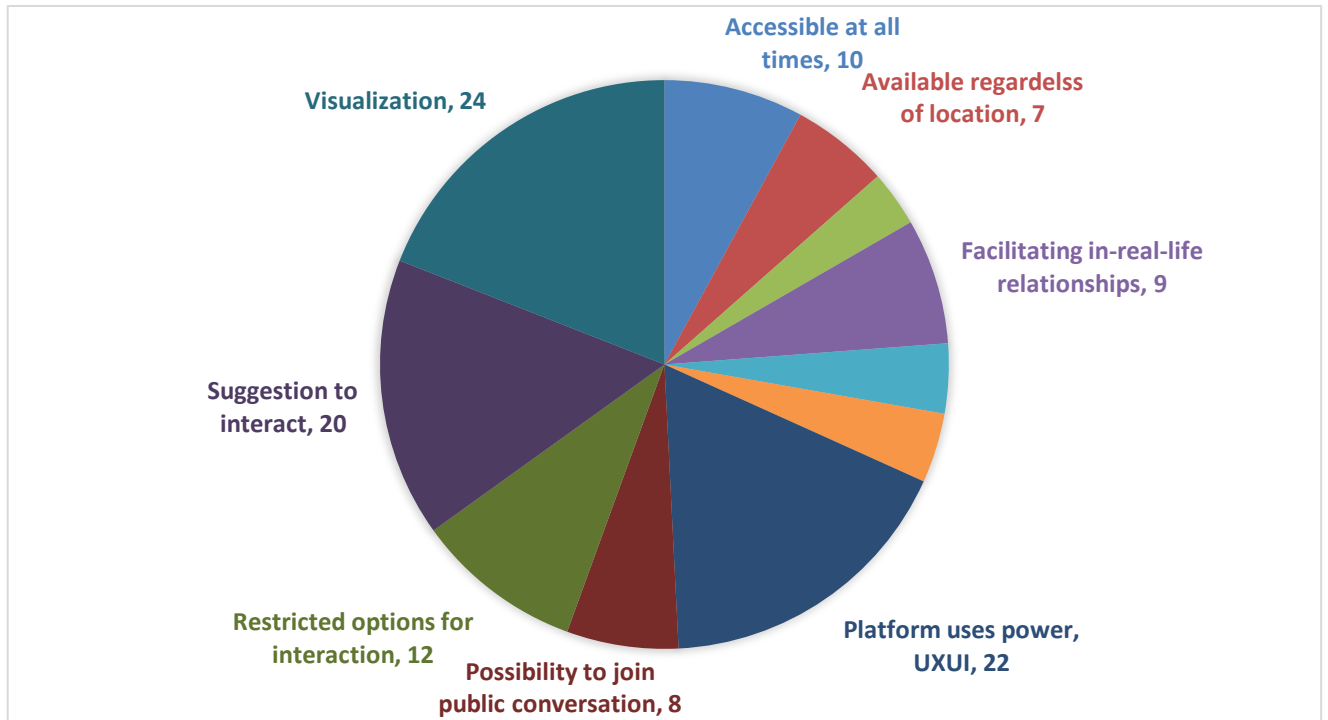


Figure 5 Affordance instances on Instagram and Facebook

The Figure 5 shows how *visualization*, *platform using power in UX/UI*, *suggestion to interact* and *restricted options for interaction* are most seen on the main tabs of Facebook and Instagram. Examples of the most common affordances found in this study are visible in the next Figure 6.

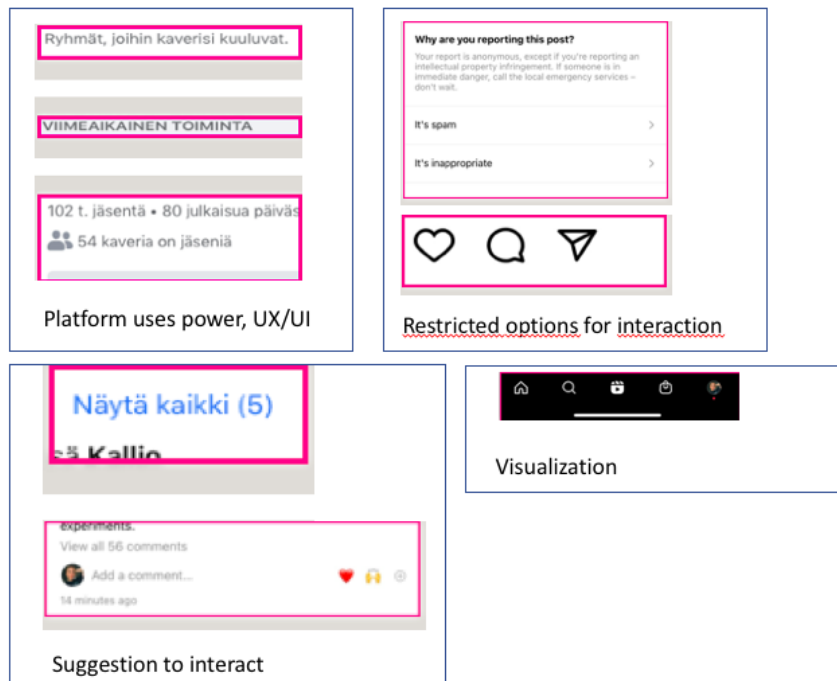


Figure 6 Examples of affordances

Figure 6 showcases glimpses of the most common affordances and how they are visible to the user. Further meanings of these affordances and experiences on them were investigated in the interviews. Shortly explained in the order of the screenshots in Figure 6, Platform using power -category referred to texts, pictures and elements in which the platform had clearly chosen to display a specific piece of information, organized the information, or made decisions for the user, such as utilizing the users' need to belong. Restricted options for interaction -affordance was all the visible limitations the platform had set for users for interaction. In the Suggestions to interact -category were all requests or suggestions the platforms had given for the users to guide them towards interaction. The last category, Visualization, consisted of all picture formatted messages to the users. This meant in most cases icons of which the Figure 6 showcases an example.

6.1.2 User experiences around affordances

This thesis analyzes the interview results followingly. The results, that are the experiences, are presented in categories and in the order of importance that was established in the content analysis by counting the coded instances. However, the content analysis is based on screenshots that are depicting only a passing moment in time and

space, so the categories may lack complexity. Therefore, there are experiences that couldn't be categorized under anything found in content analysis and they are showcased in the end of this chapter.

Suggestions to interact, possibility to join public conversations and restricted options for interaction can be linked with the affordance of *connectivity* and together they create the most common affordance. The first two were experienced as opportunities to which the participants reacted according to their goals. The experiences of suggestions to interaction also could be linked with the theoretical framework of *objectification theory* as the suggestions to interact often resulted in measurable validation, such as likes or comments. According to the objectification theory presented in chapter 3.2 women self-censor and regulate themselves more easily compared to other genders. This happens as people internalize the society's perspective of valuing oneself based on appeal or desirability. (Fox & Vendemia 2016.) The existing research states that this phenomenon is emphasized on social media since its affordances facilitate measuring and content editing as well as visibility. The interview results supported the existing theory as many participants experienced the interaction possibilities as measures of desirability or other social variables. Ciswomen experienced the self-objectification especially regarding appeal. Moreover, cismen and gender minority participants indicated similar behavior, but objectification wasn't necessarily considered as individual's appeal but as status and lifestyle.

“Here, on Instagram I get a feeling that everything is picture perfect and I begin to compare myself to others.” CM2, Instagram

“And for Instagram, well, it started I guess, for me to have like a memory book. It was mostly for fun. Then it all became very competitive, and like I compared myself to others. Now I don't feel so great being there because everything feels like a commercial, the platform is very commercial and polished.” CW2, Instagram

“I mostly follow inspirational accounts like queer accounts or political ones. I consume content but never post anything myself. I don't feel comfortable posting, so...” GM2, Instagram.

Linked with affordance of connectivity, this thesis showcases the users' fulfillment of the be-goal. The different goals regarding an interface usage facilitate experience design and guide platform creators in UX design. Hassenzahl's (2010, 22) has developed a three-goal framework for analyzing user experience and user behaviour. The framework consists of motor-goals, do-goals, and be-goals as discussed in 2.2. For this be-goal to be fulfilled Pucillo et al. (2016) state that affordances on social medias need to be designed for the be-goal-fulfilling experience to happen. This framework in particular hadn't been utilized in social media settings before. The interview answers indicated that the be-goals' fulfillment was not consistent across participant groups .

All participants experienced a will or a need to feel the *sense of belonging*. As a concrete be-goal this could be vocalized as "being related to others". The both applications supported this goal at least on some participants, but Facebook's performance was weaker in quality. The sense of belonging was also significantly weaker on gender minority participants. The GM participants reported to not find anything relatable on these platforms other than social commentary or their important social groups.

"Instagram plays an important part in my social relationships. I consider Insta being very addictive and I wonder 'why do I even use it', but then again, it's such an important channel for connecting with others." CM2, Instagram.

"I only open Facebook to check messages from friends and also to check if there are posts on my university community's group there... I get a good feeling if there's a new nice post on the university group... but I rather use Whatsapp to connect with friends" GM2, Facebook.

"I enjoy being able to connect with my friends more easily and frequently via social medias. I belong to a group from my hobby, and we communicate through a Facebook group." CW1, Facebook & Instagram

"I sometimes see my friends posts, but maybe once or twice a week There is not much other interesting content to look at." GM1, Instagram.

Lastly, *restricted options for interaction* rather guided users to other platforms and caused dissatisfaction towards the platform. Because of restricted opportunities towards the platform, the users felt powerless. There weren't significant differences between genders.

"I wish that Instagram messages could be a separate application so that I wouldn't have to be exposed to other content on Instagram when I read my messages." CM2, Instagram.

"I would wish for a better, more comprehensive reporting system against hate speech and zero tolerance on discrimination" GM2, Instagram.

Next, *Visualization* was found to be the second most common form of affordances in the content analysis. In this context visualization means icons and the utilization of pictures to convey messages to users. The interview results established the visualization as an accepted way of presenting elements and as a generally positive experience supporting element. The understanding of visual icons was tested and in the Table 8 and 9 one can see the results. All of the icons on Instagram were understood despite if the user used them or not. Especially, 'Reels' and 'Profile' were tabs that were clearly established among users of all groups on Instagram. On Facebook some users had different versions of the app, which made the comparison more challenging. All the alternatives are described in the Table 9 with their understood meaning. This showcases the proliferate and dynamic nature of social media.

Table 8 Interviewees' perceptions of Instagram application's main menu icons

<u>Tab icon</u>	<u>Names</u>
House	Home, Feed, Front page,
Magnifyer	Magnifyer, Explore tab, Search
Play button with a frame	Reels, videos
Shopping bag	Store, Marketplace, IG Shop, Shopping
Picture of self	My own page, Profile

Table 8 depicts the Instagram's main menu tab icons and their perceived meanings.

Table 9 Interviewees' perceptions of Facebook application's main menu icons

<u>Order of the menu icons from left to right</u>	<u>Option 1</u>	<u>Option 2</u>	<u>Option 3</u>
1.	House icon / Home page		
2.	Human figures / Friend requests	Play icon / Videos, TV	Human figures / Groups
3.	Video icon / Videos, Unknown	Shop icon / Marketplace for shopping, Shopping place	
4.	Bell icon / Notifications	Human figures / Groups, Unknown	
5.	Burger menu bar / Settings	Bell icon / Notifications	
6.		Burger menu bar / General menu, Settings	

The table 9 showcases the main menu icons, their perceived functions as well as the options of how they were organized for the users. As the tables prove, Facebook's main tab affordances form a more complex and dynamic ensemble. For example, the human figures signified friend requests on some participants' applications and on others' they illustrated groups. To summarize, Instagram's tab icons were more recognizable and universally accepted. Facebook's main menu caused confusion and unclarity to some participants. These icons are strongly linked with visualization of the platforms and.

The third significant affordance that was found from the content analysis was *platform using power* became evident when discussing about the feature placements with the interviewees. This couldn't be connected to any affordance from the literature review. Platform using power refers to texts, pictures and elements in which the platform had clearly chosen to display a specific piece of information, organized the information, or made decisions for the user. In the answers, it was addressed that the platforms' features were taken as self-evident, but in case of a change, the users became aware of the decisions made for them, how they affected their user experience, and often then formed an opinion.

“Godamn annoying reels. I never watch them unless they are placed on to the explore tab... And the continuous nature of the explore tab gets me hooked on the application, the content just never ends. I always think to myself ‘one more video and then I’ll stop’.” CM2, Instagram.

“Instagram just changed the order of the main menu and I got confused . I liked it more when the ‘Add a picture’ feature was here in the middle of he downbar. Now you can’t even reach it!” CW5, Instagram.

“For example, if I was going there like ‘Oh my God, I need to answer that the DM about some work or something’. And then I open it. And then I the platform is not like ‘oh, DMs her’ or ‘you have an unanswered message’. It doesn’t grab my attention. It’s more like ‘oh my god stuff happening in the world’. And then I start to scroll.” CW2, Facebook.

Another situation where ‘platform using power’ perspective is valid, is how the platforms had chosen their features the feature. Many participants used, for example, Facebook’s group-feature which wouldn’t be possible without the platform company choosing it to be available. In the theoretical framework a phenomenon of *context collapse* was discussed in chapter 3.2. It means the temporary vanishment of social boundaries that individuals might have for their social groups (Marwick & boyd 2011). The users then aim to control the collapse by self-monitoring and regulating – this was experienced especially among women users. The participants experienced that, the platforms didn’t offer enough possibilities for privacy and control. Thus, the context collapse caused distress and anxiety. This theory was found relevant also among gender minority participants. The findings of this study support the theory of context collapse, but according to the answers, on Facebook the participants were able to set and hold boundaries between social groups which decreased the context collapse effect.

“Facebook doesn’t really affect my social life, I have under 100 friends there who are mainly people from my work.” CW3, Facebook.

“On Instagram I follow old friends and acquaintances from different phases of my life, and there’s almost a thousand of them. Instagram is not that serious to me, but I do think about the posts’ aesthetics and sometimes I’m interested who visits my profile and would like to know who they are..” CW3, Instagram.

“Nowadays, there’s a mental boundary for me to post content on Instagram. If I look at my older posts, I would never post anything similar now. I feel too anxious to reveal too much of my personal life.” CW1, Instagram.

“So before there was no explore page. Back then, I created more content on my anime account and to my cosplayer friends. I had my own bubble and didn’t communicate with others. Then 2018 became the explore-page which killed the bubble and now I get content from anyone and that I don’t like.” GM2, Instagram.

The affordances of *accessibility/availability* were recognized not only in the content analysis but also in the interviews. The interviewees, especially cisgender participants described the experience of opening the social media application to be an automatic, almost unconscious process. The act of opening the app and its accessibility is connected to the theory of experience formulation. Solomon and Corbit (1974) created a timeline for the experience formulation which begins from the peak of stimulus and ends in the state of a fading experience. Maslow also described a peak experience which focused on positive outcome of an experience. However, according to the interviews the outcome of *accessibility/availability* was not always a distinctly positive experience, but neutral or even frustrated. The stimulus experience was also found stronger among cisparticipants.

“I open the Instagram application just because my finger somehow finds it from my phone. I might leave the app and then a few moments later come back without thinking that much.” CW3, Instagram.

“It’s such an unconscious activity, I don’t understand. I always find myself on the app even though I had just stopped scrolling 15 minutes earlier. Can’t tell..I open the app and find nothing new.” CM2, Instagram.

“50 % of times I use the apps is purely from out of an habit. A Signal from my brain to the thumb to swipe the app open. I don’t even do anything there.” CM1, Instagram & Facebook.

It also could be noticed, that the fading times of the experience were relatively short as participants often then returned to the app, in some cases even after 15 minutes. Even though, accessibility/availability was not found as the most relevant affordance in the content analysis, the experience around it was remarkable. As addressed, many subjects found themselves using the app for its one-click-accessibility.

Other notions on affordances, that weren’t necessarily directly from the content analysis came up in the interviews. The participants viewed social media platforms Instagram and Facebook as *constantly changing*. The change itself was perceived often as negative, sometimes depending on the time scale. All of the interviewees had been Facebook and Instagram users for over five years, some almost ten which gave the participants perspective on the change. When talking about their experience during their whole timespan on Facebook or Instagram, the changes in were agreed on across genders and backgrounds. But dynamic features on the more specific level, were interpreted differently and individualistically. One of the interview ciswoman-participants mentioned, that the negative reaction to changes has increased in the last years compared to the early stages of the platforms.

“When I got Facebook in 2015, I actually used it but then it became a space for older people and I left..” CW3, Facebook & Instagram.

“My use has changed during the years. First, Facebook was a platform where we hung out with the friends, like after school and stuff. And then it became for old people as you know... Instagram can be cool, but it's more like a platform of buying or selling stuff. Nowadays. It feels very

commercial. So if I'm not watching my friends or like, checking up on them. I don't really enjoy that part of Instagram.” CW2, Facebook.

“The platforms have changed so much during the years and not for the better. I feel like every change has been for worse, except maybe the appearance of Instagram Stories. My attitude towards change has also become more reluctant.” CW1, Instagram.

Specific features were experienced differently which emphasizes how the experience of affordances is inherently subjective (Hassenzhal and Tractinsky 2011).

“Bad design, too many features. Facebook dating, what the hell. It's like trying too much.” CW2, Facebook

“The platform gave me a post that said ‘Facebook dating is here’ FB dating is not for me at all but I’m not surprised that the Facebook notified me on the matter.” GM1, Facebook.

In conclusion, the interview results of affordances provided plenty of new deeper and richer knowledge on the experiences on affordances. The aim was to collect data that regards genders outside the binary as well as race. Important results to highlight from these answers are presented in the following Table 10.

Table 10 Central findings on affordances

The affordance	Findings
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causes self-objectification on all genders, but for different reasons. • The sense of belonging was important but experienced strongly only on cisgender participants
Visualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The icons on Instagram were better understood and established than icons on Facebook.
Platform using power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and GM participants experienced self-regulating and

	monitoring due to lack of tools for controlling their personal online environment. This caused distress.
Accessibility/Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger experience on cisgender participants who described visiting the platforms as automatic and unconscious acts.

In Table 10 are listed all central findings from the interviews regarding affordances. The results indicated that the structure of affordance is experienced differently depending on the user's demographic, especially gender and race. Some of the elements, like visualization, in the structures didn't create differences in the user experience according to these results. The theme of experienced inequality be further discussed in the chapter 7.

6.2 Algorithmic structures

6.2.1 Content analysis around algorithmic structures

In the content analysis the aim was to recognize how the terms that had occurred in the literature review, *two-way traffic*, *content personalization*, *advert targeting*, and *liberating qualities*, are displayed on the platforms and if any other algorithmic features could be found. The term two-way traffic was introduced by Dicjk and Poell (2013) meaning how the algorithms and users both have an effect on each other. Algorithms modify the space the user is spending time in, but users might deliberately alter their behaviour to influence the algorithm and thus receive more interesting content. Some algorithms are more sensitive to this "discussion" than others, but nowadays almost all social media platforms utilize the platform space optimizing algorithms. The Figure 7 describes the algorithmic structures and how commonly they appear on the SMPs.

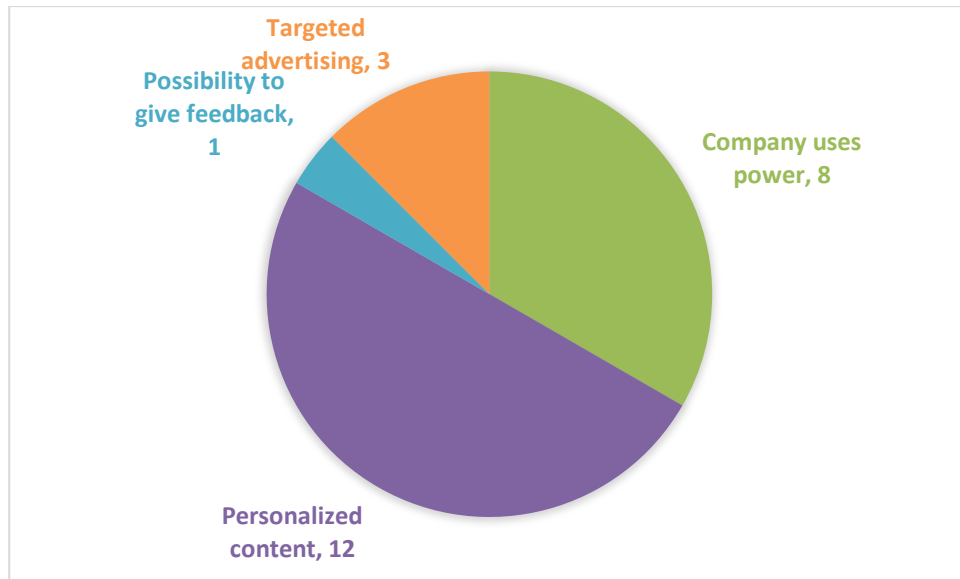


Figure 7 Algorithmic structures on Instagram and Facebook

The Figure 7 showcases how the *personalized content* is the most common way of algorithmic structure on Instagram and Facebook as it is visualized as the largest square. Second and third most common algorithmic content was *company uses power* which means algorithms altering the space according to user's perceived preferences such as changing the contents of the page or choosing which features to show or not. This is the same phenomenon as in affordances, but now with clear connection to algorithm guessing the user's preference. Other categories of algorithmic structures found were *targeted advertising* and *possibility to give feedback*. The *possibility give feedback* feature is directly related to the two-way traffic term – users were given opportunities to directly train the algorithm by this feature. There were no instances found that could be related to liberating qualities. In the next Figure 8 there are showcased some examples of personalized content that was the most common form of algorithmic structure.

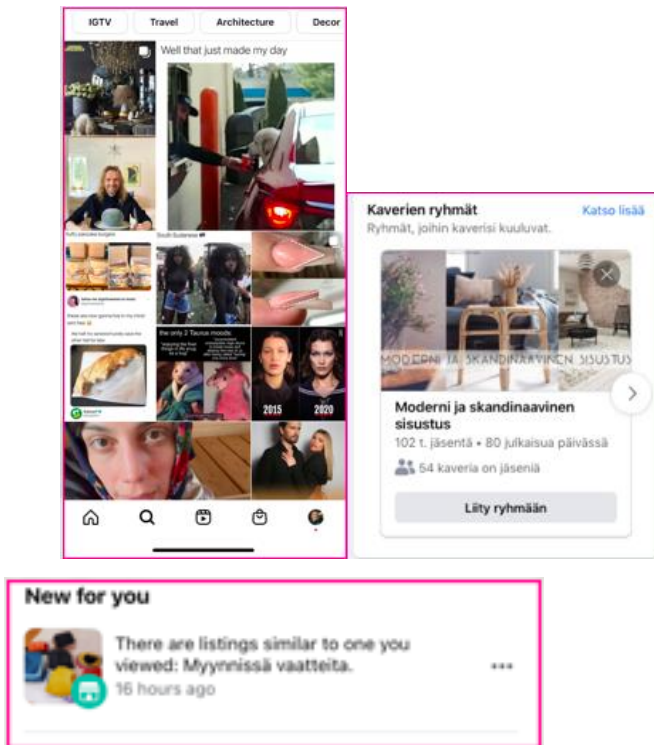


Figure 8 Examples of personalized content

Figure 8 visualizes the most common of the algorithmic structures, the personalized content and how it appears to the users. In these examples the personalized content is shown as suggested content based on previous actions. The user experience around this is further discussed in the next chapter.

6.2.2 User experiences on algorithmic structure

Next, this thesis presents the interview results that revealed the user experiences regarding the algorithmic structures. In the content analysis, the most visible form of algorithmic structures was the existence of *personalized content*. As covered in the literature review, Shepherd, Zefiro & Baade (2020) claim that algorithms can create feeling of safety as it automatically filters the content for the user. Even though, this can be viewed as a positive feature – filling needs and creating safety – the algorithmic structures are even then applying environmental power. Originating in the theory by Michael Foucault (1979) environmental power refers to a power that modifies the environment to prompt a certain behaviour in individuals. (Rettberg 2020, 2.) In the interviews, the environmental power could be recognized to reach into users' offline environments. Social media platforms hosted societal conversations which were experienced both as positive and negative. Cisparticipants reported to be taking part

actively in more casual, low-level societal discussions that were experienced as fruitful as gender minority participants were exposed to intense, identity-related discussions that were experienced as identity invalidating.

“I enjoy the groups on Facebook and the conversations that happen in these groups. I feel like it’s the most natural place for citizens to discuss about topics related to their neighbourhood. My favourite group is ”Lisää kaupunkia Helsinkiin”, I haven’t found any other environment for these types of discussions!” CM2, Facebook

“I use Instagram also to search also posts about public conversations...I don’t like how social issues are being discussed on these platforms – it’s ineffective and nothing actually happens. I feel like it’s a result from the combination of Instagram itself and its users. The worst part is, when people who actually don’t have a part on some issue gets their voices heard before the people that are actually affected by the problem.” GM1, Instagram.

Hassenzhal and Tractinsky (2011, 95) provided three theoretical perspectives on the formulation of user experience: the experiential, the emotion and affect, and the “beyond the instrumental”. These perspectives have many subcategories that primarily could be combined with adjectives such as subjective, complex and holistic. Specifically, the “beyond the instrumental” refers to qualities in online spaces that fulfil user’s hedonistic needs as well as embrace the user’s personal growth. The algorithmic structure, personalized content, is designed specifically to please the user and support their personal goals. Fulfilling of the hedonistic needs via personalized content could be recognized also from the interview answers across genders and ethnicities. According to the interview participants, sometimes the personalized content caused confusion, pressure and anxiety. Cisgender participants experienced that the algorithm sometimes made harmful assumptions about them, especially regarding their interests. The CM participants also reflected that the assumptions were enhancing the sexist assumptions about gender preferences. Cisgender participants overall experienced that the personalized content was addicting more than gender minority participants.

“I’m annoyed by the Instagram’s explore tab; I find myself scrolling there way too often. It’s so addicting...Both of the platforms are so addicting, and now that I’m aware of that, I find it disturbing.” CW2, Facebook & Instagram.

“I love aesthetic content on Instagram, I seek inspiration from there since I want to work with art in the future..” CW3, Instagram

“My Insta explore page is full of things I love: cars, shirtless men and memes...Also I follow current events through Instagram. Like presidential election or Oscar gala” CM2, Instagram

“I get a lot of irrelevant content on the explore page, like girls in bikinis. I find that disturbing as the assumption is that that’s what I wanna see? Feels a bit sexist. I don’t know why Insta thinks that that’s what I like.” CM1, Instagram..

The other parts of user experience formulation listed by Hassenzhal and Tractinsky were the experiential perspective where experience is treated as a dynamic, complex and situated event, and the perspective where emotional reaction is built up from affect. This framework was established in a case of positive experience formulation. The interview results supported the occurrence of these perspectives not only in a positive experience, but also in the formulation of a negative experience. The interviewees emphasized, how the platforms reward from creating content and interacting with content. However, sometimes the mechanism of personalized content fails and turns against itself. Thus, even though the user’s first reaction might had been positive when spending time on the platforms, after a while it could turn into a negative experience. To clarify, in some cases the affect was positive, but emotions developed to be negative. The negative feelings on cisparticipants were related to increased social pressure that derived from seeing other’s post even though they hadn’t chosen to. On GM participants the negative experience was reported as alienation – the social media platforms didn’t cater the minority participants needs.

“I find that the” post about your own life” type of thing is not for me. When I was younger, I posted about my life, but I never gained likes or attention. That made me feel worse, so I’ve made the decision to stay out of Instagram.” GM1, Instagram.

“I have a love-hate-relationship with Twitter. One can find good information from there but it’s such a negative space. The same with Facebook. I see a lot of posts not related to anything I follow.” CM2, Facebook

“I feel like the content regarding the body are the most toxic. I needed to unfollow all those types of accounts but still I see them on the Explore tab.” CW4, Instagram.

In the chapter 6.1.2, where this study presented the results on affordances, there was a discussion on fulfilling the three goals created by Hassenzahl’s (2010, 22). Despite the former theory being related to mostly affordances, this study also found a connection between goal-fulfillment and algorithms. There were some drastic factors relating to personalized content that prevented the “being related to others”-goal to be fulfilled. As stated earlier in this study, the algorithms are reflecting our society. From the answers could be concluded, that many participants from all groups had noticed how the societal problems are visible on the platforms. But only people from gender minority backgrounds experienced the consequences on a profound personal level – either as a violation to one’s existence or as a frustration of invisibility. The answers show that this phenomenon is emphasized especially on Instagram.

” On Instagram, I sometimes feel powerless that there’s so much discrimination and hate. It feels like a reminder that I could be the target one day and I feel anxious how public and normalized it is... I hate when queer content gets so much hate and horrible comments and there’s no reaction from Insta to this hate. And these posts are curated to my explore page.” GM2, Instagram.

The unrelatable content also disturbed the fulfillment of the user experience in other participant groups, but the extent of that didn't reach the issue of one's existence. The reactions addressing unrelatable content varied from 'being annoyed' to 'feeling insufficient'. The second one of those feelings leads to another conclusion which is that some participants experienced a need be-goal of "being admired" which Instagram provided the fulfillment opportunities.

"I use a lot of Instagram and I organize photoshoots for myself. I use it almost as a photo diary but I'm quite picky of how I show myself. So I plan my posts with care. I post mainly pictures of myself when I'm feeling pretty!" CW3, Instagram.

"On social media and on the internet in general. Well, I enjoy likes. If you had a lot of likes, you get credit. I enjoy that. And if I like get tagged, or of course it's nice. When it's not like I'm happy for hours, it's more like Oh, yay. And then it's gone." CW5, Instagram.

The second important algorithmic structure that was recognized in the content analysis was *company using power*. In the interviews the scale of authority over user's experience in the SMPs became apparent. The answers also depicted well how the theory of two-way traffic by Dijck and Poell (2013) functions. Most profound experienced differences were in the platform construction and icons – some of the features that were present on some participants' applications were missing on others'. For the most part, users weren't aware of this and assumed that everyone else was experiencing the platform structures similar to themselves. Here, there were no differences between the genders or ethnicities. The interviewees were asked to list their main features on both platforms from left to right and especially on Facebook almost every single answer was different. This caused unclarity amongst subjects, the icons and their meanings were unestablished in the interviewees' minds.

"The first one on Facebook is a home page, then the next page is for friend requests, third page is some sort of video feed which I know nothing about, and final page is a place for notifications." GM1, Facebook.

“First icon is the Home page. Then there’s some weird icon, I guess it’s the video page. Then I have the pages I manage on Facebook, The second to last is some kind of the notifications icon and lastly my own profile.” CW5, Facebook.

“Main feed is the first icon. Then some type of Facebook reels? I’ve never used it. Next one is Marketplace, and next to it is Groups. The Groups tab is confusing, I often visit different groups, but I never use the main menu to go there. Lastly, notifications and the burger menu. These are so unclear, I would especially change the video icon and Marketplace icon” CW1, Facebook.

Another important algorithmic structure identified in the content analysis was *targeted advertising*. This is closely linked with monetizing user data which was addressed in the theoretical framework by Bivens and Haimson (2016) and Fumagalli et al. (2018). According to Bivens and Haimson (2016) the commercialization of the SMPs can cause users to build their identities in a marketing logic-based environment. In the interviews, the subjects recognized the phenomena of targeted advertising and experienced the adverts as a negative thing. Moreover, the interviewees who had a trans background found commercial content to be the quintessential barrier for the use. This was because the targeted advertising they received didn’t feel to match the users’ values. The GM participants felt that the advertising was never targeted actually to them but to cisparticipants. The same experience was reported by POC cismen. They rather felt alienated by the advertising than annoyed. Ciswomen on the Many of the answers indicated that social media advertising was experienced as a growing and very intrusive part of the platforms.

“I find it odd how commercial Instagram has become. The new shop feature is off-putting. That is why I’m spending more time on Tumblr.” GM2, Instagram.

” There are so much ads on Facebook, I feel like that is all there is. This feels like they’re trying to shove the ads down my throat.” CW5, Facebook.

” I hate when I get adds on Facebook right after I’ve googled something. It makes me feel unsafe...Like the app is watching my moves all the time ” CW1, Facebook.

“I’m so annoyed when the algorithm is too sensitive. I get content just because I once liked something...It’s not necessarily what actually interests me.” CM4, Instagram.

The last found algorithmic structure on the content analysis was the *possibility to give feedback*. This means any possible features that the platform has provided for the user to “train” the algorithm. Algorithms gather information about the users without any visible reminder or constant consent giving, but sometimes for the platforms it might be useful to let the users give feedback on how the algorithm is performing at giving content. In the chapter 3.3 D’Ignazio and Klein (2019) address what is problematic in unpaid digital labor. According to the authors, it’s often people in minorities who are responsible for creating social media a safer place and doing unproportionate amount of labor training the algorithm. In the theoretical framework was also introduced a theory from Bivens & Haimson (2016, 7) according to which algorithms mirror the biases of our society and especially the targeting tools on SMPs are set to follow a binary, for example, in gender. This could mean that the platforms can’t provide as relate content to the people living outside the binary.

The interviewees were all aware that algorithms were picking up their behavior but only some knew, what that specifically means. This was experienced as a quite neutral thing, something that was inevitable when using the platforms. Some had used the algorithm altering into their monetary benefit but especially the people in gender minorities found that the possibilities of giving feedback were useless. Overall, the answers of people in marginalized groups tended to indicate a lack of attachment to the content on social medias. This supports the theory of algorithms mirroring societal biases and not catering the identities of marginalized groups.

” I know that the algorithm is gathering information about me but I’m not exactly sure how nor how I could get better content.” CW1, Both.

”I have sometimes intentionally visited different online shops and added things to the cart so that I could get a discount on social media ads.” CM3, Both.

“I often give up on Instagram because the content is just not interesting enough. The content is not varying enough that I could by liking or commenting get better content, the feed doesn’t change anywhere.” GM1, Instagram.

“I feel powerless on Instagram, there’s so much content that makes me feel anxious and I can’t get rid of. If I get relatable content on Reels, it’s an unusual treat and only then I might spend a longer time scrolling. It doesn’t happen that often.” GM2, Instagram

These results showcased new information about the two-way traffic theory – how it’s success is dependent on the user’s demographic and societal position in addition to just their technical skills. These interviews also provided gender sensitive data on experiences concerning algorithmic structures, which has been lacking in the social media research. In the Table 11 the central findings of this chapter are showcased in short.

Table 11 Central findings on algorithmic structures

The algorithmic structure	Findings
Personalized content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A form of environmental power that can cause both positive citizen activity but also accelerate intense societal discussions which can be harmful for users in the minorities. • Increased social pressure on cisparticipants.
Company using power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regardless of the user group all experienced the changing nature of the algorithmic structure as confusing.

Targeted advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regardless of the user group this structural element was experienced as a negative and intrusive. • POC Cismen and GM participants felt the most alienated out of the participants by this structure.
Possibility to give feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM and POC Participants lack the engagement to the social media which leads to a circle of detachment from the platform.

On Table 11 are listed all central findings from the interviews regarding algorithmic structures. From the results can be seen, that some of the elements in content moderation caused differences in the experience on social media. These differences are further discussed in the chapter 7.

6.3 Content moderation

6.3.1 Content analysis around content moderation

DeNardis and Hackl (2015,761) discussed about the different types of content moderation: one performed by social media platforms and other by the platform users. The first type is often concretized as community guidelines documentation which is most of the times heavily leaning on to the governmental laws. That is why in the content analysis of this study two of the recognized elements were governmental regulation and community guidelines. The two needed to be separated for a more specific inspection of how the two communicate with each other and how they are related in reality.

The latter of content moderation types is the moderation done by platform users which was also recognized in the content analysis. This often is visible for users as possibilities to report or block content. As Gillespie (2020) claims, the users' actions are then sent for the artificial intelligence to decide whether the users' actions were valid. That leads to the final recognized category in this content analysis – unexplainable content moderation. This meant all moderation that couldn't be traced to a reason or to a known moderator, such as algorithmic moderation. The Figure 9 is showcasing the relations between the recognized expressions of content moderation.

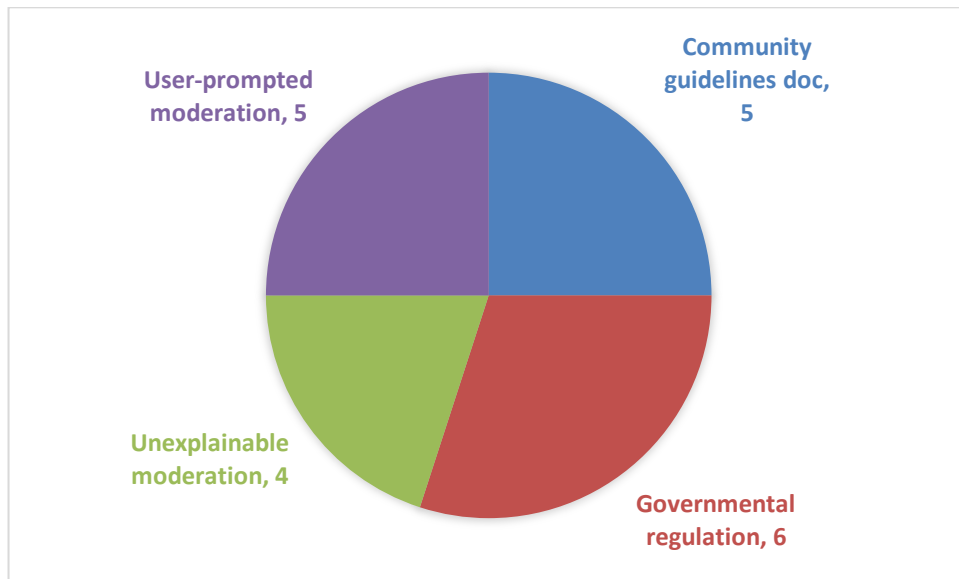


Figure 9 Instances of content moderation on Instagram and Facebook

According to the Figure 9 the most common form of content moderation is governmental regulation. Then the next two are user-prompted moderation and community guidelines document which are both equally common, and the least common is unexplainable moderation. However, the differences between the expressions of moderation are moderate. As observed in the chapter 2.4 algorithmic moderation has been a great topic of interest both in scientific research and in media outlets (Gillespie 2020; Liansó 2020), but according to the content analysis performed in this research the other moderation mechanisms were more visible to the users.

6.3.2 User experiences on content moderation

The content analysis revealed that the *governmental regulation* was the most commonly visible form of content moderation. Ultimately, the content moderation practices exist to protect users from unwanted or harmful content and to increase the safety of using the platforms. As DeNardis and Hackl (2015) reflect, the crossing of the governmental legislation, international legislation and social media governance is pivotal in the analysis on content moderation. Governmental criminal and consumer protection laws apply in crimes happening online under the different nations. However, only in rare cases can the officials gather all information for investigation or the crime itself doesn't fall under any legislation. In these cases, the responsibility falls onto social media companies. In the interviews, the subjects experienced insecurity and even desperation about how their rights are being protected on the social media platforms. The

interviewees felt that governmental regulation was not able to protect them. Both on gender minority participants and women the feeling was related to the fear of harassment, but gender minority participants in addition to this were disproportionately worried about their human rights. POC participants also experienced the fear of racism.

“Instagram is such an unsafe environment. I get hate messages, hateful comments and experience mental abuse on the platform whenever I post content.” GM4, Instagram.

“I feel like others’ freedom of speech is more respected than my right to exist. The platform doesn’t react to hate speech in any way.” GM3, Instagram.

“It’s just I don’t trust either the platforms nor the governmental officials. And but I have seen some video of how they used a feature.” CW2, Instagram.

“I once was an animal being killed on Facebook. That was awful and I wondered how it ever got to be there. I think having community guidelines is necessary but sometimes they are too strict on some things and too lenient on others. I’ve many times tried to report racist posts on Instagram, but I feel like the best security is to keep my profile private.” CW3, Facebook.

The common experience was that due to the nature of social media and algorithmic structures, subjects were exposed to content made by strangers which sometimes caused stress or confusion. During the interview period, the world was going through a global pandemic which affected users’ social media behaviors widely. Governments’ extensive measures to minimize the harms of the pandemic together with the quickly spreading disease itself, caused unease in the public. This resulted to the emergence of several conspiracies and fake news that quickly spread on social media. (Rocha et al. 2021.) Rocha et al. (2021) studied the effects of the social media misinformation in health and found that it could cause panic, depression, or even psychological disorders to the users exposed to this.

The moderation of the misinformation is handled on social media platforms as algorithmic content moderation with the justification of *the community guidelines* and as user-prompted moderation. However, the interview results lacked experiences on community guidelines documentation which is why this chapter discusses the user-prompted moderation regarding misinformation. Users could see content being flagged with a COVID-19 tag that also provided a link to World Health Organization's (WHO) website. This moderation system was also a clear crossing of the governmental legislation and the SMP's own governance system. Yet, the subjects in the interviews experienced that this didn't help to moderate the fake news around the pandemic and thus caused stress or irritation across participant groups.

“On both platforms (Facebook and Instagram) I’ve started to report all the covid-19 conspiracies and fake news. They are worrying me. Although, these have emerged only during the last few years.” CM3, both.

“In my direct opinion users can too freely post whatever is on their mind these days. The platforms give too much visibility to bigotry and fake news – like only scandals are succeeding there...Especially on Facebook, I see too much posts from people I don't know. I don't care about them” CM2, Facebook.

“Things that I experience to be negative on Instagram are medical misinformation and health influencers.” GM2, Instagram.

Followingly, this thesis analyzes the *user-prompted moderation* that was equally common as the previous community guidelines documentation. In chapter 3.4 social control theory was discussed in the context of social media. The term is closely linked with user-prompted moderation as users are self-policing themselves and deciding on the common social value system. Social control theory refers to norms, systems, and institutions that maintain the cultural status quo. This theory especially has been used in feminist research and social sciences, but recently also in online contexts. Hill and Johnson (2020) argued that females are more likely to participate in social control systems on social media by self-policing their behavior online. This view was supported

in the interviews, not only did women self-criticize themselves but also trans-men. Women and trans-men compared themselves to their peers and tried to look at the content they self created from an outsider's perspective.

"Sometimes, I think about if others consider my content boring or monotonous. I also want my feed to look somewhat polished, not that I obsess over it but a little bit." CW4, Instagram.

"I do worry sometimes if I create pressure with my content and what kind of picture I give out of myself." GM4, Instagram.

"I'm not afraid of being reported but I do think about the content aesthetic before posting. Before I did that even more but nowadays my posting is more carefree." CW5, Instagram.

Lastly, the study discusses the results on *unexplainable moderation*. According to Myers West (2018) many users found the content moderation practices of social media platforms confusing and frustrating. This view is also supported by De Zwart (2018, 284) who states that the moderation systems on social medias are insufficient in their transparency which forces users to rely on the visible queues when dealing with unwanted content. In the interviews, many subjects brought up their concern about not knowing much about the content moderation systems and recognizing the affect the systems have on their experience on the platforms. These concerns were raised across all genders and ethnicities.

"I feel like I see a lot of hate speech around Instagram. The reporting of for example hateful comments has been made very difficult on Instagram, I don't even know how to do it. That has driven me away from Instagram since it's making me feel unsafe." GM5, Instagram.

"I recognize that my information can be leaked to different places no matter how private your account is and cyber security is worrying me. "
CW1, both platforms

“I have reported some content before on Instagram but I have no clue what happened to it afterwards.” CM2, Instagram

These interview results provided deeper understanding of the experiences on social media content moderation and gender rich data on the topic. The Table 12 includes all the central findings gathered from the experiences around content moderation structure.

Table 12 Central findings on content moderation

The content moderation structure	Findings
Governmental regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users experienced insecurity and even desperation about their rights being unprotected as governmental official can't reach the violators. Stronger feeling among GM participants.
User-prompted moderation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-policing was experienced among women and transmen
Unexplainable moderation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants of all genders and races supported the view of insufficient moderation transparency.

The Table 12 presents the central findings categorized in found content moderation structures. From the results can be seen, that some of the elements in content moderation caused differences in the experience on social media. These differences are further discussed in the chapter 7.

7 Conclusions and discussion

7.1 Theoretical conclusions

The purpose of this study is to understand the experienced inequality in social media structures through taking a feminist perspective. Under scrutiny were two social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook and their structures which were divided into three categories: affordances, algorithmic structures and content moderation. The following research questions were used to help fulfill the purpose of the study:

- What kind of structures do social media platforms feature?
- How the structures appear through a feminist lens?
- How does the user experience form in the social media structures?

These research questions were first answered through a literature review after which an empirical research was conducted. The research was performed in two sections. Firstly, the social media platforms' structures, Facebook and Instagram, were analyzed in an content analysis and secondly, the experiences around these structures were gathered in individual interviews. The interview participants were divided into three groups to provide the gender sensitive data necessary for this study's purpose: cismen, ciswomen and gender minority participants.

7.1.1 Social media structures

The first research question aimed to answer what the social media structures are and what features the structures carry. By analyzing the existing literature this study ended up separating three different structures from social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook. The structures studied in this study are affordances, algorithmic structures and content moderation. The empirical research compared the theoretical findings to the actual platform features through a content analysis. This method aimed to deepen the understanding on the structures and possibly find new ones.

Naming the three structural elements was derived from the theory of affordances, which was originally developed by a psychologist James Gibson in 1977. By affordances this study means "*only actions which users consider possible*" (Norman 1988). Affordances were chosen to be the first structure as the literature claimed them as the epitome of other structures on social media platforms (Bucher & Helmond 2017,

236). In the empirical part of this study, the structures were studied through a content analysis of the two selected platforms, Facebook and Instagram.

When discussing structures, a natural course is also to consider the logic of how social media platforms are built. According to Dijck and Poell (2013) the most transformative force in the media and platform industry has been the logic of two-way traffic which is enabled by algorithms. That is why, this study studied algorithms as the second structural element.

In the theory of affordances, constraints play also an important role as the boundaries that have been set to the user. To clarify, one could call affordances as possibilities and then constraints are the natural opposite of these possibilities. (Schrock 2015, 1229.) When considering the constraints which social media platforms set for users, one clear structural element could be distinguished, content moderation. It was selected to be the third structure studied in this study.

Affordances

Affordances form a foundation for the user experience and gratification on social media platforms. Hayes, Carr and Wohn (2016, 173–174) claimed that the more advanced and intricate the affordances are, the better the user experience and greater the gratification. In the literature review, affordances were studied from the perspective of businesses interacting with social medias as well as humans interacting with the platforms. Argyris and Monu (2015) found that the affordances in business-SMP interaction differ slightly from the human-SMP version. However, this thesis's main focus lies in the affordances of the human–SMP interaction. According to the former literature the most significant affordances in this ladder interaction are persistence, availability/accessibility, connectivity, and visibility. The content analysis of this study indicated somewhat similar results –the most significant affordances according to this thesis are connectivity, visualization, platform using power and availability/accessibility.

To elaborate the results, the connectivity affordance consisted of three sub-categories: suggestion to interact, facilitating in-real-life relationships and restricted options for interaction. Visualization referred to messages that the platform portrayed through pictures, such as icons. Platform using power -category symbolized elements in which the platform had clearly chosen to display a specific piece of information, organized the information, or made decisions for the user. Availability and accessibility were features that allowed the user to access different spaces in the platforms. Lastly, on

the contrary to the literature review, persistence affordance was not found to be significant on these two platforms. Persistence in the literature was defined as recordability or achievability, but due to the algorithmic nature of the platforms this affordance was not found to be prominent.

Algorithms

The next structure this study studied through existing literature was algorithms. In this context they are used for categorizing and organizing content and rely on data collected from users to perform these tasks (Forbes.com 2016). Arsenault (2017,9) discussed how big data services have ultimately made the algorithmic structures possible. Since the social media platforms are built on APIs and almost anyone can access the open data, platforms are attracting third parties such as advertisers who are interested in the data collected from consumers. Data mining and data privacy issues came hand-in-hand with algorithmic structures into the world of social media platforms. (Bodle 2011, 320.) In the empirical study, the content analysis revealed the targeted advertising to be a visible structure on the two platforms. But although the advertising was visible, it was only the third most common affordance.

Min (2019, 2) claims that algorithms have reformed the interaction between SMPs and users. One central theory that was found to be linked with algorithms is the two-way traffic theory by Dijk and Poell (2013). This means the platform and user both influence each other – user is affected by the content they are receiving, and platform's algorithm follows user's actions in order to provide more accurate content. Min (2019) also discussed that some users, depending on their awareness of the algorithms, are able to modify the algorithmic stream. The content analysis of this study pointed out that the possibilities for active algorithm modifying were poorly available or not available at all. In that sense, the structures support the view of modifying being dependent on the user's knowledge of algorithm's functioning logic. The side of platform affecting the user in the two-way traffic theory was also supported in the empirical study. Platform using power was the second most prominent algorithmic structure on Facebook and Instagram. This meant that the two platforms were shaping their space constantly based on what they consider to be best for user engagement or for their business.

Milan (2015, 1–3) views algorithms as socio-technological artifacts that are created to enforce certain patterns in our society. Shepherd, Zefiro, and Baade (2020) support this view as they discussed the nature of algorithms on social media. They considered

algorithms to be conservative in the sense where algorithms are created to predict user's actions and be pervasive in what comes to providing content. This was supported in the empirical study. The personalized content was the most visible form of algorithmic structure on Facebook and Instagram and content was also provided based on a specific pattern.

Content moderation

Lastly, the structure of content moderation was studied first through literature review and then in the content analysis. In the literature review three types of content moderation mechanisms could be distinguished: algorithmic, user dependent, and third-party moderation. According to Liansó (2020) the algorithmic moderation can happen proactively by matching strings of data from content to predetermined rules of content or by filtering keywords. The other option is that the algorithms are categorizing the content to different types, and then deciding if it is prohibited or not (Gorwa, Binns & Katzenbach 2020, 3). The content analysis couldn't find support for these theories, but in this case that doesn't indicate that the theories are false. The algorithmic moderation as the third-party moderation fall under the category of Unexplainable moderation in the content analysis. By analyzing the platforms visually, users are unable to figure out the moderation mechanisms behind the hidden hashtags or content.

The second moderation mechanism revealed in the literature review was user dependent moderation (Medium.com 2020). This was the second most prominent form of content moderation according to the content analysis. User dependent moderation means often moderation that happens from user's initiative. The functioning mechanism relies heavily on the geo-cultural norms of the users' physical space but also on the Community Guidelines document that social medias provide for guidance. Often these two are also related to each other. (Myers West 2018,4369–73.) Visibility of the community guidelines document was also investigated in the content analysis and as a result it was noticed that the document was fairly often cited at the platforms. Myers West (2018) argued that platforms were rather removing content than educating the users on content regulations. The results on content analysis were slightly contradicting this claim, as the document was available on many occasions. However, the extent of education can be arguable. Only attaching one document to different locations of the platform can be considered as a quite passive form of education.

The most significant form of content moderation in the content analysis was found to be governmental regulation. According to DeNardis and Hackl (2015) how national legal institutions monitor social media platforms is one of the key concepts to analyze in order to figure out the content moderation practices of social media platforms. By the time of this thesis written, a worldwide pandemic was affecting the circumstances of this study. The pandemic set a new standard on governmental regulations and control, which was highly affecting also the social media platforms. The battle against misinformation regarding the pandemic was visible for social media users with banners, citations to official institutions and mandatory tags in the content that discussed the pandemic. Gillespie (2017, 254) listed prohibited content of social media, such as violence, pornographic content, abuse, and illegalness. But according to the empirical study, misinformation is something social media platforms need to take into account even more carefully in their content moderation practices in the future.

7.1.2 Social media structures through a feminist lens

The second research question asks how the social media structures appear through a feminist lens. There is only little research done on the social media platform structures from this point of view, so answering the question required combining theories from gender studies, feminist research, but also collecting data outside the binary in the empirical part of the study. Rather than focusing on to the general user experience on the platform, which will be covered in the final research question, this chapter will focus into established theories on specific structures and reflects the interview answers against them. Here important was to focus on the gender or race differences in the answers.

Affordances

As in the previous research question, our analysis begins with affordances. As Bivens and Haimson (2016) state, gender is one of the most central user categories that social media platforms uphold. It is sustained on many levels of social media platforms, all the way from affordances to content moderation. This creates a gendered environment for users that predominantly follows binary norms and assumptions of gender expression.

The first theory discussed in the literature review regarding behaviour in a gendered space was the objectification theory. The theory focuses especially to women's gender conforming behaviours on social media as a result of internalized objectification (Fox &

Vendemia 2016, 594). The answers of interviewees supported this theory. The interview results indicated that the valuing oneself through the measures that social medias provide – like buttons, comments or messages – was experienced among women. Both the literature and the answers from empirical study of this thesis support the view of this being harmful and causing shame and stress (Moradi & Huang 2008; Mercurio & Landry 2008.) To add to this theory, cismen and transgender interviewees experienced these feelings of self-objectification as well, but for different qualities. As women tended to measure appeal, other genders valued status and lifestyle over appeal. Breslow et al. (2020, 26) add that the objectification experienced on social media might be more harmful than on other medias as the use of social media is more frequent on a daily basis. This was also supported in the empirical study, especially regarding women, as in the interviews many women participants told to be exposed to content regarding appearance daily and feeling anxious about it.

The next theory regarding affordances and the feminist perspective that existing literature covered was the theory of context collapse. Marwick and Boyd (2011,9) explained the theory to be about a temporary flattening or disappearing of boundaries that an individual has set for their different social audiences in the offline world. This, according to the literature, can cause higher self-awareness and self-regulation in social media setting on women and members of LGBTQ+ community. This study supported the former literature. Women and transgender participants found themselves regulating and monitoring their posts or being unwilling to post on the platforms, especially on Instagram. The reason found for the controlling of context collapse was that the participants felt unsafe in the environment of algorithmically organized content and the commercialization of Instagram. Many were exposed to posts that were from outside of their social circles which created an unachievable standard for content as well as uncertainty of who will see the posts, they themselves published.

Algorithms

Algorithms have been under scrutiny for the past years as their power over us has slowly become evident to the public. On feminist research the algorithms are not often directly related to social media platforms but other environments or discussed as their own entity. First concept introduced in the literature review was the privilege hazard, which essentially addresses how the biases and structures of our society are reflected onto the algorithms. According to D'Ignazio and Klein (2019) the hazard originates

from the fact that the social media platforms are built by a small group of people and then scaled for a larger audience. The small sample size of humans can't take into account the experiences of people from other backgrounds and some perspectives are thus excluded. On social media platforms the commercial goals are often prioritized over users' goals. In this research, the feminist perspective on algorithms was addressed through theories and then derived from interview answers where the participants were asked about their relationship with the parts of social medias that function with algorithms.

The theory of environmental power was first introduced by Michael Foucault in 1979 and later developed to fit the social media setting (Rettberg 2020). The interview results supported the theory of algorithms on social media modifying user's behaviour. Answers indicated that there were few ways the power was showcased. Firstly, excessive time consumption on social media sites was something that could be directly pointed to be the result the algorithmic structures. Many answers across genders and races told to spend time exploring the personalized content for reasons they sometimes could not point out. Secondly, some participants explained that they rather follow current news topics via social media. The news are visible to the users as they are posted almost live on the platforms and algorithms lift them to the feed of those who the AI considers to be interested. Lastly, the notion made by Bivens and Haimson (2016, 2–5) about how humans are building their identities and perceiving others through algorithmically organized content and “marketing logic of consumption” could also be detected from the interview answers, especially from women and transgender participants. Moreover, women described this to set pressure on them as the interviewees with a trans background experienced commercial content to be rebarbative. The shaping of identities is a profound form of environmental power.

Time consumption on social media platforms was mentioned being related to the concept of environmental power. Nakamura (2015, 106–108) presents another viewpoint of time consumption on social media connecting it to the unpaid labour that women and people from margins perform on social media platforms. Nakamura explains that social media platforms would be even more discriminating without the people who educate the algorithms and bring in their experiences to protect others. D'Ignazio and Klein (2019) address how in a capitalistic society time is often money, and the time that people from minorities have to spend on building a safer environment on SMPs is the money saved from the platform administrators.

The theme of labour around algorithms fits also under the structure of content moderation. Because the existing literature was more focused on algorithms, this study will examine the results under algorithmic structures as well. The interview results supported this theory but revealed some complexities around it as well. Participants from all genders and races had tried to create a safer space for them by blocking accounts, following only interesting accounts and acting in a certain way in the algorithmic space, but the results varied. Transgender participants found themselves uninterested in the content provided to them and reviewed the algorithm's success rate as poor. Ciswomen called for more content from their friends and less from unknown accounts since they felt like the algorithmically provided content often viewed life or womanhood as "perfect". White cismen participants were fairly happy with the space they had created but were annoyed of the stereotyped assumptions the algorithm had made about their preferences and that disregarded the complexity of masculinity. POC cismen however found themselves also uninterested to spend time on social media for the lack of interesting content. This supports also the view of Groenewegen, Boersma and Wolbers (2016) as they claim that algorithms that are created by utilizing big data lack complexity and leave marginalized groups disregarded.

Content moderation

The final structure that will be examined through a feminist lens is content moderation. The interview participants were asked about their experiences on content moderation and safety on social media platforms. In this section, we will focus to reflecting the answers to existing feminist theories as well as regard the gender and race in the answers.

In the literature review content moderation was accused of restraining the freedom of expression. (Myers West 2018). Ahmed (2017) found the social media platforms to be important places for people in gender minorities for exploring their identity and gender. The interview results indicated that users don't feel free to express themselves on the platforms. The feeling of restriction derived from seeing harmful content on the platforms, unclear reporting or moderating systems, and worry of data privacy. The answers of transgender interviewees showcased that harmful content that caused the unsafety was content that disregarded gender identity presentation and existing in a minority. The harmful content according to white cis participants was regarding misinformation, fake accounts which weren't attached to the personal fear of

participants. As an exception, the last harmful content defined by cis women was harassing material. POC participants reported harmful content to be racist content and misinformation as well.

A theory that was addressed in the literature review is the social control theory that was now applied to social media environment. Social control means norms, institutions and systems that uphold the current cultural models by punishing contradicting behaviors. According to existing literature the phenomenon affects especially women's behavior and gender expression in a way that they are more prone to self-monitoring and policing their actions. (Hill & Johnson 2020.) The interview results support the theory, but in addition to social control affecting women's behavior, transmen also experienced the same self-monitoring. In the two platforms that monitoring was concretised as looking at their own content from someone else's perspective, comparing it to the content of their peers and reflecting it against the values the subjects wanted to represent.

Gillespie (2020) addressed the issues with algorithmic content moderation – how the punishing of an individual for stepping outside the prohibited should be a process where shared values guide the direction, and how algorithms now make the decision between good and bad content. Gillespie saw that we as a society are missing the opportunity to have these discussions about ethics and societal issues. The interview subjects felt that their rights were not protected on the social media platforms. The interviewees thought that the platforms didn't follow any specific value system that would've guaranteed the deeply harmful material such as hate speech regarding identity to be moderated strictly. To give an example, the algorithm found a nipple of a female-presenting to be as harmful as bullying of a transgendered person. This feeling of not being protected was experienced especially among gender minority participants. Gerrard and Thornham (2020, 1276) claimed that community guidelines are insufficient to protect the users as the SMPs are in a constant change. However, the interview participants still had trust on the community guidelines as the protectors of their rights. According to the answers this was due to the governmental legislation being even more behind on the technology development and multinational platforms being outside the reach of the local legislation.

7.1.3 Experienced inequality in social media platform structures

The last research question aims to take the results of the first two questions and compare them with the theories around user experience. The user experience itself was defined in

the literature review as an experience that forms while using technology that recognizes use as a subjective, complex and holistic event (Hassenzhal and Tractinsky 2011). Inequality in this context is examined through the experiences that came up when studying the interview answers through feminist theories. These findings are the most crucial in this study. The aim was to produce gender and race sensitive data of experiences on social media structures so to highlight this, the Table 13 showcases the results regarding gender and taking race also into account. In the Table 13 the experienced inequalities are divided into the structures that cause them.

Table 13 Experienced inequality in the structures of social media

	Ciswomen	Cismen	People of gender minorities
Affordances	self-objectification on appeal, unsafety due to context collapse	self-objectification on status and lifestyle	self-objectification on status and lifestyle, unsafety due to context collapse
Algorithms	Increased social pressure, stereotyped assumptions on femininity	Stereotyped assumptions on masculinity, alienation (POC)	Alienation, invalidation of identity
Content moderation	The fear of harassment, the fear of racism (POC), self-policing	The fear of racism (POC)	The fear of not having their rights protected, The fear of harassment

In the Table 13 are the three structures studied in this thesis and the experienced inequalities that they cause in different genders. For simplicity the different features found from each structure have been left out from this table. However, they had a significant role in the examining of the experiences as they formed a base for the interview questions.

One of the issues that was mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis was that, the social media research lacks understanding on how societal biases influence the experiences on the platforms. These results answer the issue. Almost in all interview answers, regarding any structure, was the theme of unsafety and that the fear of harm was constant. Fox and Moreland (2015, 169) addressed how essential is the positive impact of users finding their peer groups, especially among the members of minorities. Social media platforms have tried to build these community-like environments for users to connect in, such as Facebook Groups, but have failed to create them safe. This affects especially users who are operating from the margins of the society. As Sobieraj (2018) stated that as much as SMPs offer the freedom to create a space for self-expression, the control of the platforms has accumulated to privileged groups and market logic over time. This was visible in the results of this study.

What was discussed in the literature review about user experience in the online spaces, was that SMPs have the ability to shape social systems by increasing users' social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2010, 873). However, according to the research results, the social capital is increasing relatively much slower on gender minority users since the algorithms cater the engagement of people from more privileged backgrounds. According to the literature review and the empirical study, a positive user experience leads to improved satisfaction towards the social media platform. However, to achieve this positive experience user needs to experience an emotional connection and sense of belonging on the platform. (Krishen, Berezan, and Raab 2019.) The connection according to the research was in some cases found with like-minded people but the sense of belonging was more difficult to reach for the gender minority participants. This was because of the feeling that social media platforms were favoring the content that went according to mainstream perceptions of gender expression, identity and living.

7.2 Managerial implications

The goal for research was to provide a deeper understanding of the experienced inequality in social media and how the structures of platforms affect it. That being said, there are many findings that can be applied to business settings as well. It is important for organizations, especially those who have a presence in the social media, to take into account the inclusivity or the lack of it that the social media platforms create. In addition to the inclusivity issues, the structural point of view is important for businesses to understand when either utilizing platforms in marketing and business functions or

creating similar structures in their own services. This thesis aimed to create a comprehensive look into the literature regarding social media structures, feminist lens and user experience. After which the structures were examined in a content analysis and experienced inequality was studied through individual interviews with participants from different genders and races.

Beginning with a review of existing literature about social media structures, this thesis pursued to define the structures and found three of them: affordances, algorithms and content moderation. It was established that affordances create the basis of the user experience, but in the current platforms the affordances also function as self-measuring tools that cause anxiety and self-objectification to users. Ciswoman experienced this self-objectification regarding appeal, as other genders on status and lifestyle. This sets out a message to platform developers and managers on how there is a need for interactive features without them being objectifying tools of measurement. Another important message for management is the stress of context collapse that was experienced by women and gender minorities. The results call for safe spaces on social media platforms as well as better tools for users to be able to control their space.

Algorithms are socio-technological artifacts that amplify certain patterns in our society. This argument was formed in the literature review and enforced by the empirical research. The study revealed also the affects that the algorithms have on users of different genders and races. This is especially important information for those businesses that utilize similar content recommending algorithms in their services as social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. Ciswomen and -men found the algorithm making stereotyped assumptions on their gender and interests and especially on ciswomen the algorithm's content recommendations caused social pressure. According to the research of this thesis, current algorithms aren't successful in catering the interests and needs of gender minorities and POC cismen. Algorithmic spaces caused the experience of not belonging and alienation amongst the two user groups mentioned. For platforms to be able to engage their users, the algorithms must consider gender over binary measures and enrich the perception of gender expression rather than let the marketing forces overrun in the categorizing decisions. Marketers can also do their part in building inclusivity and use other characteristic measures than gender to target advertising.

Content moderation was the final structure that was studied. From managerial perspective this theme is interesting as it can be linked with trust that users have

towards social media as well as what kind of values are driving the platform moderation practices. The research results indicated that the overall trust of users on platforms is poor. For businesses present on social media this can be a useful reminder for multiple reasons. If the trust in platforms is low, can users trust the commercial content brands put out? Also, if users find harmful content or even their rights being violated on social media, will they still continue to tune in to the platforms on daily or weekly basis? The alternative channels for marketing should be considered from both ethical and economical reasons.

7.3 Study limitations and future research proposals

This study was a qualitative study, which means that the intention was not to create generalizations or assumptions on the universal truth but rather deepen the understanding of experiences from different points of the gender spectrum. This thesis focused on the inequality that was experienced on social media and connected it to specific, chosen structures. However, this study lacks volume – both in the amount of interview participants but also in the amount of structures. When the amount of interview participants was small (N=15), it is impossible to create general arguments about the experience of each gender.

For the purpose of comparison, this study had to divide the participants into three gender categories. However, gender is a constructed in the society rather than an established universal categorization, so one could say that there are as many experiences of gender and inequality as there are people (Rode 2011). In addition to this, most participants represented the millennial generation – people born between 1980 and 1995 (Wiedmer 2015).

Other limitation of this study was the feminist lens, that now followed the Socialist and African American feminism. In spite of aiming to include intersectionality and nuance into the study, some simplifications had to be made when choosing the feminist perspective, such as geo-cultural background being limited to Finnish. The experiences of inequality were also simplified from the answers in order to find patterns in experiences.

Despite the issues in generalizing the study results, this thesis did find some interesting topics for future research. Overall, the topic of gender in online spaces has not been studied much before the last few years. One specific research gap was found after exploring the *Gender Sensitive Design* approach (Rode 2011). Further research on the

subject of how gender is situated in the structures from the design and development's perspective could be researched. Another future research proposal could be to conduct a quantitative research on the same topic of experienced inequality to gain more generalized knowledge. Additionally, incorporating platforms like TikTok into the research could enlighten the experience around algorithmic content even further.

8 Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand the experienced inequality in social media structures through taking a feminist perspective. This purpose was reached by identifying the structures of social media platforms, analyzing the structures through a feminist perspective, and finally, the user experience itself was defined in the context of social media. This study was carried out through literature review and empirical research. The secondary goals of the research were to enlighten the gender and racial biases that affect our society and social media. The following research questions were defined to cover the research purpose addressed above.

- What kind of structures do social media platforms feature?
- How the structures appear through a feminist lens?
- How does the user experience form in the social media structures?

In the theoretical framework was established the hierarchy of the themes discussed in this thesis. The feminist lens was defined as the context of the study which sets this thesis to be a part of a larger societal discussion. The next largest theme was the environment which in this case are the social media structures. Thirdly, user experience was seen to be the narrowest and closest theme of the studied experienced inequality, so it was examined but now in the context of social media structures.

The empirical study in this thesis was carried out as qualitative research since the aim was to provide a deeper understanding of the research question. As an abductive study, the study produced knowledge by linking earlier theories and empirical research. In practice, the study was done in two sections: first conducting a content analysis and then exploring the experienced inequality by individual interviews. The content analysis method was performed first in order to find solutions to the first research question which was to define the structures of social medias. The second and third research questions were covered by interviewing subjects from different genders and races.

The most significant result of this study is the increased understanding of experienced inequality in the social media structures. There The structures defined in this study were affordances, algorithms and content moderation. According to this study, all genders experience inequality on social media but the extent of the inequality and the intensity of the experience vary depending on the demographic – especially

gender and race. The interview answers indicated that especially the feelings of unsafety and social pressure were experienced due to social media structures. On cis-men participants the experienced inequalities were linked with harmful stereotyping that occurs due to social media algorithms, and social pressure that is caused by the affordances. However, cis-men of colour differed from white cis-men in the way, that they experienced also the fear of racism and the same alienation than gender minority participants. Furthermore, cis-women experienced the same harmful stereotyping and social pressure, but the experiences of inequality regarding content moderation were different. In this participant group, the stress of self-policing, and fear of harassment and racism (POC) were evident due to poor content moderation practices.

This study aimed to produce results regarding gender and race across, or outside, the binary. The results were that as all genders and races experience inequality in the social media structures, the intensity was higher with people of colour or gender minorities. The GM and POC participants had experienced not only violations of identity on social media structures, but alienation from social media platforms. Results also showed that GM users experience the platforms as less engaging as the algorithms cater the engagement of users from majorities. The social media platforms have tried to create environments for self-expression and community-building, but failed to make them diverse or safe. This study revealed the issues in the social media structures that continuously create inequality in the users' lives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Open codes

Former literature	Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Availability/ Accessibility	Nodes\\Affordances\\Accessible at all times	10	10	10	10
Availability/ Accessibility	Nodes\\Affordances\\Available regardless of location	7	7	7	7
-	Nodes\\Affordances\\Business customers	4	4	4	4
-	Nodes\\Affordances\\visualization	24	24	16	16
Connectivity	Nodes\\Affordances\\Facilitating in-real-life relationships	9	9	8	8
Locatability	Nodes\\Affordances\\Features referencing society	5	5	4	4
Connectivity	Nodes\\Affordances\\Information sharing	5	5	4	4

-	Nodes\\Affordances\\Platform uses power, UXUI	9	22	9	16
Connectivity	Nodes\\Affordances\\Platform uses power, UXUI\\Describing other people's actions	13	13	9	9
Connectivity/visibility	Nodes\\Affordances\\Possibility to join public conversation	8	8	8	8
-	Nodes\\Affordances\\Restricted options for interaction	12	12	10	10
Connectivity	Nodes\\Affordances\\Suggestion to interact	20	20	14	14
Two-way traffic	Nodes\\Algorithmic structures\\Communicating preferences	0	0	0	0
Content personalization/Advert targeting	Nodes\\Algorithmic structures\\Company uses power	8	8	8	8

Content personalization	Nodes\\Algorithmic structures\\Personalized content	12	12	11	11
Two-way traffic	Nodes\\Algorithmic structures\\Possibility to give feedback	1	1	1	1
Advert targeting	Nodes\\Algorithmic structures\\Targeted advertising	3	3	3	3
Community Guidelines	Nodes\\Content moderation structures\\Community guidelines doc	5	5	5	5
Governmental regulation	Nodes\\Content moderation structures\\Governmental regulation	6	6	6	6
AI Moderation	Nodes\\Content moderation structures\\Unexplainable moderation	4	4	4	4
-	Nodes\\Content moderation structures\\Us	5	5	5	5

	er-prompted moderation				
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Appendix 2 Message to contact the interviewees

Moi!

Olen Venla Kokkomäki ja opiskelen markkinointia Turun kauppakorkeakoulussa. Kirjoitan tällä hetkellä gradua sosiaalisen median diskriminoivista rakenteista ja tavoitteenani on ymmärtää, miten eri sukupuoliä edustavat käyttäjät kokevat sosiaalisen median alustat. (Keskityn erityisesti Instagramiin ja Facebookkiin niiden yhteisen omistajan takia.)

Haastattelen tutkimustani varten tavallisia somekäyttäjiä, mutta erityisesti haluan kiinnittää huomiota haastateltavieni diversiteettiin ja siihen, että mahdollisimman moni ääni tulisi kuulluksi. Keskeisiä teemoja haastattelussani ovat käyttökokemuksen muodostuminen (UX), algoritmisten rakenteiden kokeminen ja sisältöjen moderoinnin vaikutukset. Näistä aiheista ei todellakaan tarvitse tietää mitään etukäteen, vaan ideana on, että kyselen juuri sinun fiiliksiä rennossa haastattelutilaisuudessa. Syy, miksi lähestyn sinua on se, että tuotat sisältöä aktiivisesti ainakin Instagramin puolelle, joten päätin, että somen käytöstä löytyy ehkä keskivertoa paremmin kokemusta.

Tutkimukseni pyrkimys on edistää rakenteellisen syrjinnän vastaista toimintaa, ja kyseenalaistaa digitaalisen todellisuutemme rakennuspalikat. Hyödynnän tutkimuksessani intersektionaalisen feminismin linssiä.

Olen enemmän kuin kiitollinen, jos sinulla olisi kiinnostusta osallistua gradututkimukseeni ja jakaa ajatuksia kanssani. Tutkimusdataa käsittelen vain minä ja kaikki vastaukset anonymisoidaan. Haastattelussa menee noin 40min.

Jos suostut haastatteluun, voit ehdottaa sinulle sopivia aikoja tältä viikolta (vko 16), ensi viikolta ja toukokuun alusta. Ihan sinun aikataulujen mukaan! Kysymyksiä saa myös esittää vapaasti!

Ystävällisin terveisin
Venla Kokkomäki
vekakok@utu.fi
0405077088

Appendix 3 The interview questions

- 1) Minkä ikäinen olet? / How old are you?
- 2) Miten määrittelet sukupuolesi ja etnisyytesi? / How do you define your gender and ethnicity?
- 3) Kuinka usein käytät sosiaalisen median alustoja Facebook ja Instagram? / How often do you use Facebook and Instagram?
- 4) Millä laitteilla käytät alustoja? / Which devices do you use to access social media? Do you use desktop or application version more often?
- 5) Kuinka pitkään olet ollut sosiaalisessa mediassa? / How long have you been a user on these social media platforms?
- 6) Tämän haastattelun tarkoitus on tutkia sosiaalisen median käyttäjäkokemuksia – erityisesti sukupuolierojen kannalta. Oletko joskus aiemmin pohtinut tai puhunut lähipiirissäsi sosiaalisen median aiheuttamista tuntemuksista tai kokemuksista? / The purpose of this interview is study the user experiences on social media. Have you given a thought about the issue or discussed about it with someone before?

The two themes of these interviews

Teema 1: User experiences

Teema 2: Structures and the feminist lens

Theme 1

- 7) How would you describe yourself as a social media user? Has your behavior changed during the time you've had the user accounts? / Minkälaiseksi Facebookin ja/tai Instagramin käyttäjäksi kutsuisit itseäsi? Onko somen käyttösi muuttunut käyttövuosien aikana?
- 8) Do you have any specific intentions of use? When you open an application or visit the site, do you have any primary reasons? / Minkä takia avaat somesivuston/ -applikaation? Onko sinulla aikomuksia somen avaamisen taustalla? (*Uses and gratifications*)
- 9) Which things do you enjoy when using Facebook & Instagram? / Mistä asioista nautit, kun käytät Facebookia ja/tai Instagramia? (*Uses and gratifications & Three perspectives on UX, the experiential*)
- 10) Which things evoke negative feelings when using Facebook & Instagram? / Mitkä asiat herättävät negatiivisia tuntemuksia, kun käytät Facebookia/Instagramia? (*Uses and gratifications*)
- 11) Now that you listed these things, are they constant or does other things such as personal life, other feelings or situations of use affect these negative or positive experiences? / Nyt kun olet listannut negatiivisia ja positiivisia käyttötuntemuksia, ovatko ne pysyviä vakioita vai voivatko ne vaihdella esim. ajan tai tilanteen suhteen? (*Three perspectives on UX, the experiential*)

- 12) How do these platforms (Facebook & Instagram) affect your social life? / Miten nämä somealustat vaikuttavat sosiaaliseen elämääsi? (*Social capital*)
- How do you interact or communicate with your existing, in-real-life friends/closed-ones? / Miten olet yhteydessä offline-elämän tuttaviesi ja läheistesi kanssa? (*Uses and gratifications*)
 - And then in which situations do you communicate with people you don't know offline? / Millaisissa tilanteissa olet yhteydessä somen välityksellä sellaisiin käyttäjiin, joita et tunne offline-maailmasta? (*Uses and gratifications*)
- 13) When you open Instagram, what do you see, why do you think you see it and how does it make you feel? (*Formulation of an experience & Three perspectives on UX, beyond the instrumental*)
- Open Facebook, what do you see, why do you think you see it and how does it make you feel?

Theme 2

- 14) Have you ever experienced that Facebook or Instagram would not be accessible? Why? (Accessibility) / Oletko koskaan ollut tilanteessa, jossa et olisi kyennyt käyttämään Facebookkia tai Instagramia henkilökohtaisista syistä? Voitko antaa esimerkin?
- 15) When using Facebook/Instagram, do you feel like the icons and other visual elements are easily understandable and do they feel correct for the purpose? How would you improve them? / Kun avaat Facebookin/Instagramin, kerro alaosan ikonit ja kuvaile lyhyesti mitä niillä tehdään. Miten parantaisit niitä? (Data visualization)
- 16) When scrolling through your feed, how accurately do you feel like it reflects your interests and your values? / Kun selaat etusivua, kuinka oikeaan sisältöön osuvat, kun mietit omia kiinnostuksen kohteitasi ja arvojasi? (Personalized content)
- 17) Do other people's actions on social media affect your own actions? / Vaikuttavatko muiden ihmisten toimet alustoilla omiin tekoihisi alustalla? Kerro, miten? (Platform using power, describing other people)
- 18) Earlier, you mentioned that you initially use FB & IG to *insert answer to Q8 here*. Do you feel like you are able to perform that task freely? / Aiemmin mainitsit, että käytät FB:tä ja IG:tä ensisijaisesti näihin *vastaus K8*. Pystytkö mielestäsi toteuttamaan näitä aikeitasi vapaasti? (restricted opportunity to interact)
- 19) When using the social media, do you often spend more time there than you initially intended? Why? / Kun käytät alustoja, vietätkö joskus tai usein aikaa enemmän kuin alun perin olit ajatellut? Miksi? (Suggestion to interact)
- 20) Explain the situation if Facebook / Instagram have ever diminished your visibility ("shadowbanned"), or blocked you for doing (searching, commenting etc.) some act? / Kerro tilanteesta, jos FB/IG on koskaan heikentänyt sisältösi näkyvyyttä tai estänyt sinua suorittamasta jotain yksittäistä tapahtumaa? (Company uses power)
- 21) If you'd like to change the content on your feed, do you feel like you could? Have you ever tried to "impact your feed"? / Jos haluaisit vaikuttaa sisältöön, jota sinulle

näytetään, niin luuletko että pystyisit? Oletko yrittänyt sitä ja jos olet, niin miten?
(Communicating preferences)

- 22) Do you feel more protected by the Finnish law or the community guidelines when using social media platform? Why? / Tunnetko, että oikeuksiasi somealustoilla suojelee enemmän Suomen laki vai sosiaalisen median omat käyttöehdot? Miksi? (Governmental regulation)
- 23) Have you ever reported any content for its inappropriateness? Do you feel like the social media responded in a good way to your report? / Oletko koskaan ilmiantanut mitään sisältöä sen epäsovpuuden takia? Millainen oli somealustan reaktio ilmiantoosi ja tunnetko, että reaktio oli hyvä?
- a) Do you consider of the possibility of ending up being reported for your content? How does that affect your behaviour? / Ajatteletko omien julkaisujesi kohdalla niiden mahdollisuutta joutua ilmiannetuksi? Miten tämä ajatus vaikuttaa somekäyttämiseesi? (User-prompted moderation)