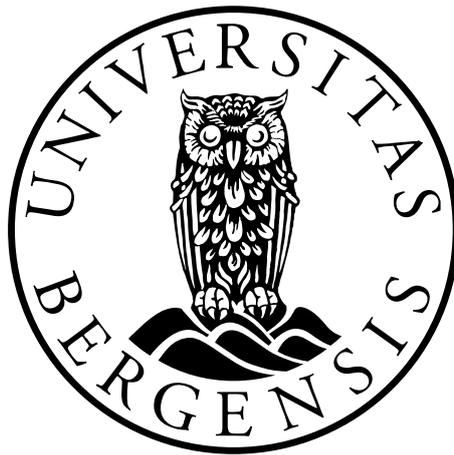


# Exploring the role of social media in the lives and well-being of young refugees in Bergen, Norway

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	I
LIST OF TABLES .....	IV
LIST OF FIGURES .....	IV
ABSTRACT.....	V
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS .....	VII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Context.....	2
1.3 Problem statement.....	7
1.4 Definitions of terms used: <i>refugees, social media, well-being</i> .....	7
1.5 Outline thesis structure .....	9
CHAPTER 2: THEORY .....	10
2.1 Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory .....	10
2.2 Capability Approach .....	12
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	16
3.1 Introduction.....	16
3.2 Literature search process.....	16
3.3 Refugees and technology, including social media.....	16
3.3.1 The role of social media in migration processes .....	17
3.3.2 The role of social media in integration processes .....	18
3.4 Social media and well-being.....	20
3.5 Messages and campaigns aimed at refugees on social media.....	23
3.5.1 ‘Migration information’ campaigns .....	23
3.5.2 Portrayals of refugees on social media.....	25
3.6 Conclusion .....	26
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	28
CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY .....	29
5.1 Introduction.....	29
5.2 Research design .....	29
5.3 Data generation .....	30
5.3.1 Study site.....	30

5.3.2 Recruitment strategy .....	31
5.3.3 Participants .....	32
5.3.4 Data generation methods .....	33
5.3.5 Data management .....	36
5.4 Ethics .....	36
5.5 Quality assurance .....	38
5.5.1 Trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability .....	38
5.5.2 Role of the researcher .....	38
5.6 Limitations .....	40
5.7 Framework for data analysis .....	40
<b>CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>42</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	42
6.2 Findings from interviews with refugees .....	42
6.2.1 How and why young refugees use social media in their lives in Norway .....	43
6.2.1.1 Uses and Gratifications .....	43
6.2.1.2 Access and limitations .....	51
6.2.2 Achievements enabled by social media use .....	52
6.2.3 Experiences and perceptions of social media in Norway .....	55
6.2.3.1 Experiences of social media in Norway .....	55
6.2.3.2 Reactions to messages, groups, and campaigns aimed at refugees in Norway ....	56
6.2.4 The importance of trust and the offline world .....	59
6.3 Findings from online observations .....	61
6.3.1 ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ Facebook group .....	62
6.3.2 ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’ Facebook group .....	65
6.3.3 @utlendingsdir Twitter feed .....	67
<b>CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>68</b>
7.0 Introduction .....	68
7.1 Discussion of findings in relation to Uses & Gratifications theory .....	68
7.2 Discussion of findings in relation to Capability Approach .....	71
7.3 Linking Capability Approach and Uses & Gratifications theory .....	74
7.4 Messages, groups, and campaigns aimed at refugees .....	75
7.5 Other themes and issues raised by the findings .....	77
7.5.1 Trust in social media .....	77
7.5.2 The importance of the offline world .....	78
7.5.3 ‘Active’ versus ‘passive’ use of social media .....	79
7.5.4 Agency .....	81
7.5.5 Summary: linking findings with health promotion .....	82
7.6 Limitations of the study .....	84
7.6.1 Participants .....	84
7.6.2 Avoidance of harm .....	85
7.6.3 Challenges with conducting online observation .....	85

7.6.4 Difficulties of broad terms: “ <i>social media</i> ” and “ <i>refugees</i> ” .....	87
7.6.5 Generalisability and transferability of the study .....	88
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION .....	89
Recommendations for research and practice .....	92
REFERENCES.....	94
APPENDICES .....	101
APPENDIX 1: Recruitment flyer .....	101
APPENDIX 2: Interview guides .....	102
APPENDIX 3: Social media prompt sheet for interviewees .....	105
APPENDIX 4: Observation notes template .....	106
APPENDIX 5: Online survey questions .....	107
APPENDIX 6: Informed consent form for interviewees .....	108
APPENDIX 7: NSD ethical approval letter .....	110
APPENDIX 8: Thematic map from data analysis of interviews with refugees.....	113
APPENDIX 9: Data analysis coding table from interviews with refugees .....	114
APPENDIX 10: Full size Figure 1. <i>The role of social media in promoting well-being among young refugees in Norway</i> .....	115

## List of Tables

Table 1: <i>Selected 'Uses and Gratifications factors' from empirical studies using U&amp;G theory with online media</i> .....	12
Table 2: <i>Interview participants</i> .....	33
Table 3: <i>Summary of themes developed during analysis of interviews with refugees</i> .....	42
Table 4: <i>Motives, Achievements and suggested Capabilities of social media use as found in this study</i> .....	75

## List of Figures

<i>Figure.1. Bus seats in a picture posted by Fedrelandet Viktigst/Fatherland first</i> .....	6
<i>Figure 2. Irregular migration comic strip</i> .....	64
<i>Figure 3. Summary: The role of social media in promoting well-being among young refugees in Norway</i> .....	83

## Abstract

In the wake of the “refugee crisis”, social media is increasingly being used by governments, humanitarian organisations, voluntary groups, and refugees themselves, to respond to issues raised by forced migration. Social media is regarded as both a facilitator and barrier in migration processes, and in recent years has been used by policy-makers and practitioners as a resource to promote integration and support refugees in host countries as well as a tool to deter migration (in official government ‘migration information’ campaigns). The potential of social media to reach migrant and refugee populations has also attracted the attention of health promoters. However, there is little evidence regarding the effects of targeted messages and campaigns delivered by social media on refugees themselves, including the impact on their well-being. There is also limited empirical research on how refugees are already using social media in their everyday lives in host countries, how it is of value to them, and what outcomes they themselves want to achieve - and are achieving - by using it.

This study aims to understand how and why young refugees living in Norway use social media in their everyday lives, to explore their experiences of using it and identify capabilities that it offers them, and to make connections between their social media use and well-being. It adopts a qualitative approach, employing as research methods: in-depth interviews with eight young refugees of different nationalities living in Bergen; interviews with two key informants representing a ‘Refugees Welcome’ group in Norway and the Norwegian government’s ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ migration information campaign; and online observation of two public Facebook groups focused on refugees in Norway, ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ and ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’. Two theories are used to frame the study and guide the analysis of findings: *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, which is an approach to understanding why individuals actively seek out particular media, including social media, to satisfy specific needs; and the *Capability Approach*, which shifts focus from the resources that individuals have access to, such as technologies, towards the outcomes that they are able to achieve with them.

Findings from analysis of study participants’ reported uses of social media indicate that their main motivations for using social media in their lives in Norway are communication, access to information, and learning. Analysis of participants’ reported achievements suggests that

social media as a resource offers five related capabilities: effective communication; social connectedness; participation in learning opportunities; access to information; and expression of self. Other findings from the study, such as issues of trust in social media, preferences for ‘real-life’ face-to-face contact, and differences in approach to using social media (‘active’ versus ‘passive’ use), are also discussed. Migration information campaigns conducted on social media are found to have little direct impact on participants in this study. However, participants report awareness of and positive responses to social media groups supporting refugees in Norway (such as the ‘Refugees Welcome’ Facebook groups).

The thesis concludes by highlighting that, although not all participants in the study engage with social media in the same way and some negative experiences are reported, social media does have an important positive role to play in their well-being. Recommendations include ensuring that all asylum seekers and refugees in Norway have the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to navigate social media; including refugees in the design and implementation of initiatives using social media, particularly around issues of trust and security; and recognising the value of identifying the social media platforms that refugees are already using in their daily lives, and using these to deliver health promotion messages and learning opportunities.

***Keywords:*** *Refugees, social media, digital technology, well-being, health, Norway, uses and gratifications, capability approach*

## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CA	Capability Approach/Capabilities Approach
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NSD	Norsk senter for forskningsdata (National Centre for Data Research)
‘Refugees Welcome’	‘Refugees Welcome to....’ Facebook groups for refugees in Norway (currently over 60 groups for different locations in Norway, e.g. Refugees Welcome to Bergen)
SNS	Social Networking Site
‘Stricter’	‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ campaign
UDI	Utlendingsdirektoratet (The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration)
U&G	Uses and Gratifications (theory)
NMJPS	Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The overall purpose of this study is to explore how and why young newly arrived and settled refugees living in Bergen, Norway, use social media<sup>1</sup> in their everyday lives; to examine what they report that they are able to achieve by using social media that is of value to them; and to explore what this suggests about the capabilities that social media offers refugees, and how these capabilities can contribute to their well-being<sup>2</sup>.

For migrating and settled refugees around the world, access to the Internet and social media is now considered essential. Recent research conducted for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) found that migrating refugees regarded Internet access as being as important as food, education, and healthcare (UNHCR, 2016, p.15). For newly settled refugees, the Internet provides opportunities to engage with host and home communities and to find and share information on local employment, education, and health opportunities and resources. Host countries and refugee agencies are therefore also beginning to acknowledge the value of giving newly arrived refugees access to the Internet, which in itself is recognised as beneficial for host communities (UNHCR, 2016, p.20).

For Norway, which is one of the most ‘connected’ countries in the world - 98% of the population have an Internet connection (Internet Live Stats, 2016) – these issues are especially relevant, particularly as the country tries to accommodate unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees. For a country that until recently remained home to a largely homogenous, white Christian population, the demographic changes of the last few decades have been significant. In 1996, just 5.1% of the total population of Norway was of immigrant background (Lofthus, 1998, p. 9); twenty years later this figure stood at 16% (Norwegian Ministries, 2017, p. 9). In the wake of the global “refugee crisis”<sup>3</sup>, which brought large

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Social media’ is treated as both a singular and plural term in the literature. In this thesis I will use the singular, since this is the preference in most key literature that I have used. Some quotations used may refer to social media in the plural form.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Well-being’ is also written as ‘wellbeing’ and, less commonly, ‘well being’ in the literature. I will use the hyphenated form throughout this thesis since this is the preference of the World Health Organization. Some quotations used may take other forms.

<sup>3</sup> The term “refugee crisis” has been commonly used in popular, policy, and academic discourse to describe the large number of people arriving in Europe seeking asylum since 2015. However, the term suggests that the

numbers of refugees to Europe, the number of asylum applications to Norway in 2015 rose to 31,145, almost triple that of the previous year (Norwegian Ministries, 2017, p. 35). As a result, the country struggled to process asylum applications and to provide an immediate and coordinated response to those seeking asylum. Since then, Norway's asylum and immigration laws have tightened considerably, resulting in a dramatic fall in the number of refugees admitted and the closure of many transit camps, or reception centres, for asylum seekers. Issues of immigration have become essential themes in Norwegian political and public discourse, and integration is central to the current debates on immigration policy. By 2017, 4.1% of the Norwegian population (217, 241 people) had a refugee background, approximately 20% of whom were in the 20-29 age group (Statistics Norway, 2017; Statistics Norway, 2018a, Table 08376).

In Bergen, the second largest city in Norway, the number of residents with a refugee background is around the national average, standing at approximately 3.7 per cent in 2016 (Statistics Norway, 2016, para. 8). However, the situation for most refugees in Bergen is different to that in other parts of Norway in that usually the city is not their first place of entry. Often they have previously been allocated to a 'mottak', or transit camp for asylum seekers, in another part of the country where their basic needs have been met and they have begun the asylum process. As such, they are already in 'the system' before arrival in Bergen. The challenges faced by refugees in Bergen tend to be related more to issues of integration than with emergency or basic needs provision. On arrival in Bergen, refugees aged 18-55 who cannot immediately enter the workforce or education begin a mandatory two-year Introduction programme run by the Bergen kommune, which aims to equip them to get a job or participate in formal education. The Introduction programme includes courses in Norwegian language and society, and introduction to the health system (d'Alessandro, 2016). However, despite having such processes in place to facilitate integration, many young refugees in the city, who often arrive in Norway alone, still struggle to meet Norwegians and to feel 'at home'.

## **1.2 Context**

The uses of social media in response to the "refugee crisis", in Norway and elsewhere, can be seen in a number of different areas. One of these is a growing interest in using social media

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problem is caused by refugees, rather than a crisis for the displaced people forced to migrate. I will refer to the term in quotation marks throughout this thesis in recognition of the fact that it can be a problematic term.

as a means of supporting refugees – by providing them with necessary information, contacts, support networks – and this is evident in the efforts of the activist and humanitarian organisations which have used social media to provide and coordinate support for refugees in Norway. For example, a ‘Refugees Welcome Norway’ Facebook group was established in summer 2015 to show refugees that they were welcome in Norway and to provide information and a common contact point for newly arrived refugees and those wanting to help them (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RefugeesWelcomeToNorway/>). By March 2018, this group had just over 72,000 members. It has become part of a larger network of ‘Refugees Welcome’ Facebook groups in Norway run by volunteers, many of whom work with refugees in their professional life. There are currently over 60 local and specialist Facebook groups under the ‘Refugees Welcome’ umbrella in Norway, including groups for Bergen and the Hordaland region and one group specifically focused on health. These groups respond to local needs but interact with each other. Humanitarian and voluntary organisations such as the Norwegian Red Cross are also increasingly considering and using social media to reach and engage refugees, including young refugees.

Digital technologies are also being used as methods of sharing health information with the general population and for health promotion interventions, leading some to claim that “social media are becoming preferred methods of health promotion as evidence builds showing their effectiveness in reaching public audiences” (Korda & Itani, 2013, p.16). Social media certainly offers attractive possibilities for health promoters to gain access to and engage with communities, including those considered hard-to-reach, at a relatively low cost and with minimal personnel. Given the interest in using digital technologies for health promotion with general populations, it is unsurprising that interest in the potential of using these technologies, including social media, for engaging with and providing health information to refugees and migrants is also growing. There is anecdotal evidence of asylum seekers using social media to access health information during their journeys and in asylum camps, and a growing number of apps, including apps for health care and psychosocial support, have been developed to support refugee orientation in host countries in the wake of the “refugee crisis” (Mason, Schwedersky & Alfawakheeri, 2017). However, using social media for health promotion is itself a relatively new phenomenon, and research and evaluation on its use and effectiveness with asylum seekers and refugees remains limited. There is concern that research and evaluation of health promotion delivered via social media sites, even among the

general population, is not keeping pace with the recent proliferation in health promotion initiatives using them (Lim, Wright, Carrotte, & Pedrana, 2016).

Another recent use of social media has been as a tool for delivery of official ‘migration information campaigns’. In the last few years governments around the world have been using social media in these campaigns to spread messages to potential asylum seekers about the dangers and difficulties of seeking asylum and about the consequences of ‘illegal’ immigration. Most have focused on the dangers involved in the journey, the consequences of living illegally in destination countries, and more recently, on the implementation of stricter immigration policies in receiving countries. Examples include the ‘No Way’ campaign implemented by Australia in 2013, the ‘Aware Migrants’ campaign by Italy in 2016, and Norway’s ‘Stricter Asylum Regulation in Norway’ campaign. A recent review of thirty-three migration information campaigns found that eight had employed social media (Schans & Optekamp, 2016). A survey into the use of social media in migration information campaigns conducted for the Norwegian Institute for Social Research, found that six of the nine European countries surveyed had employed social media (Beyer, Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2017). This research also found that only the Norwegian ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations’ campaign had used a social media platform - Facebook - as its exclusive communication channel. The others had used social media as a supporting channel or link to other more traditional forms of communication, such as web pages or television.

The Norwegian government’s ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ campaign, which has the stated aim of targeting “potential asylum seekers and other migrants” (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 19), began in 2015 and was extended in 2017. Its official Facebook page, managed by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, had almost 37,000 followers by March 2018 (<https://www.facebook.com/asylumregulations/>). When Norway launched the campaign on Twitter in 2015, Joran Kallmyr, the Norwegian State Secretary of Justice, told the press that the aim of the campaign was “to get the number [of immigrants] down” (Orange, 2015, para. 5). This was apparent confirmation of the use of the campaign for migration control, rather than a humanitarian attempt to prevent harm to potential migrants. The ethics of ‘migration information’ campaigns have therefore been questioned by some observers, since extreme negative messages may have the effect of deterring people in desperate situations, facing torture, discrimination and human rights abuses, from seeking asylum (Schans & Optekamp, 2016, p.25).

There has, however, been little attempt to examine the impact of migration information campaigns, either in terms of their influence on decisions to migrate and migrant numbers or their effect on migrants themselves. A 2015 report prepared for the UK government found “no publically available evaluations of information campaigns” and “extremely little” evidence on their impact and effectiveness on decisions to migrate and migrant numbers (Browne, 2015, p.2). In Norway, analysis of the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ campaign highlighted a lack of evidence about its impact on both immigration numbers and on the perception of potential migrants (Beyer et al., 2017). One research study in the UK, however, found that migration campaigns aimed at illegal migrants provoked or increased anger, fear, and anxiety among all migrants - including those living legally (Jones et al., 2017). What little evidence there is suggests that there is reason to believe that the effects of migration campaigns, in their aim to reduce migration to specific countries, are limited. Literature suggests that the causes of irregular migration are not a lack of information about its dangers, but the unchanged conditions of poverty, inequality, conflict and lack of economic opportunities in home countries (Musarò, 2016, para.18). Yet, despite a lack of evaluation or evidence of the effectiveness, or indeed harm, of migration information campaigns, they continue to be popular with policy makers. They are cheap and easy to implement, and can be seen to send a strong message to potential migrants as well as to host country populations.

In addition to official government migration information campaigns, social media has also been used to spread negative portrayals of refugees and anti-immigrant responses amongst host populations. In Norway, this has included the ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’ Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/Muslims-NOT-welcome-to-Norway-139612049752821><sup>4</sup>) and other anti-immigrant Facebook groups and Twitter hashtags. Recently, the private Facebook group ‘Fedrelandet viktigst’ (Fatherland first) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/977401442274457/>) made headlines around the world for posting misinformation and a “prank” photograph purporting to show a group of Muslim women wearing burqas on the bus in Norway (these were actually empty bus seats, see picture below), fuelling anti-immigrant responses (Henley, 2017). In March 2018, a Facebook post by the then anti-immigrant justice minister, Sylvi Listhaug, accusing the

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<sup>4</sup> This group changed its name to ‘Muslims NOT Welcome to Norway’ in 2018, but previously operated as ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’.

Labour party of supporting terrorists over Norwegian people, resulted in her resignation and almost caused the collapse of the Norwegian government. These examples show how social media is increasingly present in contemporary political and social debates about immigration.



*Figure.1.* Bus seats in a picture posted by Fedrelandet Viktigst/Fatherland first (Henley, 2017)

The effect that migration information campaigns, negative portrayals of refugees, and ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ immigration messages and groups targeted at refugees disseminated via social media have on refugees themselves, and their well-being, is largely unknown. Furthermore, how refugees are actually using social media in their everyday lives, and how this use can contribute to development and well-being outcomes, is only beginning to be examined. Academic studies with marginalised groups and refugees on their use of digital technologies have largely focussed on usage in relation to researchers’ pre-supposed outcomes (for example, the impact of use on employability, social inclusion, political engagement), much of which is biased toward project-based and economic ends, rather than outcomes of refugees’ own choosing (Nicholson, Nugroho & Rangaswamy, 2016). Such an approach focuses on digital technologies to fulfil assumed ‘needs’, rather than what refugees themselves want to achieve or how they wish to incorporate technology into their lives. As the authors of one recent study into how refugees use the Internet in their daily lives reported, “To date, we are unaware of any studies looking at how refugees are actually using the Internet on their own and to what end” (Mikal & Woodfield, 2015, p. 1322). However, a few studies related to digital technologies and development have shown that ‘non-instrumental’ use of technology (primarily for entertainment or for passing time), which might be dismissed as time wasting, can have development and well-being outcomes such as digital literacy, income generation, empowerment, and relationship maintenance (Nicholson et al., 2016; Nemer, 2016). Nevertheless, much is still unknown about how social media is used and valued, and what it offers, from the perspective of refugees themselves.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Understanding how young refugees use social media, and for what purposes, has practical implications for the development of health promotion messages and support resources aimed at them. It cannot be assumed that universal access to technology alone, or ability to use it, is enough to ensure user engagement – an understanding of how and why users use technologies including social media, and how they relate to them, is essential in order to develop effective initiatives and campaigns delivered by them. Yet little is known about how refugees actually use social media in their lives in host countries or what they are able to achieve themselves from doing so. This study therefore has potential significance for health professionals and those working with refugees in Norway who are developing initiatives delivered by social media. Since the use of social media within health promotion is a new area, with relatively little research and evaluation yet undertaken, the study also contributes to scholarly development.

Furthermore, given that there has been insufficient evaluation of the effectiveness of migration information campaigns, which are a relatively new phenomena, in their stated aim of reducing migration, it is to be expected that even less attention has been given to their effects on those that they are targeted at. Very little is known about refugees' experiences and interpretations of such campaigns - particularly in Norway, which runs its 'Stricter Asylum Regulations' campaign exclusively through social media. Indeed, neither is there much information available as to how refugees respond to messages and groups which are positive towards them on social media, and whether such groups may help to enhance their sense of belonging and well-being. This study therefore also has significance for policy-makers, refugee organisations, and activists using social media as a communication tool.

By examining refugees' actual use of social media, and the value that they themselves attach to it, the study contributes to a small body of research exploring the how refugees use social media on their own in their daily lives in host countries, and the potential benefits of doing so.

### **1.4 Definitions of terms used: *refugees, social media, well-being***

In this thesis, the term *refugees* is used to describe those who have been forced to leave their home country, as opposed to those who have chosen to leave (migrants), and who have met

the requirements for being granted asylum in their host country (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, n.d., para. 1).

A commonly used definition of *social media* is that provided by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61): “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Social media encompasses a range of different platforms including Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook); media sharing (e.g. YouTube); microblogging (e.g. Twitter) and blogging; and virtual games and social worlds. ‘Social media’ is often used interchangeably with ‘Social Networking Sites’ (SNSs), but there is a subtle distinction between the two. SNSs are used to form social networks and relationships, and as such require users to engage in mutual communication. Social media, however, does not necessarily require users to be in mutual communication with others (for example when sharing media or posting content). SNSs are therefore more a subcategory of a broader ‘social media’ category.

Whilst there is no consensus on a single definition of *well-being* – indeed the concept of well-being has been described as “notoriously difficult to define precisely” (White, 2010, p. 160), it has been defined in public health literature as “judging life positively and feeling good” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016, para. 6) and as comprising two main elements: feeling good and functioning well (Aked, Marks, Cordon, & Thompson, 2008, p.1). ‘Feeling good’ and ‘doing well’ are both elements that seem to be common to definitions in literature on the concept of well-being. Often, social science research refers to two dimensions in assessments of well-being: objective well-being and subjective well-being. The ‘objective’ aspect focuses on external components presumed to indicate a better life for individuals or societies, such as educational achievement, employment, or material well-being. ‘Subjective’ well-being usually focuses on an individual’s perceived life satisfaction and happiness. In recent years, there has been an acknowledgement that measuring subjective well-being is essential to measuring overall Quality of Life (QoL), which has itself become an important concept in health care. Subjective well-being and the ‘Capability Approach’, which is used as a theoretical framework for this thesis, are commonly used measures for well-being.

## **1.5 Outline thesis structure**

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. This introductory chapter is followed by a review of the literature relating to refugees and technology, particularly social media, and gaps in the literature are identified. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework for this study, which comprises *Uses and Gratifications theory* and Amartya Sen's *Capability Approach*. Chapter 4 outlines the main objective of the study and research questions. Chapter 5 presents the research methodology, including research design and methods of data generation. Chapter 6 provides the empirical findings, which are then discussed in Chapter 7. Chapter 7 also discusses limitations of the study. Chapter 8 concludes with a summary of key findings and recommendations for research and practice.

## Chapter 2: Theory

The two theories that frame my study are described in this chapter. These theories guide my research questions, my review of the literature, and my analysis and interpretation of the data. The first, *Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory*, is used to analyse how and why young refugees use social media in their everyday lives, and to identify potential ‘factors’, or ‘motives’, of this use. The second, the *Capability Approach*, is used to analyse and identify the *capabilities* associated with their use of social media – with a particular focus on how these capabilities can be linked to key factors of well-being. Whilst one of the themes of U&G theory - the “uses” - focuses on the technology-oriented ‘means’ of participants’ social media use, the Capability Approach focuses more on the ‘ends’: identifying capabilities enabled by participants’ use of social media, which may in turn contribute to development outcomes and impact on their well-being.

### 2.1 Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory

U&G theory has been long used as an approach to understand how and why people actively seek out particular media to satisfy specific needs, and to examine what people do with media as active participants, as opposed to what it does to them. The basic principle involved in U&G is that individuals seek out media that fulfils their needs and leads to gratification (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The focus on satisfying specific needs seems an appropriate approach for this study since it can be assumed that settled refugees actively use social media as a result of specific needs developed during the process of their migration and settlement. The U&G approach also emphasises the personal social and psychological context in which media is consumed, which motivates the choice of content and achievement of particular gratifications - again, particularly relevant to the experiences of refugees.

U&G theory has been used in media and communications research since the 1940s. Early research (Herzog, 1940; Lazarsfeld, & Stanton, 1949) began to examine and classify the reasons that audiences consumed different media (radio, newspapers, and comics), but this work was primarily descriptive rather than theoretically coherent (Ruggiero, 2000). Building on this initial research, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) developed the U&G framework in the early 1970s, and are often credited with the first use of the theory and for causing a paradigm shift from how media influences people to how audiences use media. Over the

years, the focus on creating categories of gratifications has continued and multiple typologies of gratifications have continued to emerge, specific to different contexts (Spencer, Croucher, & Hoelscher, 2012). In recent years, U&G theory has seen a revival due to the advent of digital technologies. It has proved particularly relevant to addressing questions of why and how individuals are adopting social media because of its origins in the communications literature (social media being a mechanism for communication) and its focus on active audience members, individual choices, and divergent populations (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Quan-Hasse & Young, 2014, p. 273). A recent progression of the U&G framework has been to examine the distinction between gratifications ‘sought’ and gratifications ‘obtained’, including investigating the relationship between the two and how this can predict user satisfaction levels (Spencer et al., 2012). Whilst there are some criticisms of U&G theory, including that it lacks theoretical substance and justification (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 11), and is more an approach to data collection and analysis, it does provide a basis for examining how and why individuals use media. “A typology of uses, although not providing what some scholars would consider a refined theoretical perspective, furnishes a benchmark base of data for other studies to further examine media use” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 12).

Currently, there is a vast body of literature, located mainly within media and communications studies, on the uses and gratifications of the Internet and social media, particularly Social Networking Sites (SNSs). Various U&G ‘factors’ (also referred to as ‘motives’, ‘motivations’, or ‘themes’) for Internet use have been identified in empirical research. Examples of common U&G factors from studies using online media include: entertainment, passing time, and social interaction. (U&G factors identified in studies often cited in the literature are presented in Table 1 below.) However, much U&G research has not distinguished between gratifications sought and obtained, and most studies taking U&G as a theoretical approach have examined SNSs, particularly Facebook. Most have used college students as participants; few have engaged with marginalised populations. There are some studies on refugees and technology using U&G as a theoretical framework, but they tend to focus on use of technology during refugees’ ‘flight’ or in refugee camps. Given that an increased focus on refugees has recently emerged as a result of the 2015 “refugee crisis”, peer-reviewed studies in this area are also quite limited (Kondova, 2016).

Table 1: Selected 'Uses and Gratifications factors' from empirical studies using U&G theory with online media

Authors	Year	Medium	Participants	U&G 'factors' identified from online media use	
Papacharissi & Mendelson	2011	Social media (Facebook)	Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>expressive information sharing</li> <li>habitual pass time</li> <li>relaxing entertainment</li> <li>companionship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>professional advancement</li> <li>escape</li> <li>social interaction</li> <li>new friendships</li> <li>cool and new trend</li> </ul>
Papacharissi & Rubin	2000	Internet	Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpersonal utility</li> <li>pass time</li> <li>information seeking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>convenience</li> <li>entertainment</li> </ul>
Parker & Plank	2000	Internet	Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>companionship</li> <li>social interaction</li> <li>surveillance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>excitement</li> <li>relaxation</li> <li>escapism</li> </ul>
Song, LaRose, Eastin & Lin	2004	Internet	Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>virtual community</li> <li>information seeking</li> <li>aesthetic experience</li> <li>monetary compensation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>diversion</li> <li>personal status</li> <li>relationship maintenance</li> </ul>
Whiting & Williams	2013	Social media	Users aged 18-56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social interaction</li> <li>information seeking</li> <li>passing time</li> <li>entertainment</li> <li>relaxation</li> <li>communicatory utility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>convenience utility</li> <li>expression of opinion</li> <li>information sharing</li> <li>surveillance/knowledge about others</li> </ul>

U&G theory is used in this study to focus on two central themes of young refugees' social media use: *how* they use social media in their everyday lives (for example, the platforms they use, how they access these, how often) and *why* they choose to use them (motivations for this use, including gratifications sought and obtained) (Quan-Hasse & Young, 2014, p. 274).

## 2.2 Capability Approach

The second theory that will provide a framework for this study is Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA), also known as the *Capabilities* Approach. This approach shifts the focus from the resources that a person has access to, toward the uses or outcomes that a person can make of the resources available to them. The CA has significantly influenced the fields of economics and development, development policy, and human development theories and measures, including the Human Development Index (HDI). AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017, p. 1794) conclude that the CA has proven a valuable approach in the context of refugee research. However, it has only recently been applied to technology (Oosterlaken, 2012) and to exploring the use of technology by marginalised groups, including refugees. Its potential for those interested in ICT and development has, however, been recognised: "Given the enormous potential of ICTs to give individuals choices, and indeed a greater sense of choice, Sen's approach is of particular interest to those working on ICT and development" (Kleine, 2010, p. 687). In recent years, Andrade and Doolin (2016) have used the central concepts of

the CA to explore the ICT use of resettled refugees in New Zealand; AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017) have used the CA as a conceptual framework in a study of ICTs in supporting the integrations of Syrian refugees in Germany; and Nemer (2016) applied the principles of the CA to research into social media use in the favelas of Brazil.

There are several key elements that make up the capability framework. The two key concepts, which this study will focus on, are the concepts of '*capabilities*' and '*functionings*'.

*Capabilities* represent the real opportunities that individuals have to achieve outcomes of value to them and to lead the kind of lives they value. Sen (1999, p. 87) describes capability as a kind of freedom; capabilities as “the substantive freedoms [an individual] enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value”. The second, interrelated, concept of *functionings* refers to “things a person may value doing or being” (Sen, 1999, p. 75), or, in other words, valuable achievements and activities that a person has already realised. Alkire and Deneulin (2009, p.31) describe functionings as the “valuable activities and states that make up people’s well-being”, which, in relation to ICT use, could include communicating effectively, understanding a new society, and being socially connected (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). In distinguishing between functionings and capabilities, Sen (1987, p.36) describes how “a functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve”; in other words, the former represents *achievement* and the latter *freedom*. The key concern of the CA, however, is with capabilities – individuals’ freedom to be and do what they want – which can be assessed by observing their actual functionings and the value that they place on them. “The assessment of capabilities has to proceed primarily on the basis of observing a person’s actual functionings, to be supplemented by other information...the valuation of actual functionings is one way of assessing how a person values the options she has” (Sen, 1999, p. 131).

Other important aspects and concepts of the CA are ‘agency’ (the ability to pursue goals and interests that an individual has reason to value, which may include well-being) (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 37), individual ‘endowments’ (the resources available to individuals, which can include biology, skills, resources), and ‘conversion factors’ (the personal, social and environmental factors that affect individual ability to access and convert endowments into capabilities) (Chiappero-Martinetti & Venkatapuram, 2014, p. 711). These aspects need to be taken into account when assessing the ability of individuals to convert capabilities into achieved functionings. Access to a reasonably diverse range of resources, which are subject

to personal, social and environmental factors, are required to realise particular functionings (AbuJarour and Krasnova, 2017, p. 1794). However, at the core of the CA is a focus on people rather than resources. Although resources can be important, they should be understood in terms of how they can enhance people's lives: "resources do not have an intrinsic value; instead their value derives from the opportunity that they give to people" (Anand, Hunter & Smith, 2005, p.10). Thus, in the case of social media as a resource, the focus is on the freedoms engendered by social media, rather than on social media itself (Andrade & Doolin, 2016, p.407).

The CA has been criticised for being too abstract and vague, and difficult to apply to the analysis of empirical research (Zheng & Walsham, 2008). However, in the field of ICT, using the key concepts (functionings and capabilities) in analysis of empirical research does encourage researchers to move beyond a focus on technologies as instrumental tools, and on issues of access, to consider the opportunities that ICTs give to people to lead the lives that they value.

#### *The Capability Approach and well-being*

In relation to well-being, the CA regards freedom to act and choose as a central issue. It argues that freedom to achieve well-being is of moral importance and that it can be understood in terms of individual preferences and the real opportunities that result from individual capabilities, as well as the structure of the environment in which they live. In an article on the CA and children's well-being, Ben-Arieh and Frønes (2011) argue that the CA offers a promising approach to studying the well-being of children, and I believe that the reasons that they offer could also well be applied to refugees. They point to the CA's focus on environment and the concept of evolving capabilities, both of which are suited to refugees as well as children, given that refugees also have to adjust to new environments, relationships, resources and commodities whose value they will have to assess. The authors assert that the CA is "fruitfully related to the understanding of specific contexts" as well as "to individuals or groups with special needs" whose "well-being is dependent upon an understanding of their specific relations to the social and physical environments." (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011, p. 464). This focus on context, special needs, and understanding of relationship within a specific social and physical environment seems pertinent to the study of refugees.

Whilst Sen himself has always avoided providing a list of possible capabilities, Nussbaum (2001) has attempted to identify and develop indicators to measure them. Nussbaum's (2001) list of ten Central Human Capabilities essential for human well-being includes: life expectancy, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, living with other species, play, and control over one's environment. Other scholars, (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011; Nemer, 2016) however, have called for well-being to be positioned within the framework of the CA, with a focus on outcomes that people themselves desire (Nemer, 2016, p. 375), rather than concern for a set of indicators for capabilities. They argue that the importance given to such indicators may well vary or be contested by different individuals in different contexts, and that observation of the outcomes that participants *themselves* wish for is still largely missing from research in the field of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D).

Inspired by the empirical research of Andrade and Doolin (2016), AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017), and Nemer (2016), this study attempts to identify capabilities associated with refugees' use of social media in their everyday lives in Norway by exploring how social media is of value to them in their lives and what they report that they are actually able to achieve (and value achieving) as a result of using it. What this suggests about how their use of social media is related to their "freedom to achieve wellbeing" (Sen, 1985, p. 201) is also explored. Throughout, the focus will be on the capabilities that participants themselves desire, rather than following prescribed indicators. Like Zheng and Walsham (2008) and Andrade and Doolin (2016), I use the central concepts of the CA as a framework and "sensitising device" for this study (Andrade & Doolin, 2016, p. 407).

## **Chapter 3: Literature review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Although the research questions informing this study, which are provided in Chapter 4, are addressed through empirical data generation and analysis, a discussion of current relevant literature helps to inform and contextualise my research and enables a meaningful discussion of findings in relation to other studies.

This chapter will focus particularly on empirical research relating to the role of social media in migration and integration processes, the role of social media in individual well-being, and analyses of campaigns and portrayals of refugees on social media. Where necessary, due to limited literature being available, I have included research on digital technologies as well as social media; migrants as well as refugees and asylum seekers; and young people as well as young refugees. Unless otherwise stated, the studies reviewed in this chapter are all qualitative empirical studies.

### **3.2 Literature search process**

The main databases that I searched to find literature relevant for this study were Web of Science and Oria (the University of Bergen Library database), as well as Google Scholar. I chose Web of Science as it is one of the world's largest databases of scholarly literature which includes access to the Social Sciences Citation Index, and I chose Google Scholar as it provides a good starting point to literature across a range of disciplines. I undertook a systematic search, keeping a log of search terms, combinations used, and relevant literature extracted. Search terms included "well-being", "refugees", "technology", "social media" and their related synonyms. Terms were truncated to allow for variations in spelling (for example, "well\*" to cover both "well-being" and "wellbeing"). I limited searches to literature published in English and, after initial searches, to literature published since 2012. I also used reference lists from papers I read to identify further papers of interest.

### **3.3 Refugees and technology, including social media**

Research has begun to examine how digital technologies, including social media, can be used to address the challenges faced by refugees both during their journey and after settlement in host countries. In the period after settlement, which is of most interest to my study, the research focus has tended to be on the role of technologies in two main areas: firstly, in

migration processes, particularly in migration decision-making and the maintenance of social ties to home countries (Komito 2011; Komito & Bates, 2011; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014); and secondly, in integration process, particularly social inclusion (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017; Brekke, 2008, Alencar, 2017, Alam & Imran, 2015; Gifford & Wilding, 2013; Felton, 2014). The literature related specifically to refugees, however, remains limited. For this reason, empirical research with migrant groups has therefore also been included.

### **3.3.1 The role of social media in migration processes**

Building on earlier research into how the Internet enabled traditional one-to-one communication which allowed migrants to maintain social ties with family and friends in home countries, researchers have recently begun to look at the role and influence of social media specifically in migration processes and decisions (Komito & Bates, 2011; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). It has been recognised that social media is distinct from other online communication (such as email) in that it relies on the development of users' social networks and for users to produce and share content within and across networks. Social media also facilitates the maintenance of stronger ties between migrants and their home countries, which can be part of their daily and real-time life through, for example, social networking sites and instant messaging, and also enables them to 'monitor' friends and family in other places (Komito & Bates, 2011).

Most of the recent research on social media in relation to migration decisions has been with economic migrants, rather than forced migrants such as refugees. This is perhaps unsurprising since refugees are likely to have less choice and decision-making ability in their migration. However, since government 'migration information' campaigns conducted by social media are based on the premise of influencing refugees' decisions about attempting to reach a particular country, it is worth considering what is known about the role of social media in facilitating migration and influencing decisions related to migration.

Social media has been found in empirical studies to influence migration in several ways. In research comprising interviews with 90 migrants in the Netherlands, Dekker and Engbersen (2014) identified four ways in which social media transformed the nature of migrant networks and facilitated migration: by enhancing the possibilities for migrants to maintain strong ties with family and friends at home; by supporting the weak ties in the destination

country that are relevant to organising the process of migration and integration; by enabling migrants to establish a new infrastructure in the host country; and by offering a rich source of insider knowledge on migration that is discrete and unofficial. However, whilst the authors state that their participants were migrants with a range of legal statuses and migration motives, it is not clear whether refugees were included in this study (Dekker & Engberson, 2014, p. 405).

The finding that social media enables the maintenance of strong ties with migrants' home countries is consistent with other studies (Komito & Bates, 2011; Komito, 2011; Brekke, 2008; Alencar, 2017). In a particularly relevant piece of research, and the only one found that focused on young refugees in Norway, Brekke (2008) discovered low levels of interaction between the young refugees that she interviewed in Tromsø and the local population but found that the Internet facilitated strong ties between them and their family and friends in home countries and other parts of the world. In a study of social media use by Polish and Filipino migrants in Ireland, Komito (2011) found that social media, specifically, facilitated strong ties between participants and their friends and family in home countries, and also enabled them to maintain a passive "watching brief" over the lives of their loved ones. It has been suggested that this possibility to maintain strong social connections with the migrants' home countries can in turn lessen the emotional and social costs of migration, and therefore potentially make the decision to migrate easier (Dekker & Engberson, 2014).

### **3.3.2 The role of social media in integration processes**

As mentioned, literature suggests that new technologies enable strong ties between migrants and their 'home' friends and family, and that social media specifically seems to enable these ties to be stronger. Whether the ability to maintain strong ties to the home country impedes or facilitates integration in the host country is, however, less clear. In her study of young refugees in Norway, Brekke (2008) found the former to be the case, observing that chatting on the Internet with friends in other countries meant that participants were less dependent on developing social networks locally and more open to the idea of future migration. Similarly, Komito (2011) in Ireland found that continued communication and monitoring of those in the home society could slow down the process of integration and participation in migrants' host society as they were less dependent on developing new connections. Based on the same study, Komito and Bates (2011) contended that social media facilitated participants to be

‘virtual’ migrants, since they remained part of previously existing groups which did not weaken even though members had dispersed.

However, studies show that the use of digital technologies can also assist in the adaptation process during resettlement, facilitating integration in host countries. In research with migrant groups in Australia and Canada, communication technologies have been found to play a key role in the re-settlement period and to help combat feelings of social isolation and loneliness (Felton, 2014; Hiller & Franz, 2004). Positive outcomes for integration observed from ICT use in studies conducted specifically with refugees in New Zealand and the UK have included: increased social inclusion, increased participation, empowerment, and development of identity (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006). Results from a study in regional Australia focussed on refugees’ use of digital technology found that they considered access to and use of ICT essential in terms of their own integration, and that they viewed digital technology as a vital tool for learning, assimilating with the wider community, accessing education and job opportunities, as well as for contact with family and friends (Alam & Imran, 2015). An extensive review of research conducted on the use of social media and digital technologies by Indigenous youth in Australia similarly found positive outcomes for identity and power and control, as well as for cultural compatibility and community and family connections (Rice, Haynes, Royce, & Thompson, 2016). Also in Australia, Gifford and Wilding (2013) demonstrated that if young Karen refugees were able to maintain their connections to family and friends through social media applications, they could gain support and maintain their identity which enabled them to experience a greater sense of ‘being at home’, leading the authors to argue for the need for a global perspective on refugee settlement.

In the area of social inclusion, there are number of recent studies focused on refugees and technology which have attempted to identify the process by which digital technologies can contribute to the inclusion of refugees in the host country. Two of these studies are particularly relevant to the design of my study, since they concern refugees as participants and use the Capability Approach as a theoretical framework (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; AbuJarour & Krasnova 2017). Andrade and Doolin (2016) used the Capability Approach to identify capabilities that ICTs offered over 50 refugees in New Zealand, by examining what participants actually did and were able to achieve by using ICTs. In Germany, AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017) also used the Capability Approach to identify ICT-enabled capabilities of 15

refugees and highlight the role of ICTs in promoting social inclusion. Capabilities identified from ICT use in both studies included ‘social connectedness’ and ‘participation in an information society’. Whilst neither of these studies focused on social media specifically, both included social media applications within their definition of ICTs.

It seems that it is not yet clear how social media and new technologies are changing previous patterns of migration (Komito, 2011). More research is needed to further understand whether such technologies actually facilitate or hinder integration processes in different contexts and to understand the relationship between home-host country ties and integration. In a recent study with refugees from Syria, Eritrea, and Afghanistan focussed on social media and integration in the Netherlands, Alencar (2017) determined that social media applications were important for building both bridging capital (ties with the new society) and bonding capital (ties with the home society), enabling participants to learn about the culture and language in the new country whilst providing the emotional support from friends and family that they needed to deal with the challenges of adjusting. Interestingly, this study also revealed the importance of participants’ perceptions of host society attitudes and government policy towards refugees in influencing their social media practices and usage (such as whether they used social media for language learning) and for contributing to their successful integration. The author highlighted that the influence of host country integration policies and host population attitudes to refugees on refugee actions during settlement, including their social media usage, is a neglected area of research (Alencar, 2017, p. 14).

### **3.4 Social media and well-being**

There is a good deal of empirical research on the use of digital technology and social media by young people, especially college students, and its role in their well-being (Nabi, Prestin & So, 2013; Kim, 2017; Nilan, Burges, Hobbs, Threadgold, & Alexander, 2015; van Oosten, Peter, & Boot, 2015; Moreno, Cox, Young, & Haaland, 2015). There is some empirical literature focused directly on the use of digital technology and social media by immigrants and marginalised groups and its relationship with well-being (Lu & Fangfang, 2017; Sa and Leung, 2016). To date, however, there have been few studies directly connecting social media use and well-being among refugees and asylum seeker populations (Felton, 2014; AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017; Andrade & Doolin, 2016).

Claims for direct and indirect benefits of social media use for well-being have been made by several studies, but these require further scrutiny. A quantitative study of 401 American students using Facebook claimed to present unique evidence that the number of Facebook friends (rather than use of Facebook *per se*) indirectly benefited both physical health and psychological well-being (Nabi et al., 2013). The study found that a higher number of Facebook friends was associated with stronger perceptions of social support, which in turn associated with reduced stress, less physical illness, and greater psychological well-being. Despite this finding, the authors recognise that the field of research into Social Networking Site (SNS) use and well-being is limited. They note that whilst Facebook has been proposed as a promising channel for health promotion, and that the literature “hints” at a relationship between Facebook network size, perceived social support and well-being, the few studies that have examined psychological well-being as a function of Facebook use have yielded mixed results - “the paucity of research examining how SNS use links to physical and psychological well-being is somewhat surprising” (Nabi et al., 2013, p. 722). Another recent, quantitative, study of ‘urban migrants’ in China claimed to show a direct relationship between urban migrants’ social media use and their subjective well-being, as well as an indirect relationship through social integration (Lu & Fangfang, 2017). However, the benefit to participants’ subjective well-being was largely attributed to the special (restricted) media environment in China, and to the effect of being able to release dissatisfaction and freely express their opinions. An interesting perspective was provided by a qualitative study of Chinese immigrants in the USA, which observed indirect and ‘philanthropic’ health benefits to participants derived from the satisfaction of using social media to give health information to others within the immigrant community (Sa & Leung, 2016). None of these studies included refugees as participants, however.

Yet in studies on the use of ICTs in which refugees and marginalised groups were included as participants (including several of the studies mentioned in Section 3.3.2 above), in which other outcomes from ICT use - such as social inclusion - were the main focus of study, improvements to participants’ well-being were nevertheless observed. In the AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017) study on social inclusion, refugees underscored the value of their smartphones in promoting feelings of well-being and agency, with ICT use shown to provide them with emotional support, sense of safety, and sense of agency. Andrade and Doolin (2016) contend that realising the capabilities offered by ICT use, such as increased social connectedness and reduced isolation, enhanced the well-being of the refugees in their study.

Felton (2014) found that ICT use by migrants, including humanitarian refugees, in Australia promoted feelings of well-being among participants resulting from the comfort derived from maintaining face-to-face communication with absent loved ones. In an ethnographic study in the favelas in Brazil, Nemer (2016) observed that marginalised residents were empowered by their use of social media in telecentres to attain development outcomes of their own choosing and make life-enhancing choices, which were key factors in their well-being. It therefore seems that positive outcomes linked to well-being can be observed in studies on the use of social media and ICTs by refugees and marginalised groups focused primarily on outcomes such as social inclusion, participation, empowerment, and development of identity, even if well-being was not the explicit focus.

For some marginalised groups and refugees, willingness to proactively use digital technologies to improve their well-being may not be enough for positive outcomes to be observed. A study investigating Internet use for support among Iraqi and Sudanese refugees in the United States found that participants were willing to use it to engage in online support seeking and as a tool for post-migration stress reduction, but also found limited evidence that it was being used effectively (Mikal & Woodfield, 2013). This was due to the reluctance of participants to engage in online communities, and barriers to Internet access. Whilst Internet access is less likely to be a barrier to refugees in Norway, the study suggests that caution is needed in assuming that access and willingness to engage with digital technologies to improve health are enough to ensure effective results.

Associations between social media use and *reduced* well-being have also been observed in empirical research into social media use among young people. A negative effect on well-being has been linked to, amongst other things, cyber bullying (Nilan et al., 2015), and increased risk behaviours, including sexual behaviour (van Oosten et al., 2015) and alcohol abuse (Moreno et al, 2015). A study of Korean students found that online social networking was adversely associated with psychological well-being, measured in terms of self-reported mental problems and suicidal thought (Kim, 2017). As mentioned, for refugees and migrants, social media has been observed to impede local integration (as well as to facilitate it), which may also impact negatively on well-being (Brekke, 2008). Research on Facebook use and young people has suggested that passive use ('watching' rather than actively posting or interacting) can have negative effects, as a result of generating enhanced feelings of envy

over the lives of others, which undermine well-being (Tromholt, 2016; Frison & Eggermont, 2015; Verduyn et al., 2015).

Overall, the evidence regarding the effects of ICT and social media use on well-being can be seen as inconclusive or contradictory. A recent systematic review of the impact of online technologies on young people concluded that there is currently “an absence of robust causal research regarding the impact of social media on mental wellbeing” (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014, p. 27). Another recent broad literature review into Internet use and well-being (but one which does not mention migrants or migration) tried to pinpoint how Internet use affects well-being, arguing that the effect of Internet use on well-being is mediated by personal characteristics specific to individuals: psychological functioning, capabilities, and framing conditions (culture and beliefs) (Castellacci & Tveito, 2018). The authors assert that it is personal characteristics and the way that they interact with activities in different domains in an individual’s life (private life, working life, environment) in which the Internet is used that explains why Internet use has stronger positive effects on the well-being of some individuals than others. However, whilst interesting, some of the domains (such as working life) may be irrelevant or irregular for refugees.

In sum, both positive and negative outcomes of ICT and social media use, which could directly or indirectly impact on well-being, have been observed in empirical studies. However, many of these studies have been conducted with student populations, and the evidence with refugee populations is limited.

### **3.5 Messages and campaigns aimed at refugees on social media**

#### **3.5.1 ‘Migration information’ campaigns**

There is very little literature on the effectiveness of migration information campaigns because there has been little attempt to examine the effect of these, either in terms of effect on decisions to migrate or migrant numbers (Schans & Optekamp, 2016, p.7). Only one empirical study was found, involving research by seven universities in the UK to map and understand the impact of the UK immigration campaigns of 2013 (Jones et al., 2017). This research used a variety of qualitative methods to show that the campaigns provoked anger, fear, and anxiety amongst both the targets of the campaigns (or those who perceived that they were) and legal migrants, as well as the host population who were worried about migration. Other literature on the subject tends to be in the form of reports to governments, opinion

pieces, and reflections from those working in the migration field. A report prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development, on communication campaigns to deter irregular migration, stated that there was "no publically available evaluations of information campaigns" and "extremely little" evidence of their impact and effectiveness on decisions to migrate and migrant numbers (Browne, 2015, p.2). A recent Norwegian Institute for Social Research report on using social media to communicate migration messages found "a total lack of knowledge about how governments employ social media to reach people of foreign nationalities" (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 13).

What scant information there is, suggests that there is reason to believe that the effects of migration campaigns, in their aim to reduce migration to specific countries, are limited. The literature indicates that social, political, and economic conditions at home and presence of social networks in destination countries are the most important factors in influencing migration decisions (Heller, 2014; Schans & Optekamp, 2016). Furthermore, when potential migrants perceive that information campaigns are driven by governments and organisations with vested interests, they are likely to dismiss them as propaganda (Musarò, 2016). According to Musarò (2016) "the literature is fairly clear" that the causes of irregular migration are not a lack of information about its dangers, but the unchanged conditions of poverty, inequality, conflict and lack of economic opportunities in migrants' home countries (para.18).

With regard to the Norwegian 'Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway' campaign specifically, there has so far been no evaluation study of the effect of the campaign, so the actual impact on the target groups - "potential asylum seekers and other migrants" - is unknown (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 19). Although statistics provided by Facebook apparently report millions of hits and thousands of likes for the 'Stricter Asylum Regulations' Facebook page (Beyer et al., 2017, p.53), little is known about those who have viewed it beyond these numbers. One of the Norwegian Institute for Social Research's report recommendations is for a thorough "reception study" of the campaign, to include migrants' perceptions of government-sponsored information on social media and its effect on migration-related decisions (Beyer et al., 2017, p.55).

### **3.5.2 Portrayals of refugees on social media**

Since 2015, there has been some analysis of the portrayal of refugees by the mainstream media in Europe and Australia and how it affects the perceptions of host country populations (Parker, 2015; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore, 2015). Within academia has been mostly located within media and communication studies, with a focus on linguistic analysis. Social media is beginning to be studied as part of this analysis, but research has so far concentrated mainly on the print press where depictions of the “refugee crisis” in Europe have varied somewhat depending on the reporting country but have shared some common factors. A content analysis of newspaper coverage in the EU from five European countries (Sweden being the only Scandinavian country included) prepared for the United Nations Commission for Refugees, found differences in how countries reported in terms of language used for refugees, sources, and themes of the articles (Berry et al., 2015). For example, Italy focused more on humanitarian themes than Britain, Germany, or Spain, and the British press had a much higher incidence of portraying refugees as a threat to welfare and health systems than the other countries. Common to all, however, were a low incidence of articles that highlighted any benefits of migration or portrayed any migrant success stories

Representations of refugees within European media have also been found to change within different time periods, with portrayals ranging from ‘refugees as victims’ to ‘refugees as threats’. A systematic content analysis coordinated by London School of Economics focussing on press reports across eight European countries at three peak moments in the “refugee crisis” of 2015 - summer, early autumn and late autumn - found that the narratives of the coverage changed dramatically across this period for all countries (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017). A largely sympathetic and empathetic response in summer and early autumn, particularly following the widely shared shocking image of 3 year-old Syrian Alan Kurdi who drowned trying to reach Europe in September 2015, was replaced by suspicion and, in some cases, hostility towards refugees and migrants following the November terror attacks in Paris. Building upon this study, researchers at University of Bergen mapped and analysed, quantitatively and qualitatively, how Scandinavian news press covered the same peak moments of 2015 (Gripsrud, Hovden & Mjelde, 2017). This revealed that Scandinavian press wrote less often about the negative consequences of refugees than European press, but that the humanitarian aspects also became less prominent over time. Norway was found to occupy a middle ground between the more negative economic focus of Denmark and the

more positive moral focus of the Swedish press. It seems that common to all these analyses, however, is the portrayal of refugees and asylum seekers in the European press as both victims but also, particularly in times of fear, as invaders who threaten the well-being and economies of the respective host countries. The research also revealed that refugees and migrants were given limited opportunities to speak directly in coverage, and little attention was given to individual refugee stories. Missing in most accounts were refugee voices, as well as reports of the success stories and benefits of migration.

There has been little research into the portrayal of refugees on social media in Norway specifically. Rettberg and Gajjala (2015) are rare in their examination of representations of refugees in a social media context from the perspective of researchers in Norway. Although only a short commentary, based on three weeks of observation of the Twitter hashtag #refugeesNOTwelcome, their 2015 examination of images and words shared in the Twitter forum is very relevant to my study. Their analysis revealed how male Syrian refugees - the dominant focus - were depicted as, contradictorily, either terrorists and rapists or cowards. The authors suggest that this representation of male Syrian refugees as either threatening or cowardly is compounded by the fact that, because they dress much like Europeans, they do not conform to visual expectations of what a “refugee” looks like, which are based on familiar “third-world” images from Africa. Consequently they are considered to not be “true” refugees in need of assistance, and are therefore not to be trusted (Rettberg & Gajjala, 2015, p. 180).

Given that there has been insufficient evaluation of the effectiveness of migration information campaigns, it is to be expected that even less attention has been given to the effects that they have on those that they are targeted at. Very little is known about refugees’ experiences and interpretations of such campaigns, or their response to messages and portrayals of refugees in the media in general, including social media, and the impact on their sense of self and well-being. This study hopes to contribute new research to address this research gap.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

My study aims to build on the small but important body of existing research exploring the use of digital technologies, including social media, by refugees and marginalised groups that focuses on the perspective of participants themselves (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; AbuJarour & Krasnova 2017; Nemer, 2016). It provides a voice for those who are often unheard, and

whose own values and agency regarding the use of technology is often not considered in research. It adds to a limited number of studies which have explored the role of social media in migration processes with refugees rather than economic migrants, and gives much needed diversity to the studies on social media and well-being that have traditionally used college students as participants. By attempting to shed light on how migration messages and campaigns conducted through social media are interpreted by refugees, it provides some knowledge where there is currently almost none. Finally, by being set in Bergen, it contributes to research in Norway at a time when issues and tensions relating to migration and social media are highly relevant and visible within the country, and when the Norwegian context is largely missing in the academic literature.

## Chapter 4: Research questions

In order to meet the gaps in knowledge described above, I defined the following research questions to guide the study. These were designed to explore: how and why young refugees actually use social media in their everyday lives in Norway and the value that it has for them; the achievements that refugees report from this use, which indicates the capabilities that social media offers; and the effects of social media content targeted specifically at refugees in Norway on refugees themselves. In the process of answering these questions, I hoped to make connections between social media use and well-being.

The central overarching question of this study is *how do young refugees in Bergen use social media in their everyday lives and how does this use contribute to their well-being?*

Sub-questions:

1. a) What are the uses and gratifications of social media for young refugees?  
b) Is there a difference between gratifications ‘sought’ and ‘obtained?’
2. What do young refugees report that they are able to achieve from using social media that is of value to them in their lives?
3. If they have been exposed to messages on social media aimed at asylum seekers and refugees in Norway, both positive and negative, how do young refugees interpret and respond to these?

## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present the research design chosen to address the research issues identified in Chapter 1. I describe the data generation and data analysis processes that I used in the study, and highlight measures taken to ensure quality and ethics throughout the research process. Finally, I direct the reader to potential limitations and problems with the design and implementation of the research.

However, it is first important as a researcher to be open about my own ontological position (my view of truth or reality), how this shapes my epistemology (what I believe can be known), and to acknowledge that epistemological orientation inevitably influences the choices and “underlying assumptions and logic” of researchers’ work (Gringery, Barusch & Cambron, 2013, p. 55). I consider my ontological position to be social constructivist/interpretivist, in that I believe that there is no one single truth or reality (rejecting the ‘positivist’ position that there is only one reality or absolute truth). My epistemological orientation aligns most closely with interpretivism, which suggests that there are many interpretations of phenomena which are dependent on time and context (Biggam, 2008). In this study, human participation, interpretation and observation, in a specific context, are essential to addressing the research questions. The qualitative approach is particularly identified with interpretive research, as are interviewing and observation as research methods.

### **5.2 Research design**

This study adopted a qualitative approach to research since it was seeking to explore experiences, interpretations, and meanings; to seek illumination and understanding rather than causal determination (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600); and to give a voice to participants. Qualitative research generally observes an inductive style of research. This approach distinguishes it from quantitative research which tests objective theories deductively, by examining relationships among variables (Cresswell, 2014).

In qualitative research, it is possible to use more than one design in a study, and the research designs most closely aligned to the objectives of this study are interpretive and ethnographic. Interpretive studies are interested in understanding phenomena through the meaning that people assign to them, are time and context dependent, and focus on people’s subjective

experiences and interpretations of events (Biggam, 2008, p. 94). The phenomenon of interest for this study was social media use. Ethnographic studies involve directly observing individuals, groups or cultures in their own environment (including virtual environments) over a period of time (Skågeby, 2011). The ethnographic design employed in this study is what Skovdal and Cornish (2015, p.76) would probably term “rapid ethnography”, usually involving a shorter time period for observations and often combined with other methods such as interviews.

The research designs chosen for this study were reflected in the methods employed: in-depth interviews (interpretive design) and online non-participative observation (ethnographic design). I chose individual interviews over group interviews because the participants involved were regarded a sensitive group, and there was potential for the interview topic - involving questions about negative experiences of social media use - to be sensitive. To contextualise and supplement the interviews (which report only “what people *say*, not what they *do*”) and to give triangulation of data collection methods, I also chose an online observation method (Green & Thorogood, 2009, p.102). The intention was to observe postings and interactions by, or aimed at, refugees on relevant Facebook groups. I hoped that observation would provide direct insight into messages, interactions, and behaviours in specific social media settings aimed at refugees in Norway. I chose non-participant observation, rather than participant observation, partly out of consideration for ethics, as will be discussed in Section 5.4, and so as not to influence natural interactions within the group settings.

## **5.3 Data generation**

### **5.3.1 Study site**

The study location for the face-to-face individual interviews with participants was the city of Bergen in Western Norway. It has a population of around 278,000 people and the number of residents with a refugee background (approximately 3.7 per cent in 2016) is around the national average (Statistics Norway, 2016, para. 8). This location was chosen because it was where I was living at the time of the study and had contacts who could assist in recruiting participants.

Online observation was conducted with two Facebook pages, ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’<sup>5</sup> and ‘Refugees NOT welcome to Norway’<sup>6</sup> (<https://www.facebook.com/refugeeswelcomenorway>; <https://www.facebook.com/Muslims-NOT-welcome-to-Norway-139612049752821>). One Twitter feed, @Utlendingsdir, run by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), was also observed (<https://twitter.com/utlendingsdir>). Participation in these online sites was not restricted by users’ locations, so it was likely that users from other areas of Norway, and even overseas, were observed. However, it was not usually possible to identify the location of users of these sites from their online profiles.

### **5.3.2 Recruitment strategy**

A purposive sampling strategy was chosen to locate participants who met the inclusion criteria for the study. Purposive sampling was chosen because the study required participants to all share common characteristics (inclusion criteria) and have the potential to provide rich data relevant to the research questions (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007, p. 352). I also planned to use snowball sampling – by asking all interview participants to refer other participants – but this did not prove successful.

I tried a number of methods to locate participants for individual interviews. These included using contacts known to me, who had links to individuals who met the inclusion criteria for the study; contacting organisations and two schools working with young refugees; and directly contacting a participant who had posted on a Facebook group related to the study who seemed to meet the inclusion criteria. A flyer, providing details of the study and inclusion criteria, was designed and distributed to contacts and organisations by email and in person (see Appendix 1). It was also given to each interview participant to share with others who might be interested in taking part in the study.

The most successful method of recruitment was through a personal contact of mine who had been involved in a project working with refugee youth. This person passed on details to me of four individuals who had taken part in that project and were interested in taking part in my

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<sup>5</sup> Note that there is another similar Facebook group called ‘Refugees Welcome Norway’ run by the same Refugees Welcome network, but which is a closed/private group. This has approximately 72,000 members. The one observed in this study is an open/public group and has approx. 10,000 followers.

<sup>6</sup> Since the observation period, this group has changed its name to ‘Muslims NOT Welcome to Norway’. The posts observed during the observation period remain visible under the changed name.

study. All four were subsequently interviewed. Two further participants were recruited through local organisations working with young refugees and one participant was recruited through another personal contact known to me. One participant was recruited directly through the Facebook group referred to above.

However, I encountered some barriers when trying to recruit participants, particularly in relation to gatekeepers. One organisation that I contacted refused to pass on details of the study to eligible individuals as they felt that young refugees in the study location were over-researched. Another organisation also said that the target group was over-researched and suggested that I would have to spend a lot of time with them, building relationships with potential interviewees, before any interviews could take place. This proved impractical in the time available for data generation, and due to the fact that the organisation worked in the Norwegian language. (I did not speak Norwegian sufficiently well to be able to engage in their activities.) One of the schools contacted did not respond; the other responded to the study in a positive way but did not end up providing details of any potential participants.

### **5.3.3 Participants**

Inclusion criteria for interview participants included the following: they should have come to Norway as a refugee, be aged 18-30, live in Bergen, and be a regular user of social media. The age group chosen was appropriate because the largest group of immigrants to Norway in 2015, when the Norwegian migration information campaign began, was aged 20-29 (Norwegian Ministries, 2017); Internet and social media use in Norway also increased in 2015 for “everyone between the age of 9 and 44” (Statistics Norway, 2016). I initially hoped to recruit an equal mix of male and female participants. I had also hoped to recruit a mix of newly arrived and settled refugees (those who had been in Norway for less and more than two years), in order to get perspectives from those who were outside of Norway when the government migration information campaign began in 2015 and those who were already in Norway at that time. However, in practice there was no opportunity to select from willing participants - it proved difficult to recruit enough participants for the study in the time available. I had planned to interview 10-12 participants in total, which is a common number for a qualitative study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). In the end, 8 interviews were conducted. Details of participants are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: *Interview participants*

	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Length of time in Norway</b>
1	Ali	Eritrean	30	M	4 years
2	Omar	Palestinian	22	M	2 years
3	Jemal	Eritrean	22	M	3 years
4	Farah	Palestinian/Syrian	24	F	2.5 years
5	Kalila	Sudanese	23	F	5 years
6	Hamid	Yemini	39	M	10 months
7	Hassan	Syrian	23	M	2 years
8	Nasim	Iraqi	21	M	3 years

One participant, Hamid, was over the age range specified for the study. He had been recruited through Facebook, where it was not possible to ascertain age from his profile prior to contact. However, I decided to include him in the study as he was willing to participate and had some interesting insights. Another participant, Nasim, was not living in Bergen, which was also a criterion for inclusion. However, he seemed to have a very relevant and interesting story to tell about their use of social media, so I also included him.

### **5.3.4 Data generation methods**

For the study, I planned to employ the following as data generation methods: 1) individual interviews with young refugees and key informants 2) observation of pages and groups on social media aimed at refugees in Norway, and 3) an online survey of interview participants' daily use of social media. The first two methods were used, but the last was discarded.

1) *Individual semi-structured interviews with young refugees* were carried out using an interview guide with open-ended questions (see Appendix 2). All interviews were conducted face-to-face, in English, by me. Participants were contacted prior to the interviews by text or email, when a brief outline of the project was provided to them. Some participants also saw copies of the flyer used to advertise for research participants (see Appendix 1). At the start of each interview, the purpose of the project was explained in more detail.

Locations for the individual interviews were guided by the interview participants. Most participants suggested a location that was convenient and comfortable for them. Three of the interviews took place in cafes, one in a shopping mall, one in a hotel, two in a library, and one in the interviewee's own home. At each interview there was only myself and the interviewee present. All settings offered enough privacy for participants to speak freely and to enable audio recording of the interview.

The interviews ranged between 25:00 minutes and 45:00 minutes in length. All participants agreed to have their interview audio taped, using a digital voice recorder, which I later transcribed. The interviews were recorded in order to ensure a truthful recording of what was said, provide accurate data for analysis, and to enable me to be fully present and focussed during the interview. The interview guide was developed to incorporate key factors relevant to the study, including 1) uses and gratifications of social media use, 2) outcomes or capabilities enabled by social media use, 3) messages and campaigns aimed at refugees on social media. The interview guide included a definition of social media which was explained to participants prior to the start of the interview. A printed ‘prompt sheet’ containing 22 popular social media icons was also shown to participants, so that they could refer to it during the interview as a reminder of the wide range of social media sites available (see Appendix 3).

*Interviews were also conducted with two key informants* – one interview, with a moderator of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ Facebook group, was conducted face-to-face; due to time constraints and practicality, an email interview was conducted with a representative of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, which runs the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ Facebook page. Key informant interviews were not originally planned as part of the methods for this study, but due to the failure of another data generation method (the online survey), I decided to conduct these late in the data gathering process. As Skovdal and Cornish (2015, p. 56) point out, key informant interviews provide quick access to important facts, from carefully selected individuals who have access to those facts and can be used to inform a rapid appraisal of a situation. An interview guide (Appendix 2) was used for the face-to-face interview. Questions were prepared for the email exchange, which were emailed to the informant to answer.

2) *Online observation* was conducted with two Facebook groups, ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ and ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’, and one Twitter feed, UDI’s @Utlendingsdir. The rationale for choosing these three sites was to observe one ‘pro’ and one ‘anti’ refugee group, and one site run by the Norwegian government. Whilst the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ Facebook page was initially selected as the government site to observe, it was not active enough (the most recent post to the group was posted three months prior to the start of the observation period). All sites had to be ‘active’, with up-to-

date 'live' posts and interactions, since old posts would be classed as historic material. Due to ethics considerations, it was also only possible to observe 'open' or public Facebook groups, which significantly limited choice. I initially planned to observe the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' group, but since this was a closed group the public 'Refugees Welcome to Norway' group was chosen instead. (A key informant interview was later conducted with a moderator of the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' group). Moderators of both the Facebook groups chosen were contacted and their permission was sought and obtained to observe the groups prior to the start of the observation.

The observation period took place between 5 September 2017 and 3 October 2017, with the three online sites observed twice a week each. Participant observation is often conducted on a short time frame (from a few weeks to a few months) and overlaps with other forms of data collection (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013, p. 100). Observation field notes were taken, using an observation guide adapted from Skovdal and Cornish (2015, p. 161) (see Appendix 4). I chose to make field notes following guidance from the literature that they are necessary even in online settings and that it is essential for observers to record their comments, including reactions and interpretations (Salmons, 2016, p.123).

3) *An online survey* for interview participants was created using SurveyMonkey, a free online survey tool often used in academic research. The rationale for the survey was to provide a 'snapshot' of the realities of how participants were using social media in their everyday lives, to supplement the information that they gave in the interviews. The survey link was given to each interview participant and they were asked to complete it on a daily basis for a period of one week after the interview. The survey was designed to be deliberately short, with only four questions, so that it would not be cumbersome or time-consuming to complete (see Appendix 5). It was also set up to be anonymous. IP addresses would not be collected with survey results and there was no login or identifiers required to access it.

However, although the survey was set up and links were given to all interview participants, by the end of the agreed data generation period it had not completed by any of them. This method of data generation was subsequently discarded. The failure was likely influenced by the fact that the survey links could not be sent to participants electronically (in order to ensure anonymity and comply with National Centre for Data Research, NSD, requirements), as several participants requested, but instead had to be handed to them on a piece of paper. It

was likely that this would have been lost or forgotten. Given the failure of this method, I decided to instead conduct key informant interviews with individuals who had insights into the phenomenon of social media use with refugees in Norway as another method of data generation.

### **5.3.5 Data management**

Interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed using Microsoft Word. The transcripts were stored on my own password-protected computer. Names of participants were not included in transcripts to protect their identities. An encrypted spreadsheet of participant names, ages, nationalities, and the method used to contact them, was saved separately to the transcripts. Personal details (surname, address) were not collected from participants, and all data used during the data analysis phase was anonymised. During online observation, field notes were made by hand. Audio files were deleted at the end of the project.

### **5.4 Ethics**

On ethics in qualitative health research, Green and Thorogood (2009, p. 72), emphasise that the primary responsibility is to participants. This study kept this and avoidance of harm at the forefront of considerations regarding recruitment, data generation methods, storage of data, and feedback.

Whilst the research topic itself was not considered particularly sensitive - with interview questions asking mainly about participants' actual use of social media - I recognised that there were potential sensitivities for interview participants related to negative campaigns and messages related to refugees (and the impact on their well-being), and to participants being considered a marginalised group. Furthermore, the fact that a person has been granted asylum is in itself considered sensitive information. Anonymity of participants was therefore the highest priority. Transcripts of interviews did not contain participant names and I took care to maintain the anonymity of interview participants and those observed in the writing-up of findings. Careful consideration was also given to formulating sensitive interview questions and to ensuring that participants felt comfortable and could speak freely during interviews. Briefing/debriefing was built into the interview guide and I attempted to create rapport with the interview participants before and during the interviews. All participants were encouraged

to contact me at the completion of the study so that key findings, presented in an accessible way, could be fed back to them.

Interview participants were all informed about the purpose of the study and given a copy of the Informed Consent letter (Appendix 6), which was also explained to them verbally. Seven participants signed a second copy of this letter, which they gave back to me, and one gave consent verbally. They were all told that their involvement in the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time.

There are specific ethical considerations relating to online observation. However, due to this being a relatively new method of data generation, key ethical questions, such as whether to disclose the researcher's presence and motives for participating in online spaces, are still unresolved among researchers. Whether online spaces should be treated as 'public', thus not necessarily requiring explicit consent from all users to use data, or inherently private, thus requiring consent from all users of the space, is also contentious. In the view of the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), "Information provided in forums, social media or spaces on the internet that are intentionally public would be considered 'in the public domain', but the public nature of any communication or information on the internet or through social media should always be critically examined" (ESRC, 2017, para. 3). In this study, I decided to observe only 'open' (public) Facebook groups (those 'in the public domain'), and, in addition, permission was also obtained from the two group moderators to observe them for the purpose of the research study before observation began. In the case of the Twitter feed, I did not feel it necessary to seek permission to observe since it is a public feed which serves mainly for UDI to post information on - it does not have the same level of public interaction as the Facebook groups. As with traditional offline observation, the identities of those observed were protected in the writing up of field notes and the findings; direct quotes and identifying 'nick names' were not recorded. Observation field notes were made by hand, rather than 'screen grabbing' or using online recording software in order to further protect users by not saving identifying material. Observation of online groups was non-participative so as not to influence or bias the interactions in the groups being observed.

Approval for this study was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Data Research (NSD), project number 54882 (see Appendix 7).

## **5.5 Quality assurance**

### **5.5.1 Trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability**

To establish trustworthiness in the research, consideration was given to addressing issues of credibility and dependability. *Credibility* in qualitative research has been defined as “the element that allows others to recognize the experiences contained within the study through the interpretation of participants’ experiences” (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 152), or confidence in the truth of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To help ensure credibility of data in this study, triangulation of data generation methods (interviews, online survey, and online observation) was built into in the study design, and appropriate data generation methods and analysis techniques were chosen for the study aims. During the data generation and analysis process, opportunities to be reflexive and to collaborate with other students and academics were taken in order to minimise my own bias as a researcher. I shared and discussed my research proposal and my plans for the study and invited feedback from peers and academics (“peer scrutiny”) (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). I also undertook ‘collaborative coding’- generating and comparing codes together with other researchers in a workshop setting - in order to increase the credibility of the analysis.

*Dependability* in qualitative research has been defined as an ‘audit trail’ which allows the decision-making process of the researcher to be followed by another researcher (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). This can be difficult in qualitative research, however, due to the changing nature of the phenomenon scrutinised (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). In this study, dependability has been addressed by providing detailed information about the purpose of the study, research design, decisions taken, and data generation methods.

*Transferability* refers to the extent to which the results of this study can be transferred to other settings or contexts and will be discussed further in the Discussion chapter (Section 7.6.5).

### **5.5.2 Role of the researcher**

The aim of being reflexive in the research approach is to highlight potential biases and preconceptions as a researcher and to raise awareness of issues that might have affected the research process. Awareness of positionality – the position of the researcher in relation to

participants – is also important in order to recognise how related issues (for example, power imbalance) might influence the dynamic with interview participants and their responses.

My own motivations for undertaking this study came partly from my background being an (economic) migrant in several countries and using social media as a tool to assist in my own integration. I was curious to know whether my perception of the role of social media in the migration process, as a result of my own experiences, would also apply to refugees.

I was noticeably older than the majority of my interview participants, and this fact combined with my position undertaking research for a university may have initially caused them to perceive me as part of the bureaucratic ‘system’ in Norway. However, as I am also an immigrant in Norway (albeit an economic migrant rather than a forced migrant) and do not consider myself well integrated here, I had points of commonality with them, especially regarding issues of integration and learning the Norwegian language. Since most of the participants were also considering applying to university and I had worked in a professional capacity with international students in university settings previously, I was also able to talk with them outside of the main interview about their study plans. This again helped to create rapport and build trust.

Two of the interviewees ‘befriended’ me on Facebook – one before and one after their interviews took place. I felt that I needed to accept their requests since they were entrusting me with their information and I felt that they had a right to know more about me. However, this did create a dilemma for me as a researcher regarding allowing access to information about my personal life and blurring the boundaries between professional and personal.

Initially, I was conscious that the interview dynamic might be influenced by the fact that I am female and Western, and most of the participants were male and from mainly Arabic nations. Indeed, several participants expressed surprise on meeting me in person that I was female, as they had assumed from my name (provided in our prior correspondence by text or email) that I would be male. However, I was not aware of the gender dynamic influencing the interviews. There was one issue when a male participant wanted me to interview him in his home and, due to my own cultural norms regarding personal safety, I requested that we meet in a public place instead. I was concerned that this had caused offence and it seemed it might threaten his withdrawal from the interview process.

I also tried to be reflexive during my online observations. My observation notes template (Appendix 4) for observation included sections for notes on 'Interpretations' and 'Reflexivity', so that I could record my own judgments, responses, and feelings about what I had observed online. The rationale was that this would help to separate field notes that were based purely on what I had observed from those that involved personal judgments and biases.

## **5.6 Limitations**

There are limitations to this research, which will be discussed further in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 7). Due to the challenges encountered recruiting participants in the time available for data generation, it did not prove possible to select study participants based on a narrower set of criteria, such as their length of time in Norway or gender. However, since the literature shows a gap in research focussing on social media use by refugees and asylum seekers - particularly in Norway - this study does help to contribute to knowledge.

My lack of experience and skills in interview technique may have limited the depth of exploration in the individual interviews. When transcribing audio recordings of the interviews I noticed that, on occasion, I had asked leading questions and missed potentially interesting lines of enquiry in my attempts to closely follow the interview guide. I also felt a dilemma between ensuring consistency of questions across each interview and allowing participants to guide the conversation. However, the advice of my supervisor, who saw copies of transcripts throughout the interview process, was very helpful, as were opportunities to discuss these issues with fellow students and more experienced researchers. This helped to mitigate the limitations of inexperience.

## **5.7 Framework for data analysis**

I used thematic analysis to analyse data generated from both my interviews with refugees and my online observations, in order to systematically identify and examine themes within the data. However, I employed slightly different analytical procedures for each data source. I analysed my observation field notes following the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis, and coded manually. For the interview transcripts, I used 'thematic network analysis' (Attride-Stirling, 2001), and used NVivo software to manage and help code the data. I undertook my analysis of the online observations some time prior to analysing the interviews, before I had considered different qualitative analytical methods and

tools available to manage data. This, and the fact that interview transcripts produced a much higher volume of data to analyse, was the reason for the difference in procedures used. For the interviews, I also undertook ‘collaborative coding’ at the start of the data analysis process. The coding table and thematic map produced during analysis of interview data is provided in the appendices (Appendix 8 and Appendix 9).

The analytical approach taken with both the observation and interview data was a mixture of inductive (‘bottom-up’) and deductive (‘top-down’). Whilst I sought to allow codes and themes to emerge from the data itself (inductive approach), these were driven by my research questions and theories and, in the case of interviews, my semi-structured interview guide (deductive approach). My approach can therefore be described as a ‘hybrid’ of inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

## Chapter 6: Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

Findings are split into the following sections: findings from interviews with refugees and key informants (Section 6.2) and findings from online observations (Section 6.3). Input from interviews with key informants - a moderator of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ Facebook group and a representative from Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security - have also been included where relevant in these sections.

### 6.2 Findings from interviews with refugees

Using thematic network analysis, I organised coded text from the interview transcripts into three types of theme: (i) Basic (lowest order, coded statements or beliefs), (ii) Organising (categories of basic themes grouped together to summarise more abstract principles) and (iii) Global (super-ordinate themes that encapsulate the principal metaphor in the text as a whole) (Attride-Stirling, 2001, pp.388-389). Four ‘Global Themes’ were identified, which comprise the main sections below. The ‘Organising Themes’, which “dissect the main assumptions underlying a broader theme that is especially significant in the texts as a whole” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389), are presented as sub-sections. A summary of the themes is presented below in Table 3. A thematic map illustrating these themes, and more detail on the coding framework developed during the analysis, are included in the appendices (see Appendix 8 and Appendix 9).

Table 3: *Summary of themes developed during analysis of interviews with refugees*

<b>Basic themes</b>	<b>Organising themes</b>	<b>Global themes</b>
-Social media platforms used -Motivations for using social media -Behaviours on social media	Uses & Gratifications of social media by refugees in Norway	<b>How and why young refugees use social media in their everyday lives in Norway</b>
-Access to social media -Limitations and barriers to social media use	Access and limitations to social media use in Norway	
Activities enabled by social media use	Reported achievements from social media use	<b>Achievements enabled by social media use</b>
-Negative experiences of social media -Positive experiences of social media	Experiences of social media	<b>Refugees’ experiences and perceptions of social media</b>
-Perceptions of messages and groups aimed at refugees and asylum seekers on social media -Perceptions and impact of migration information campaigns	Perceptions of and reactions to messages, groups, and campaigns aimed at refugees on social media	
Confidence in information and identities on social media	The issue of trust and social media	<b>The importance of trust and the offline world</b>
-Offline support and information -Life would be better without social media	The importance of offline contact	

Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of interview participants, but other details about them (age, nationality, and length of time in Norway) are accurate. I believe that it is not possible to identify my participants from these details, since I have not revealed the projects or organisations that I recruited them through and Bergen is a large city with a significant number of residents with a refugee background. I also feel that these details are important to the Discussion. Neutral pronouns have, however, been used in relation to the two key informants, in order to protect their anonymity. Quotes provided are verbatim and are used to illustrate key findings. Details of interview participants (for example, nationality and age) are provided in Table 2, Section 5.3.3, p. 33.

### **6.2.1 How and why young refugees use social media in their lives in Norway**

In the interviews, participants were asked firstly to talk about the social media platforms that they used routinely in their lives and to describe how and why they used them, in order to explore the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ of their everyday social media use.

#### ***6.2.1.1 Uses and Gratifications***

*Social media platforms used: the ‘what’*

The platforms that all participants reported using were Facebook and YouTube. In addition, almost all used Skype for communicating with family and friends. Only Omar said that he did not use Facebook often (but had an account) and Ali did not use Skype. The other most commonly used platforms were Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The majority of participants reported using these three, although several had stopped using, or were considering deleting, Twitter, saying that they found it difficult to use or did not understand how to use it. However, others valued Twitter for providing the opportunity to get information “*directly from the people who you are interested in*” (Ali), which included politicians: “*I follow the Prime Minister on Twitter*” (Kalila), “*even in the Arab world, there is a lot of politicians that use it*” (Farah). Half of participants also reported using Viber and/or Snapchat for messaging. However, several had only used Snapchat since being in Norway, saying that they had had done so because young Norwegians use it. Interestingly, although all participants used YouTube, few mentioned it unless they were asked about it directly. It seemed as though they did not consider YouTube as “social media” unless prompted.

Overall, participants’ choice of social media used in their daily lives in Norway was remarkably similar, given the range of options available to them. Apart from those mentioned

above, the only other platform reportedly used was Pinterest<sup>7</sup> (by one person). There was also some expression of ‘social media fatigue’ among participants in relation to the sheer number of platforms available and having so many accounts, which could sometimes become overwhelming. Farah spoke of having to use Snapchat to communicate with her younger brothers overseas “*they are not using Facebook or Instagram or anything. So I really wanted to use Snapchat just to try to get to communicate with them*” but was worried that she was using too many accounts already “*it’s a lot, all this social media*”. As a result of the abundance of social media available to them, it seemed that participants carefully chose the particular platforms that they used and used them for different purposes. They chose each according to what they understood to be their unique functions, usefulness, or relevance to groups of interest to them.

*Every app has some special thing. For example, as I said to you, WhatsApp and Viber for my family and my close friends. And Facebook actually for reading about the world, what’s going on, because I join many pages so I can read about the world. And Instagram to see friends and friends’ days; what they are doing. (Hassan)*

#### *Motivations for using social media: the ‘why’*

In terms of what motivated participants to use social media, the following emerged as the most common factors: communication, accessing information, and learning. Other motivations will also be presented.

#### *Communication*

All participants spoke about the importance of social media for enabling communication. Communication included talking with their friends and family, who were usually overseas, as well expressing their opinions and political views. When talking with friends and family, the fact that messaging platforms were mostly free and easy to use and available in most countries around the world, even countries in conflict, was very important. Farah, who had arrived in Norway alone, described how, for her, social media was the best way to communicate with others from her home country.

*We have been separated all over the world in lots of different countries, so it’s the only and the best way to get in touch and get information about each other, this way. It’s not only to communicate with people – but for example Facebook is very important to communicate with people and you can call for free or using the*

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<sup>7</sup> Pinterest is a platform that allows to users to ‘pin’, organise, and share media content with others, like a virtual pinboard.

*Internet, you don't have to contact direct or something. And, like, everyone now in the world – not everyone in the world, but in many countries –there is access to Internet and to Facebook.*

Several participants also talked of the importance of social media as a means of sharing their ideas and opinions with others. They described the audience being mostly their friends, who would arguably have similar views; however, there was also the potential for them to influence others, including younger people. *“The most important thing for me? [about social media] It's a platform for communication. It's a platform to exchange ideas, different points of view – with friends and few followers, the younger generation.”* (Ali). For Hamid, this sharing of opinion took the form of what could be considered political activism. Using social media for political reasons had been particularly important for him when he started using it in his home country.

*...when came the revolution, I used it more as political opinion and also to organise the events there during the revolution, and also to raise the awareness of freedom and the revolution between people on Facebook. So it was very political; for political reasons.*

Although he had been in Norway for the shortest time of the group, Hamid had already used his knowledge of social media to communicate about - and improve - his situation as an asylum seeker in Norway. He had contacted a moderator of one the 'Refugees Welcome' groups on Facebook to complain about his treatment in a transit camp: *“I sent him all the information and then he start to make some calls and then things start to be better”*.

### *Information*

Almost all participants described the importance of social media for accessing information. The type of information that they talked about accessing included: information on the asylum system, the situation in their home countries, local information important for new refugees, and national and international news. Social media also enabled them to access information and opportunities that could help them find jobs and establish networks in Bergen. Several participants spoke of having become involved in projects or volunteering as a result of seeing information shared by friends or organisations on Facebook. *“I read news, for example, some newspapers' page on Facebook, but I also get information, if I can, about job opportunities, volunteering, organisations. Many different things.”* (Farah). *“I also knew from Facebook about this [public event in Bergen], and so I applied to participate as a volunteer, and I volunteered with them and they sent last week a certificate.”* (Hamid). Nasim, who had never

used social media before coming to Norway, described using social media as a literal personal information resource, posting any questions he had about life in Norway to his Norwegian friends on Facebook for them to answer.

*...if there's anything that I don't know I just write it on my Facebook. So I got a lot of help...I get a lot of tips. "Hi Facebook, what does integrating mean?" I get a lot of people who just tell me what they think about many things.*

Another motivation that participants gave for using social media was in order to provide information for others. Often this meant people from their home country, but it also included other refugees. Kalila, who had been in Norway the longest of the group, used Facebook to help newcomers to Norway:

*We have a page on Facebook in Arabic. For Sudanese people who live in Norway. We post important information for new ones who come to Norway. And if some of them have problems to find a job or something, we help each other.*

This information-sharing could take the form of posting to an established Facebook group, such as one of the 'Refugees Welcome' groups, but more often involved sharing information with known friends and private groups on Facebook. *"We use Facebook here, to help some people who are in difficult situations. For example, my friend can share to me and I can see that and I can write a message..."* (Jemal).

Omar was the only participant who stated that he did not routinely use social media to access or share information, preferring to use it only for keeping in touch with friends and family and for entertainment. He talked of not trusting what was posted on social media, even by governments or official sources, saying that he believed that it was possible for anyone to create a page or post information and therefore it could not be considered trustworthy.

*"Especially from Facebook, I don't trust the information from Facebook. I can create a page and what information I'd like to put..."* He described how he trusted only selected channels on YouTube, but nevertheless still researched the references they provided to confirm the authenticity of their videos: *"There are two channels on YouTube I trust, because they put sources in their videos and I watch the sources actually – I open it to see if what they say is true."*

## *Learning*

Although participants did not necessarily describe their activity on social media as ‘learning’, it became apparent during the interviews that learning was actually a very important motivation for their use of social media. This was particularly evident in the case of language learning, as well as with the use of YouTube. Several participants described how they used Facebook to practise Norwegian with others and used YouTube to learn languages (most commonly English) from video tutorials. They also described watching YouTube videos to learn how to cook, make, or fix things - often because they had no-one else to show them how.

*Yeah. I use it for everything. Like, if I want to know, like, a recipe and I don't really know how to make it, I use YouTube. If I want to learn anything. Sometimes I just have free time and I want to learn something, like, anything, any tips, I use YouTube.*  
(Farah)

Kalia spoke of wanting to become a professional photographer, and said that she used Instagram to learn how to take better pictures “*In Instagram, all the time I learn new things about photography, so the way I can take pictures.*”

Nasim stood out for, remarkably, becoming fluent in Norwegian by using Facebook and Skype as his only resources. He turned to Facebook when he found that he was unable to access language courses due to his asylum status, and because the remote location and small local population (“*just twenty or thirty people*”) of the transit camp he lived in made it impossible to meet Norwegians. He achieved his impressive feat in only three months, by proactively asking for language help from Norwegians on the ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ Facebook group - where he instantly gained 900 friend requests - and dedicating hours a day to systematically communicating with “hundreds” of them in Norwegian:

*And people start to teach me; they start to make it simple and simple and simple, so that I understand what they are trying to tell me. Afterwards I start to talk to them with Skype, Facebook. So I think that I wrote with a couple of hundred every day – two hundred or three hundred each day – just messaged them. And I had fifty who I could Skype with. So I made a programme [laughs] – I start to say “Ok, today I’m going to talk with Camilla, Constanza; tomorrow I’m going to talk with who, who, who.*

After doing this for four months, Nasim started his own Norwegian courses for other refugees in the transit camp. Whilst clearly his is an exceptional case, his story shows how, with

enough motivation (and perhaps natural talent), social media can be an effective language learning resource.

#### *Other motivation for using social media*

Whilst communication, information, and learning emerged as the most common motivations for participants' use of social media, there were other motivations that emerged from analysis of the interviews. These included using social media for entertainment, to meet local Norwegians, and to improve well-being.

Although a couple of participants described how they used social media for entertainment – mainly watching movies and listening to music on YouTube and watching funny videos on Facebook - entertainment was, however, referred to by participants less than expected, given that it has often been a motive reported in the literature on uses and gratifications of social media. It did not seem to be as important motivation to them as watching videos to learn how to do things, or wanting to have 'real life' entertainment experiences "*I don't use it that much to entertain myself because...I don't know, I watch football, I play football*" (Omar).

With regard to meeting Norwegians, Nasim described how he started to use social media because he had no other way to make contact with them: "*I needed a platform to reach Norwegians, because I didn't meet any Norwegians. I was in Norway a couple of months and I didn't see any Norwegians*". Hassan talked of the difficulties of getting to know locals and finding opportunities to practise the language with them, referring to Norwegians as "closed":

*They don't like to talk to you. And we would like to talk with them; we want to get this language. And it's hard for us, to get started. You have to meet them at school or work or somewhere.*

For both of them, social media was an important means of making contact with Norwegians in a more indirect way. After initiating contact online, they could then establish friendships and practise the Norwegian language.

*For me, it's opportunities. Social media is a way of getting to know people, new people who I could meet in real life. It's a way of learning Norwegian. It's a way of getting to know the Norwegian culture.* (Nasim)

Only Nasim spoke explicitly of turning to social media to help with loneliness, isolation, and depression after arriving as a refugee in Norway. However, his is a powerful story which

directly links to well-being, so it is worth highlighting. After arriving at the transit centre, and becoming depressed at his situation and the remote location he was placed in, Nasim opened his Facebook account and asked for help and support.

*So I just get depressed, because I thought that, when I came to Norway – and it's kind of that...I didn't choose Norway, I just get smuggled here, so it was just luck, kind of. So I just get depressed in the camp, in the asylum centre, so that's why I start to use social media, to get to know Norwegian. ...each time I get a problem, each time I feel depressed, each time I think that it's really hopeless, I just use Facebook. I just write "Hi Facebook, I think it's really hopeless here, what should I do?"*

He described the Facebook friends he found in Norway as his “family”, and they had clearly been an invaluable emotional support to him. “*They care, you know. They want for me the best in life. That's something that I didn't experience before.*” Nasim was unique in regarding social media as a tool that could be used to improve his well-being and for proactively using it to do so.

#### *Behaviours and language on social media: the 'how'*

An unexpected theme that emerged from the data analysis related to participants' own ‘rules’ and social norms concerning behaviours that they expected or tolerated on social media – both their own behaviour and that of others. Ali, particularly, was clear that he would only interact with those who showed respect and good manners in social media forums:

*If they can give their comments in a well-mannered way, in a positive way, though they are against my beliefs or ideas, I don't really care about it. But it will be their manners, the way they use language...it's very important for me.*

Several participants also stated that they would not share their political views on social media as they did not think it was appropriate to do so. This was in contrast to Ali and Hamid, who used social media as a platform for political commentary.

There were also contrasting opinions about whether negative and offensive language and messages should be responded to, or just ignored. Farah described being compelled to respond to a racist comment directed at a friend on Facebook, telling her to “go back to her home country”. She said “*...I didn't care, actually, [about attracting more abuse] because I just had to reply. Because it was very mean, what that person had said. I'm not used to seeing this on a daily basis.*” However, the consensus among participants was that offensive posts, other than those aimed directly at people known to them, should be ignored. When asked how

such posts made her feel, Kalila responded *“I feel...it’s a bad feeling. But I don’t comment back...I just let them go.”* There was a feeling among participants that it was not worth demeaning themselves writing “bad words” (Jemal), or becoming involved in disputes with people who were unlikely to change their views.

One participant, Omar, was very aware of maintaining his privacy on social media, in stark contrast to Nasim, who was very open in his interactions and sharing on Facebook. For Omar, having control of his personal data and image online was extremely important *“I don’t like to put a lot of my pictures on Facebook or something”*. He also had an interesting opinion about why voluntary organisations in Bergen found it difficult to recruit refugees to participate in their activities, informed by his experience working with one such organisation. His view was that whenever they undertook an activity, these organisations wanted to take photographs to document the activity. They would then post these photographs to their social media pages for anyone to see. He felt that this act of taking and posting pictures of participants was off-putting to many refugees. *“For example, if [name of organisation redacted] had an activity, they would want to take a big picture...It would not be nice to publish everything that you did”*. Whilst the majority of participants in this study did not express strong feelings about their privacy on social media, for some refugees issues regarding privacy and consent may be of concern.

Participants were asked about the languages that they used on social media. All those in this study reported using English, saying that it was a common language for communicating with their friends from different parts of the world and those who did not speak Norwegian. All also said that they used their home language on social media. The majority also used Norwegian. Therefore the majority of participants were using at least three languages in their social media interactions; the choice of which one depended on who they were talking with or the audience that they were posting to, or what they needed to do. For example, Omar used “mostly English” due to his love of football: *“I like football and the best clubs are English clubs.”* Farah was typical in saying *“I use Arabic with my friends and family, who speak Arabic. And I use English with those who don’t speak Norwegian. And I speak Norwegian with Norwegian people.”* However, this contrasted with the view of the moderator of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group, who asserted that in fact most refugees do not speak English on arrival and need information on social media to be available in their own languages, the most important in Bergen being Arabic, Tigrinya, Somali, Kurdish and Farsi.

### **6.2.1.2 Access and limitations**

Smartphone and personal laptop were both the primary means of accessing social media for participants in this study, with the majority using a mix of both laptop and phone, depending where they were and what they wanted to do. Several said that they liked to access social media when travelling on public transport, to alleviate boredom, whilst others preferred to use it at home when they had more time. All agreed that getting access to the Internet and social media in Norway was easy.

Over half of participants reported that their use of social media had increased since they had been in Norway, with Nasim never having used it prior to arrival. Reasons given for the increase in use included the need to communicate with friends and family in other countries, having better Internet connection in Norway, and having more time with less to do than in their lives previously.

*...here, when I came here, it's so boring. There's nothing to do, just open [social media] to read more and to know what's going on around the world and something like that. So I use it a lot. (Hassan)*

Interestingly, several participants described feeling compelled to use social media in Norway in order to 'fit in', as they believed that social media was important to Norwegians.

*...here in Norway they use actually all day the Internet for everything. Like, if they want to post for a job. So it's important here. But in my country, no, it wasn't. And because most Norwegians...it's important to their lives, so it's important to my life. (Hassan)*

Study commitments were the main limitation to participants' use of social media in Norway. The majority said that classes, including Norwegian language classes, and the need to study stopped them from using it. Work also limited social media use for a couple of participants. One participant spoke about sporting activities limiting the time he could spend online. However, regardless of their other commitments, several commented that they still always found time to use social media. *"It's becoming, like, addiction, you know [laughs]. Not like every hour or something, but it's like that you really have to check your Facebook or Instagram..." (Farah).*

### 6.2.2 Achievements enabled by social media use

Participants were asked to talk about what they felt social media enabled them to do or achieve in their lives that was of value to them. By analysing their reported achievements, I hoped to identify the achieved functionings and corresponding capabilities that their social media use offered them. Capabilities will be discussed further in the Discussion chapter; here, the achievements that participants' reported as being a result of their social media use are presented. The key achievements reported were: communication, social connection, learning, and access to information. One other achievement mentioned by one participant - self-representation - is also discussed.

There is some clear overlap between participants' reported 'achievements' and 'motivations' in relation to their social media use. 'Communication', 'learning', and 'access to information' were reported as both motivations and achievements in their use of social media.

#### *Communication*

All participants spoke about communication with family and friends as being something that social media enabled them to achieve which was of great importance and value to them. Several participants spoke of using social media platforms to contact their family every day: *"...every day. Basically because my parents – all my family – lives in Syria right now, so I need to communicate with them"* (Omar). They also spoke of social media being the easiest, or only, way to contact their loved ones. As Jemal explained, the most important thing about having social media was *"To contact the people who live everywhere that you can't contact by telephone"*.

#### *Social connection*

Connecting with people socially – making new friends, establishing friendships with people already known, or gaining support online from others who had been through similar experiences – was also something that participants reported social media enabled them to do. Some made friends as a direct result of meeting them on social media; others reported making contact with or setting up Facebook or WhatsApp groups with people that they had already met in real life as acquaintances who would then become friends through social media interactions: *"Because each time you meet someone you get to become friends, so the first stage is that you become friends on Facebook, Instagram, so..."* (Farah). It seemed that social media contact often gave participants the confidence and information, and a 'space', to

pursue a friendship with people that they wanted to get to know better, in a way that real life did not provide: *“I don’t know them but maybe they know you or they know your friends and then they can add you on Facebook and then you start to talk with them and then you can be friends with them. You start communication.”* (Jemal).

Again, Nasim was quite exceptional in the number of friends he had made (almost 4,000) since opening his Facebook account after his arrival in Norway. Some of these friends he had gone on to meet in person, travelling all around Norway to do so, and they transitioned into ‘real-life’ friendships. However, for other participants, just finding people online who understood their experiences was an important benefit of social media, even if they did not result in offline friendships. These online connections could be equally important and provided support and comfort. As Ali said, *“You find so many people who have the same experiences like you. You find friends you can cry with. Or be happy with.”*

### *Learning*

‘Learning’, or gaining knowledge and skills, was an important achievement of participants’ social media use. As discussed, some recognised their activity as learning: *“[I use] YouTube, to learn...For example, I learn how to make food...How to do exercise”*(Jemal); this was particularly the case with language learning, as exemplified in the case of Nasim becoming fluent in Norwegian through his use of Facebook and Skype. Others did not necessarily recognise their activity as ‘learning’ in a formal sense, but nevertheless reported using social media to gain skills and knowledge which could be considered informal learning. This emerged particularly in discussions about YouTube. *“Yeah, I use YouTube. When I want to see how....if there is something wrong with my laptop or with my iPhone. How to fix it.”* (Hamid). Although not discussed in the interviews, it would be interesting to ask whether participants would have had difficulty gaining such knowledge if they had been unable to access, and navigate, social media.

### *Access to information*

Being able to access information was described by participants as both a motivation for and an achievement of their social media use. The kind of ‘information’ achieved mainly related to being that discussed previously under ‘Motivations’: being able to access news about their home countries, finding information about Norway and Bergen, and accessing information

relevant to newly arrived refugees (for example, about the asylum process and job opportunities).

### *Self-representation*

One participant, Nasim, spoke of valuing social media for providing him with a platform to represent himself as an individual and a refugee, and to demonstrate to the world what he could offer: “*Facebook, for me, it’s a way of showing people who I am and what I can do*”. He expressed this passionately, and several times, during the interview, and his view is interesting to include as it is unlikely that he would have been able to achieve his goal to do this so successfully or efficiently in any other way. The key informant from the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group also highlighted the importance of social media groups for refugees to have a forum to tell their stories and write about their lives in Norway. In response to being asked what the most important thing about social media was for him, Nasim replied:

*...it’s also a way of showing other Norwegians that I am here, I exist, and I can do a lot. That I’m a resource to Norway. It’s right that Norway has a lot of things to give me, but I have a lot of things to give back to Norway.*

He talked of social media enabling him to be an ambassador for his home country and to demonstrate his potential to Norwegians. Being able to present himself, and other refugees, in the way he felt that they should be seen - as a resource to be valued by Norway and necessary for its future - in contrast to the prevailing view in the Norwegian mainstream media, was very important to him.

*Because I do really believe that we – people who come to Norway – are ambassadors from our own countries. Because Norwegians, they do know just a little bit about Iraq, where I come from. But it’s the way that I’m presenting my own country, it’s the way I am; how I am as a person. To just reflect a good picture about my own country. So it’s all about that, I think. Because my goal is about showing people that we are a resource, and we are a really important resource for the Norwegian society. We are the youth of today and the leaders of tomorrow. We are the people who are going to build the Norwegian society, because you and me know that Norway needs people. They need people.*

### 6.2.3 Experiences and perceptions of social media in Norway

Participants in the study spoke of both positive and negative experiences resulting from their use of social media, as well as how using it could have both good and bad effects on their feelings of well-being.

#### 6.2.3.1 Experiences of social media in Norway

Most participants spoke of positive experiences resulting from their use of social media in Norway. For several of them - Farah, Hamid and Nasim - this had a practical dimension, in that their use of social media had resulted in actions that improved their situation as refugees.

*When first I came to Norway, I went to Oslo and I posted a photo on Facebook from Oslo and...when I posted that, many friends of mine who I didn't see in four, five years or something, people who I met in Syria and Lebanon, they wrote me "Oh, I live in Norway, I live in Oslo", and then I met many of them. I had one friend – he was Norwegian... – he connected me to his mum and his cousin...I met them and they were very nice and I borrowed a bike from his mum. That was very helpful actually. (Farah)*

Hamid, as seen, had used the 'Refugees Welcome' network to help improve his situation in a transit camp. Nasim, again, was quite exceptional in proactively turning to Facebook to – very successfully - raise money to fund private schooling for himself and his sister. He even used Facebook to find a trusted stranger with a Norwegian bank account to manage the money donated to him, since he could not open a bank account in Norway himself.

*I decided to go to school, but I didn't attend any school because I was an asylum seeker and didn't have any rights in Norway. But it was a solution – it's a private school. But to attend it I have to pay, and there was almost 80,000 kroner. I started my own Facebook group, I called it [name of group redacted], and I collect money. So I got double – I got over 150,000 kroner in two weeks. So I got the opportunity to go to school, not just for me but for my sister as well. So we could both pay for school.*

Nasim described how Facebook had had a life-changingly positive effect on his life and access to opportunities in Norway, enabling him gain an education to pursue his dream of studying medicine. He was able to joke that *"Actually, without Facebook and social media you could find me in Bygland, which is a small village in South Norway, with just two cows trying to learn how to get milk."*

For other participants, using social media had sometimes generated good feelings and provided them with emotional support. A couple of interviewees talked about feeling good about themselves when they received positive comments and ‘Likes’ on social media.

*Sasha: And is there anything about using social media that makes you feel good?*

*Kalia: For example, YouTube. When I’m studying [using YouTube videos to study] I’m doing something. And Instagram, when I use it to download my picture. And I read comments about my picture.*

Others spoke of the support and comfort that resulted from the social connections gained through their use of social media, as discussed in Section 6.2.2.

However, most participants also reported having had negative experiences using social media in Norway, or spoke of times when using it made them feel bad; only three said that they had not had this experience. These bad experiences included: seeing negative or racist comments directed at friends, reading traumatic details about conflict in their home countries, and seeing negative messages about immigrants in Norway. Farah described upsetting times when using social media made her feel bad:

*When I see news from Syria and when I see people who are dead. Like people who I used to know. People who were friends or I used to know them, and then I just see on Facebook that they are dead. And that was bad. And that happened a lot... And yeah, on Facebook I can see photos.*

A couple of participants referred to feeling, through what they saw on social media, that the Norwegian government did not want them in Norway, including the Immigration Minister [at that time Sylvi Listhaug], saying “*she doesn’t want immigrants to come here*” (Ali). “*I read once that one of my friends wrote that the Norwegian authorities want Norway only for Norwegians, not for others*” (Omar). These messages made them feel “fed up”, but not enough to quit social media - “*you just close it and go away for some time and then come back again*” (Ali).

### **6.2.3.2 Reactions to messages, groups, and campaigns aimed at refugees in Norway**

Reactions of participants to messages, groups, and campaigns aimed specifically at refugees and asylum seekers in Norway were also explored in the study. Five of the eight participants spoke of having used at least one of the ‘Refugees Welcome’ Facebook groups in Norway, including ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’. Most did not describe themselves as ‘active’ users

of the groups (only Hamid and Nasim reported proactively posting to them), but they had looked at and seen the posts and discussions. Interestingly, Kalia, who had been in Bergen for five years, said that she still ‘used’ ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’.

Kalia: *Yeah, I use it. I have several friends who use it.*

Sasha: *Would you ever post on it yourself? Or comment?*

Kalia: *No.*

Sasha: *But you’re there, watching.*

Kalia: [laughs] *Yeah.*

Participants reported that they found these groups positive for both the information that they provided and for reading about the experiences of others “*you can find out about experiences and learn, for example, about how to start to learn the language, how to find a job*” (Kalia).

The interview with the moderator of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group revealed that the group’s moderators do not allow negative messages to be posted to it, because “*it’s a Welcome site*”, not a discussion site, and it is set up to be a ‘closed’ group in order to screen members and prevent trolls. When asked why refugees do not seem to actively post to the group, the informant replied that sometimes they do - but since most refugees do not speak English or Norwegian on arrival in Bergen, this can prevent them from posting. “*I think it’s a matter of language, actually. Because many of them don’t speak English or they didn’t speak English at the time. When you first arrive, that’s when you need information the most, right?*”

For Nasim and Hamid, as we have seen, contacting the ‘Refugees Welcome’ groups had resulted in real, tangible improvements to their living situations and had enabled them to connect with others who were in a position to help them, either with language practise or in practical or emotional ways. Only one participant, Omar, said that he would not look at any Facebook groups aimed at asylum seekers or refugees in Norway, saying that he felt they gave an unrealistic view of life for refugees and tended to be populated by a particular type of Norwegian positive to refugees “*these people are a bit of optimist people. And I’m not kind of an optimist person*”. Those participants who did not use the ‘Refugees Welcome’ groups preferred to make private groups with friends or seek information from friends on social media “*if you know each other then you can make a group. Then you can talk.*” (Jemal).

In terms of migration information campaigns, three participants (Omar, Kalia, and Hamid) said that they had heard of the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ campaign; four

participants said that they had not; and it was unclear whether one participant had heard of the ‘Stricter’ campaign specifically. Those who had heard of it reported that they did not know much about it, but said they were interested in finding out more. However, Nasim pointed out that for him, and for many refugees, there was no choice in their decisions to come to Norway - being, as he was, smuggled - and therefore migration information campaigns had no real relevance.

*There are many people who come to Norway but they didn't choose it. Because I didn't hear about Norway before I come here. I didn't know that Norway exist. I had heard about Germany and a little about...Denmark, but nothing more than that. So I didn't know, for example, that Finland or Iceland or Norway exist [laughs]. Surprise!*

Ali and Hamid also both pointed out that not all asylum seekers have access to social media, or the education to understand the messages on it, and therefore campaigns will have no impact on these people.

However, participants felt that messages on social media about migration, not necessarily those related to migration information campaigns, could have an influence on migration decisions. Hamid described how social media had altered his plans to stay in Greece and led to him coming to Norway instead. After reading something on Facebook about changes to asylum rules in Greece, he decided not to stay there: *“when I heard this news on Facebook I said maybe I should go now. So after two weeks I was in Oslo.”* Unwelcoming messages about asylum seekers that he saw when he was researching Australia on Google had also previously deterred him from trying to reach Australia. Other participants said that they thought that messages on social media might influence refugees’ decisions, but that information from personal contacts was also very important. Hamid described how, for those in a position to make choices, messages and campaigns aimed at refugees were only one element in their decision-making: *“When you are in a situation to decide, you think about everything. You think about the way – how it is risky and how much it costs. So then you evaluate and decide – risk and cost.”*

Overall, it seemed that participants felt that migration information campaigns could influence some potential refugees, but not all. For some, there would be other influences (cost, risk, personal contacts); for others, social media campaigns would not be relevant at all due to their lack of agency or their lack of access to social media or their ability to interpret the messages on it. Among participants in this study, the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in

Norway' campaign seemed to have had little direct impact. However, only Omar, Hamid and Hassan had arrived after the campaign started in 2015, with the other participants already in Norway when it began. Both Omar and Hamid had heard of it, even if it had not influenced their decision to come to Norway.

#### **6.2.4 The importance of trust and the offline world**

##### *The issue of trust and social media*

Interestingly, several participants spoke of believing that websites were a more trustworthy source for 'official' information (on the asylum process, for example) than social media, even if the social media sites were run by government departments, as in the case of the 'Stricter Asylum Regulations' Facebook page. Omar, who had expressed strong distrust in social media, nevertheless seemed to trust web page information, saying "*you can trust official websites [for example the UDI website] more than these pages on Facebook*". Farah explained how "*I really prefer to read it from the website*", and Hamid said "*It's better to go to the official website, rather than Facebook*". Part of the reason for this perception seemed to be that they felt that other people could comment on social media pages, and spread fear or misinformation through their comments, which "*affect your opinions somehow*" (Omar), whereas web pages were regarded as more neutral, with content produced only by officials. However, it was surprising that none of the participants questioned the trustworthiness of web page information, and that they seemed to base their perception of trust more on the communication media rather than the source of the information.

In contrast, the moderator of the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' group offered the view that, in their experience, social media was more accessible to refugees than web pages, which were more difficult to navigate for refugees who did not know the language. The informant also felt that the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' group was a site that was trusted by refugees because many of the people moderating and posting to it had been working with refugees for many years. The informant also pointed out that groups and organisations can easily verify their accounts on Facebook to show that they are authentic groups. However, the informant did concede that at the height of the refugee influx of 2015 in Norway there was a lot of misinformation circulating on social media about the asylum rules and procedures (as well as a lack of information even amongst those working with refugees) and that this

*was a big problem actually, because we didn't have a lot of information to give them so the information they went and got [from social media] was ... When it wasn't right,*

*it could be really – especially at that vulnerable time of their lives – it could really ruin everything for them.*

Omar and Hassan also expressed distrust in identities portrayed on social media. Omar, as has been seen, believed that anyone could create a page on Facebook to post misinformation and Hassan described how he believed people might not be who they said they were “*I’m talking to someone behind the screen, but I’m not sure. In reality I am another person...It’s just illusion. It’s not like reality, like us now.*” However, Nasim, in contrast, was incredibly trusting of the people he met on Facebook, to the point that he transferred a substantial amount of money donated for his schooling into the bank account of someone he met on Facebook.

#### *The importance of offline contact*

For several participants in this study, the offline world was very important for information, support and social life. Farah spoke of preferring to get her information from the Norwegian media, and Omar and Jemal preferred to seek information and advice from personal contacts. Others expressed regret that so much of their social lives in Norway were conducted through social media rather than face-to-face. “*It’s important to have some social contact with people. To use it [social media] your whole life, or all the time... [makes negative facial expression]*” (Hassan). “*I like something real. I like to go out with friends*” (Hamid). Farah talked of believing that time spent on Facebook was “wasting time” which could be spent doing something more useful offline.

Perhaps surprisingly for young people, both Hassan and Omar expressed strong opinions that their lives would be unaffected or even preferable without social media. “*Actually for me it’s not that important. Like, in a way, if it [social media] disappears one day it won’t affect me that much*” (Omar). Hassan spoke of hearing from his father about a time before the Internet existed, and how he felt that was a better time to live: “*Actually, I would like to go back to our old life. I mean, like, because it was better. To meet people in reality. Not behind a screen.*” He also talked of how social media had not been so important in his home country, when he would “*go out with friends and do something funny and you don’t think about your phone*”, and regretted that in Norway social media had become such a big part of his life.

*So that’s the difference between here and there. When I came here, I start to use it, and now I’m using it a lot. But that’s not good for life. I mean, like, I have to do*

*something else. And would love to meet them [Norwegians] face-to-face, not behind a screen.*

Their views were in clear contrast to Nasim's experience of social media in Norway which had dramatically improved his social and personal life as well as his future prospects.

For organisations working with refugees, social media may still not be regarded as a valid or trustworthy method of communication, as opposed to web pages, printed media, or face-to-face information. The key informant from the 'Refugees Welcome' group expressed the view that social media was a key way to reach refugees online "*where the people actually are*" and was an essential tool for being responsive to and staying on top of current needs within the refugee community. Yet their experience was that most organisations in Bergen working with refugees are still not willing to use it. "*Why are we still not doing this? [using social media] It would help so many people. But they didn't want to do it, because it's not seen as a serious channel.*" However, interestingly, the informant from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, which runs the 'Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway' Facebook group, commented that it was "very important" for the department to have a presence on social media.

*We know that migrants find a lot of information about migration, travel routes and national asylum regulations in social media... We have to communicate through social media if we want to make sure that migrants get the correct information about Norwegian regulations.*

At the time of the interview, the Ministry had not conducted an evaluation of the 'Stricter' campaign. The informant expressed opinion that the campaign had had "*an impressive reach*" but acknowledged that it was not known how many migrants it had reached or how they had reacted to it.

### **6.3 Findings from online observations**

Thematic analysis of my field notes from observation of the two Facebook groups, 'Refugees Welcome to Norway' and 'Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway', identified key themes which are presented below. During the observations, an Observation Guide was used as a template for the field notes made (Appendix 4). Attention was given both to the posts to the group (the topics and themes of posts and stories shared) and to the reactions and interactions

among users of the group related to these posts (the number and type of their ‘Reactions’<sup>8</sup>, shares, and comments).

In order to protect the identity of users of the groups, and comply with NSD requirements, direct quotes from users in the groups have not been included.

### **6.3.1 ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ Facebook group**

All the posts to this Facebook group during the observation period were posted by the ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ group administrators, but comments and reactions to the posts were from individual users. The number of reactions to posts, using ‘Facebook Reactions’ (six emoticons available on Facebook to express a reaction to a post: Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad and Angry), ranged from 33 to 641 per post, with an average of 157 reactions per post. The majority of the posts were links to stories concerning refugees and asylum seekers that had been published in local and national Norwegian media, such as Dagsavisen, Aftenposten, and Dagbladet, as well as links to posts from other organisations working with refugees. Almost all posts were in Norwegian, with a couple in English.

Although it was not always possible to accurately ascertain the nationality or location of users of the group from their Facebook name or avatar, it appeared - from their given names, profile pictures, and the fact that they were writing in Norwegian - that almost all the active users of this group were Norwegian. Some identified themselves as Norwegian in their comments - for example, when expressing feelings of shame at being Norwegian. Very few posts were from those who identified themselves as refugees or had names that would suggest that they were not Norwegian. However, it was not possible to tell if refugees were seeing the posts in the group and just choosing not to respond to them. Since it is an open, or public, Facebook group, anyone can view posts and comments without participating in the group themselves. My observation field notes included many comments such as “Where are the asylum seekers/refugees? Are they reading these posts?” This seeming lack of involvement could be due in part to the language barrier identified by the moderator of the ‘Refugee Welcome to Bergen’ group.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Reactions’ are emoticons used by Facebook which allow users to express their reaction to a post. There are currently six emoticons available: Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad and Angry.

Four key themes were identified in analysis of field notes of the group's interactions during the observation period. These were related to the group's perceptions of refugees, perceptions of the Norwegian government, and perceptions of the Norwegian people. How to interpret user reactions to posts was another theme that frequently emerged from the notes.

#### *User perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers*

Within the group, reactions and comments to posts about refugees and asylum seekers were overwhelming positive. During the observation period I noted only one response that could have been construed in a negative way, when a user posted a 'heart' reaction, symbolising 'Love', in response to a story about asylum seekers being returned to Afghanistan. (However, it was impossible to know whether this action meant that the user 'loved' the fact that asylum seekers were being forcibly returned or whether it had another meaning.) There were particularly large responses from users to links to several stories about refugees being successful in Norway. For example, a story about a woman who came to Norway as a refugee and went on to become head of a private Norwegian school received 372 positive 'Reactions' and many comments of congratulation and pride. This suggested that users liked to see examples of successful integration - possibly that they liked stories of refugees 'becoming' Norwegian.

#### *User perceptions of the Norwegian government*

Reactions to posts about the Norwegian government were overwhelmingly negative. There was criticism of the government's *policies* on asylum seekers, refugees, and human rights, including its forced return of asylum seekers and also of its *treatment* of asylum seekers and Muslims, and the lack of humanity it showed to them. For example, there was outrage in the group at a news story about Norwegians being encouraged to send photos of Muslims going about their lives in Norway to the state-sponsored Human Rights Service to monitor perceived suspicious behaviour. This generated 146 'Angry' Reactions and many comments summarised as "is this actually legal?" Comments repeatedly expressed feelings of "shame" and "anger" over the actions of the Norwegian government, and the view that human dignity and human rights were not important to policy makers.

An example of expression of shame and anger was seen in response to the illustration below, posted to the group under the heading "Skremmer med rasisme/Scare with racism". It shows frames taken from a comic strip produced by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

48,000 copies of which were distributed in Somalia in 2014-2015. This comic book depicts the fate of Hassan, who arrives in Norway from Somalia without documentation, only to suffer racism, exploitation, ill health, and ultimately returns to Somalia (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Organization for Migration, n.d.). This post generated 74 ‘Angry’ and 25 ‘Sad’ Reactions and a comment about feeling ashamed of being Norwegian.



Figure 2. Irregular migration comic strip (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Organization for Migration, n.d)

Box 1: “At one point, the staff at the hospital refuse to attend to him for lack of documents” (p.5)

Box 2: “Hassan gets racially abused” (p.6)

Box 3: “Hassan has to live on the streets before he can find housing” (p.12)

### *User perceptions of the Norwegian people*

There seemed to be a clear distinction among the group in its perception of Norwegian people as individuals, and as a collective society. At an individual level, stories posted were all of ‘good’ Norwegians assisting asylum seekers and refugees in different ways. The comments that these stories generated were mostly of pride in seeing Norwegians involved in acts of caring and generosity, praising them for doing so. However, the perception of Norwegian society as a whole among the group was negative. Comments repeatedly described Norwegian society as “cold” and uncaring in its treatment of asylum seekers. As mentioned, users expressed feelings of shame at being Norwegian in their comments. For example, one user commented (in Norwegian) that Norway is a cold and heartless society, and that when they read things about asylum seekers being held for long periods they feel ashamed to be Norwegian.

### *Interpreting user reactions to posts*

My observation field notes reflected my uncertainty throughout the observation period regarding correctly interpreting the meaning of Reactions to posts to the group. For example, when a story was posted about poor treatment of refugees, which received negative comments, some users ‘Liked’ the post itself. It was not possible to know whether they were

‘liking’ the story about the negative treatment of refugees, or ‘liking’ the critical comments directed at it below. The fact that almost all comments, and most of the stories linked to, were written in Norwegian and had to be translated into English, also meant that nuances or meaning of some messages may have been lost or misconstrued in translation.

The ‘author’ of the stories and articles also seemed to influence the level of response they received. The most reactions to any post observed was in response to a link to an interview with Ole Paus, one of Norway's most popular singer-songwriters, who was criticising Norway’s stricter asylum policies. This story generated 641 Reactions and 112 shares. Stories written from personal, more emotional, perspectives - for example, those written by refugees themselves or those directly helping refugees - also generated more responses than journalistic reports (for example, 471 Reactions were observed for a blog post written by a Norwegian inviting asylum seekers to share his home). Messages written by those directly experiencing issues affecting refugees, or from a ‘celebrity’, seemed to have a greater impact on the group in that they prompted a greater response from users.

### **6.3.2 ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’ Facebook group**

All the posts to this Facebook group during the observation period were posted by the ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’ group administrators. Comments and reactions were from Facebook users, but the number was low. The number of reactions to posts using Facebook Reactions ranged from 0 to 22 per post, with an average of 1.08 reactions per post. The majority of the posts to the group were links to stories concerning refugees and asylum seekers published on two sites: Rights.no, a Norwegian foundation established to promote integration but which has been criticised for being anti-Muslim, and Document.no, a Norwegian online right-wing magazine. Articles in mainstream Norwegian national press such as Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (sites also linked to by the ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ group), were also posted.

As far as could be ascertained, all of the users that did actively engage with the group appeared to be Norwegian. Being a public group, it is not possible to know how many people were watching the group and not engaging with it, or who they were. However, the group had few ‘active’ users.

Three key themes were identified in analysis of field notes taken during the observation period. These were related to users': perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers in Norway; perceptions of the effect of immigration in Norway; and perception of threat to Western societies from immigration.

#### *User perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers in Norway*

Perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers in Norway within the group focused on the theme of them 'taking advantage' of Norway. Aspects of Norwegian life that it was perceived they were trying to exploit included: Norway's generosity and wealth; the kindness of the Norwegian people; and Norway's laws regarding citizenship and laws protecting minors (which asylum seekers were accused of lying about their age to take advantage of). Articles that were linked to, and commented on, included a story about Somali asylum seekers being paid by the Norwegian government if they chose to return to Somalia voluntarily. This generated comments which can be summed up as "*They get paid well for coming here and then they get paid again to return.*" The article implied that these Somalis had never been in danger of persecution in their home country, but had simply travelled to Norway for economic gain with the intention of returning home wealthier.

#### *User perceptions of the effect of immigration in Norway*

Overwhelmingly, in the group, immigration was portrayed as having a negative or threatening impact on the Norwegian way of life. Key sub-themes that emerged from the posts and comments referred to dangers from: 1) Muslims, who were regarded as practising cultural or religious behaviours incompatible with the Norwegian lifestyle, 2) polygamy, which was portrayed as being prevalent among Pakistani and Somali men in particular, and a practice that they expected to import to Norway, and 3) the cost of immigration, which would result in higher taxes for hard-working Norwegian people and divert resources, including health care resources, away from them. However, the focus seemed to largely be on fear of a potential threat from 'other' cultural and religious practices, rather than the real, present impact of immigration on Norway.

#### *User perceptions of the threat to Western societies from immigration*

Many of the stories linked to were reports in the press from other countries - including the UK, Belgium, and, most frequently, Sweden - exposing problems resulting from their open immigration policies, and highlighting perceived threats to Western society. Three main

topics relating to threats to Western society were identified: 1) use of the niqab or hijab, which was perceived as a threat to security and culture, 2) polygamy, which was perceived as a threat to Western law and cultural norms, 3) safety of local populations, with examples given of refugees being involved in cases of rape, murder, terrorism, and the sexual abuse of minors. The implication was that if these problems occur in other, neighbouring, countries that allowed large numbers of immigrants and refugees to enter, then they were likely to occur in Norway too.

### **6.3.3 @utlendingsdir Twitter feed**

Although observation of the UDI's @utlendingsdir Twitter feed was also undertaken, findings have not been included as there was very little activity (only six tweets) or interactions on the feed during the period observed. Tweets mainly contained links to reports and statistics related to immigration and it was often unclear what the purpose or intended audience was. Examples of tweets included a photograph from an information meeting held for Somalis in Norway with the caption "Topics were citizenship, family reunification and termination/revocation of permissions". (This raised the question of whether information about this meeting was provided for the benefit of Somalis in Norway or for those working with them, and whether the purpose of the meeting was to support or deter them). Most of the tweets and reports linked to were all in Norwegian, suggesting that this feed was not actually aimed at refugees and asylum seekers themselves.

## Chapter 7: Discussion

### 7.0 Introduction

With this study I aimed to explore the role of social media in the lives of young refugees in Bergen. I hoped to examine their motivations for using social media in Norway, what they reported that they were able to achieve by using it, and the implications for identifying capabilities offered by social media; particularly capabilities related to well-being. The findings, presented in the previous chapter, raise some unexpected themes and unresolved questions which I will discuss in this chapter. Limitations and challenges were also encountered during the research process, which will be presented. The discussion will be initially framed around the two theories used to frame the study, Uses and Gratifications theory and the Capability Approach.

To summarise the key findings from the previous chapter, the main motivations (or U&G factors) reported by participants for using social media were communication, accessing information and learning. The key achievements that they reported as a result of using social media were communication, social connection, learning, and access to information. Norway's 'Stricter Asylum Regulations' campaign had little impact on participants, and their response to the 'Refugees Welcome' groups was largely positive but passive. Overall, for participants in this study, the positive benefits of social media seemed to outweigh negative experiences, and negative experiences did not generally deter them from using it.

### 7.1 Discussion of findings in relation to Uses & Gratifications theory

My first research question asked about the 'Uses and Gratifications' of social media use in the everyday lives of my participants. U&G theory seeks to understand *how* and *why* individuals seek out particular media to satisfy specific needs. Findings showed that my participants chose the social media platforms that they used according to what they understood to be their unique functions and usefulness, or "*special thing*" (Hassan), either for themselves or others that they interacted with. They were generally well informed about these functions. Other empirical studies have shown similar results, including a study of young refugees and digital spaces which found that participants actively evaluated a range of devices and formats to determine which ones were 'fit for purpose'. The authors suggested that this showed "a level of awareness, discernment and flexibility about the appropriateness of the tool or source" (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2015, p. 4). I would argue that such awareness

also applied to my participants. Some expressed reluctance to add any more social media accounts to those that they already used, and talked of deleting those they did not find useful, suggesting that there was a limit to how many platforms they were prepared to adopt as well as ongoing evaluation of those that they used in their daily lives.

Of particular interest in my findings were the main U&G ‘factors’, or motivations, that participants themselves identified for using social media, especially when compared with other studies which have looked at U&G factors for online media (illustrated by Table 1, Section 2.1, p. 12). An unexpected motive that emerged in this study was that ‘learning’ was a strong U&G factor for my participants (although, with the exception of language learning, they often did not explicitly identify, or even acknowledge, their social media activity as ‘learning’). Among other studies reviewed, only Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011), in their research into university students using Facebook, identified “professional advancement” as a U&G motive which might relate to learning. (However, it was not clear what ‘professional advancement’ in this case entailed – whether it meant networking or educational achievement. The term was also provided to participants in the study by researchers as a motive category, rather than one that emerged from participants themselves.) In a study of the role of digital technology with settled refugee migrants in regional Australia, Alam and Imran (2015), found that the Internet was perceived as essential for educational activities by participants. However, most of those participating in the study were in education, the cohort was older (almost 40% were age 35 and over), and the focus was on digital technologies rather than social media specifically. No other U&G studies that I reviewed referred to finding learning a U&G motive in participants’ use of online media, and in this respect the finding was unusual. It must be pointed out that all the participants in my study were also either in education in Norway (one was currently at university and all the others except one were at college or studying Norwegian) and most were planning to apply to university, and this likely had an influence on their motivations. However, in other studies participants are usually university students, themselves in education, so the comparison remains interesting.

Other strong U&G motives identified in my findings were ‘communication’ and ‘information’. Information-seeking and sharing are found in existing literature as common factors for online media use, and it is not surprising that newly settled refugees use social media for accessing information about their home countries and for locating necessary local information, as well as for sharing information with others. In respect to accessing

information about their home countries, my participants agreed with a study of young refugees in Australia which revealed that they considered online news services, particularly those from their home countries, a better information source than local ones (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2015). Using social media for ‘communication’, mostly with family and friends, seemed more important to participants in my study than in others reviewed (likely because most of them were separated from their families), although the factors of ‘companionship’ and ‘social interaction’ found in other studies seem to be closely related motives (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Parker & Plank, 2000; Whiting & Williams, 2013). This leads to one of the issues with using Uses and Gratifications theory, which is that the range of terms and classifications used by researchers to refer to ‘gratifications’, make it difficult to compare them, and even sometimes to understand what they involve. As Quan-Hasse and Young (2014, p. 280) observe: “Across studies a wide range of gratifications have been proposed, with distinct and diffuse typologies. This disparity in the literature makes it difficult for scholars to compare research findings and to develop internally coherent theoretical frameworks”.

Finally, ‘entertainment’ and ‘passing time’, which have been consistently found in research as strong U&G factors, were much less, or not at all, important to the participants in my study. Although using social media for entertainment was a motive for a couple of participants, it occurred much less than expected, and several spoke of preferring to be entertained in ‘real life’ and of a longing for offline contact and entertainment. In contrast to findings in existing literature, passing time or escapism were only mentioned in relation to certain particular times when participants accessed social media - to alleviate boredom on public transport - but not explicitly reported as a motive for using it.

The findings reveal that for the young refugees in this study, social media was a vital tool for communication, accessing information, and accessing opportunities to learn. They were not motivated to use it for entertainment, relaxing, or passing time as much as evidence from other studies would suggest. Although they still often ended up “*wasting time*” on it (Farah), this was often due to the circumstances of having little to do or few friends in Norway, rather than an active motivation for use. However, the participants on my study differed from those in other studies in the fact that they were refugees. Whilst the participants in most U&G studies of online media are usually young people, they are not typically refugees. What empirical research there is with refugees focuses more on technology use during refugee

journeys or in crisis situations, such as during time in transit camps (Kondova, 2016; Gillespie, Osseiran & Cheesman, 2018). There seems to be little U&G literature which relates to technology use and settled refugees – those who have been granted refugee status – or which focuses on social media specifically.

### *Gratifications ‘sought’ and ‘obtained’*

My second research question was intended to explore the difference, if any, between the gratifications that my participants ‘sought’ and the gratifications that they ‘obtained’ from their use of social media, which has become a recent focus of U&G research. However, the main method that I had planned to use to explore this difference - an online survey/diary - failed because my participants did not complete it. I attribute this largely to the fact that I could not send the online survey link to participants electronically (in order to ensure their anonymity and comply with NSD requirements), as several participants asked me to do. Instead I had to provide the survey link on a piece of paper, which was likely lost or forgotten. Since the survey was designed to be completed after the individual interviews, I did not specifically ask participants at the interview stage about the outcomes - or ‘gratifications obtained’ - from their social media use in relation to their motives for using it. I did ask them to talk about what social media enabled them to achieve that was of value to them, (functionings), which is related; however, the survey was intended to be the main method of gathering information on gratifications obtained. I therefore do not have data to answer this research question or to add to existing knowledge on the distinction between sought and obtained gratifications in relation to social media. I am, though, able to offer findings to add to existing U&G motives for my participants, as discussed above.

## **7.2 Discussion of findings in relation to Capability Approach**

The Capability Approach, as applied to this study, shifts the focus from the ‘means’ of participants’ social media use (issues of access and platforms used) to the outcomes or ‘capabilities’ that it offers them, which are of value to them. Following Sen’s own view that “the assessment of capabilities has to proceed primarily on the basis of observing a person’s actual functionings” (1999, p. 131), I approached the identification of capabilities associated with social media use by analysing what participants reported that they were able to achieve from using it. This approach has also been applied in empirical research by Andrade and Doolin (2016) and others. The achieved functionings that my participants’ identified, as presented in the previous chapter, were: 1) communication; 2) social connection; 3) learning;

4) access to information; 5) self-representation. Based on these findings, I suggest five corresponding capabilities that social media use offers to refugees: effective communication; social connectedness; participation in learning opportunities; access to information; and expression of self.

- *Effective communication.* The ability to easily and reliably communicate with family and friends in different parts of the world, for some on a daily basis, was the most important thing about social media for participants in this study. Social media, particularly messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Skype, enabled them to share information about their own lives and to keep track of the lives of their loved ones in almost real-time. This ability was a source of great comfort. In fact, it was described by several participants as a “need”. If this need for communication was not fulfilled, it could negatively affect their mood and outlook. It can therefore be supposed that social media can provide a vital means of emotional and psychological support for refugees.
- *Social connectedness.* Social media played a role for participants in establishing relationships - with people that they met through social media or were known to them as acquaintances in ‘real life’, as well with as those that they only communicated with online. Even if online connections did not result in offline ones, they were still regarded as valuable, and social media offered a neutral space in which to ‘meet’ and share experiences. Online social networks could, therefore, provide for refugees a sense of belonging and inclusion and help progress their integration in the host country.
- *Participation in learning opportunities.* YouTube in particular was a vital resource for participants for learning; they reporting using it to learn languages (Norwegian and English), and for learning how to ‘do’, fix, and make things that they needed or wanted. It seemed that most participants almost took for granted the ability to access learning opportunities online - “[YouTube] *I use it for everything*” (Farah) - and often did not recognise their activity as learning. However, it seems clear that without social media as a resource, they would have had difficult satisfying these learning needs so easily. It would be interesting to probe this further and to consider the potential of social media as a means of delivering educational programmes to refugees and asylum seekers. This is especially pertinent for asylum seekers since, as Nasim found, they are not usually allowed to participate in education programmes, including language

learning, whilst their applications are being assessed. They therefore have very limited learning opportunities; social media may provide a means of accessing these.

- *Access to information.* Being able to find out about events in their home countries and access information needed to navigate the social and practical challenges of their new lives in Norway was important to most participants. It gave them a sense of control and the ability to make choices in their everyday lives. Access to information about local opportunities (such as volunteer opportunities) might also, in turn, have important benefits for social connections, participation, and integration.
- *Expression of self.* Although Nasim was the only participant in the study who directly identified self-representation as a valued achievement of his use of social media, the impact that the ability to do this - to present and express himself on his terms - had on his self-esteem and sense of control (and perhaps had on the way that his Norwegian Facebook ‘friends’ responded to him so warmly and helpfully), makes it worth including as a potential capability of social media use for refugees. As a marginalised group, often discredited in the media, refugees do not have many other outlets through which they can demonstrate who they are and what they can offer to their new society, in their own voice. Using social media for self-expression, and the benefits derived by doing this, could therefore be an intriguing area for further research.

Undoubtedly, being able to realise the capabilities identified could be positive for refugees in terms of offering them emotional support, social connections, a sense of community and belonging (in their home country and new society), as well opportunities to participate and integrate in a new society. In turn, realising these capabilities could enhance their sense of agency and well-being.

#### *‘Capabilities’ findings in the context of other studies*

The capabilities identified in this study share strong similarities with capabilities identified in the limited number of empirical studies which have examined the use of digital technologies by refugees, particularly the studies of AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017) and Andrade and Doolin (2016). Both identified *communication* (termed in these studies ‘effective telecommunication’ and ‘communicating effectively’); *social connectedness*; and *access to information* (termed ‘participating in an information society’), as capabilities that ICT enabled refugees to realise. Whilst AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017) also identified

‘participation in education programmes’, which relates to the *learning* capability identified in this study, this referred to more formal educational programmes delivered online and YouTube ‘lessons’ rather than informal learning. They also identified some additional capabilities that did not emerge from this study, including: ‘communicating with government’, ‘translation services’, ‘mobility’ (geographical navigation), and ‘safety and emergency services’ (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). However, most of the participants in the AbuJarour and Krasnova study were refugees living in shelters and awaiting asylum application decisions, so their immediate needs and concerns were likely to be different from the participants in this study. Furthermore, neither of these studies, nor others reviewed, focussed on capabilities associated with social media specifically, but looked at ICTs (of which social media is a part).

In relation to *social connectedness*, other studies with migrant groups have shown that online support groups and Internet-mediated social support can help with adaptation during resettlement (Hiller & Franz, 2004; Mikal & Woodfield, 2015). A recent study exploring social media use by refugees in the Netherlands found that social media was particularly important for building social connections with the native population through the coordination of intercultural meetings and links between refugees and local people (Alencar, 2017).

*Expression of self* has not been identified in studies that I am aware of. Although studies (AbuJarour & Krasnova 2017; Andrade & Doolin, 2016) have identified ‘maintaining/expressing cultural identity’ as a capability that digital technology offers refugees, this has focussed more on maintaining religious or cultural beliefs and attachments using technology than on self expression.

### **7.3 Linking Capability Approach and Uses & Gratifications theory**

Motivations (U&G factors) and capabilities related to using ICTs are typically considered separately in the literature. This study aimed to explore and identify both the motivations for and capabilities enabled by social media use by young refugees, and to link the theories of Uses and Gratifications and the Capability Approach. This was ambitious given the scope of the research project. In hindsight, focusing on just one of these aspects and theories could have enabled more in-depth explorations with participants. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the overlap found between the Uses and Gratifications ‘factors’ (motivations) and the achievements and capabilities identified. Whilst acknowledging that much more attention is needed to examining the concepts of motivations, achievements, and capabilities, and the

relationship between them, it is worth highlighting the factors common to all three in this study (see Table 4 below.) These factors were: ‘communication’, ‘learning’, and ‘access to information’. Interestingly, ‘social connection’ was not a reported motivation for participants’ use of social media, but it was a reported achievement of use. The mechanisms by which participants felt themselves become socially connected through their use of social media could be further explored.

Table 4: *Motives, Achievements and suggested Capabilities of social media use as found in this study*

<b>Motives reported by participants’ for their use of social media</b>	<b>Achievements reported by participants’ from their use of social media</b>	<b>Capabilities suggested by their use of social media</b>
Communication	Communication	Effective communication
Information	Access to information	Access to information
Learning	Learning	Participation in learning
<i>Entertainment (for a couple of participants)</i>	Social connection	Social connectedness
<i>Meeting Norwegians (for two participants)</i>	<i>Self-representation (Nasim only)</i>	Expression of self
<i>Well-being (Nasim only)</i>		

On an individual level, Nasim’s motivations and achievements were somewhat different to other participants, as can be seen in the table above. Unlike the others, his reported motivations for using social media included to improve his own well-being (to help address his depression, loneliness, isolation). His reported achievements included self-representation. The way that he used social media – very proactively, to ask for help learning Norwegian, as well as for emotional, financial, and practical help and support – was also different to the majority of participants. The positive outcomes that he gained from using social media far exceeded the others in terms of the numbers of friends and connections that he made (notably mostly with Norwegians), becoming fluent in Norwegian, and raising money to enable him to pursue his education. This raises a number of questions, which will be discussed further in Section 7.5.

#### **7.4 Messages, groups, and campaigns aimed at refugees**

My third research question asked how participants interpreted and responded to messages on social media aimed at refugees and asylum seekers in Norway. The main focus was on Norway’s ‘Refugees Welcome’ Facebook groups and the Norwegian government’s ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations’ campaign, both of which began on social media around 2015.

Findings revealed that whilst most participants had positive views of the ‘Refugees Welcome’ groups, they were ‘passive’ users of them. In other words, that they knew of and looked at the groups, and most reported that they found them useful or interesting, but they did not interact with them (‘post’ or comment). Only Nasim and Hamid had actively posted to ‘Refugees Welcome’ groups (Nasim to the ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ group and Hamid to regional ‘Welcome’ groups), and both had seen positive, tangible improvements to their lives as a result. Hamid saw improvements in his treatment at a transit camp as a result of contacting the moderator of a local ‘Refugees Welcome’ group and had positive response to posting on the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group, and Nasim’s life clearly changed and improved dramatically following his initial posts to the ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ group asking for language help. This ‘active’ versus ‘passive’ use of groups and social media in general, and its implications, will be discussed further in the next section. The passive use of the ‘Welcome’ groups by participants was mirrored in my observation findings, that it was almost all Norwegians participating in the ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ and ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’ Facebook groups, with virtually no refugees identifiable. Nevertheless, the response of participants in the study was universally positive towards the ‘Refugees Welcome’ groups, even if they did not actively participate in them; in Kalia’s case, she was still “watching” the Bergen group five years after her arrival in the city.

The ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations’ campaign, however, seemed to have little influence on participants in this study. Only three participants had heard of it, but they did not know much about it. Since most participants were already in Norway when the campaign started, this is perhaps not surprising. Most participants felt that messages on social media could potentially influence other refugee’s migration decisions regarding coming to Norway. However, they also stressed that other factors – cost, risk, and information from personal contacts – were very important in migration decisions, and that some refugees did not have any choice in their destination; meaning that migration campaigns would be irrelevant to them. This finding is backed up by literature, which suggests that it is social, political, and economic conditions in home countries and the presence of social networks in destination countries which are the most important factors in influencing migration decisions (Heller, 2014; Schans & Optekamp, 2016). Furthermore, when potential migrants perceive that information campaigns are driven by governments with political interests in reducing immigration, they are likely to dismiss them as propaganda (Musarò, 2016). That there is a lack of knowledge and evidence about the impact and effectiveness of migration information campaigns conducted through

social media, either on migration numbers or on migrants themselves, has been confirmed by the Norwegian Institute for Social Research. It recently reported “a total lack of knowledge about how governments employ social media to reach people of foreign nationalities” (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 13) and concluded that in the case of the ‘Stricter’ campaign “the actual impact on the target groups’ reception or behavior is unknown” (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 54). The key informant from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security contacted for this study confirmed that there has been no evaluation of the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ campaign since it began in 2015.

There is clearly a need for evaluation and research on the impact of migration information campaigns conducted through social media. For future work in Norway, it would be useful to investigate the impact of the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations’ campaign on refugees who were making migration decisions and were outside Norway when the campaign began in 2015, unlike most of the participants in this study who were already in Norway at that time.

## **7.5 Other themes and issues raised by the findings**

During the course of this research several issues emerged that need to be highlighted, some of which were unexpected. This section will present key themes, issues, and questions that emerged during the process of research and analysis that are worthy of discussion and may necessitate further exploration. These include: trust in social media; the importance of offline world; ‘active’ versus ‘passive’ use of social media; and choice and agency in social media use.

### **7.5.1 Trust in social media**

A surprising theme that emerged from the findings was that several participants expressed greater trust in web page content than content in social media pages, even if the source of the content was the same for both (as in the case of the ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ Facebook page and website of the same name, both run by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security). As discussed, this seemed to be based on the fact that other people could comment on social media pages but could generally not comment on web pages. A couple of participants also distrusted identities portrayed online, which they believed could be fake, and were therefore suspicious of information provided through social media. In contrast, Nasim was highly trusting of the people he met through Facebook. The key informant from the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group also reported that ‘Refugees

Welcome' Facebook groups in Norway are generally well trusted, highlighting the fact that many of the moderators have worked with refugees for years and are regarded as credible by refugees.

The reasons for these differences in participants' perception of the trustworthiness of social media were not explored in this study. However, an implication that can be drawn is that social media might not be the best, or should not be regarded as the only, method for sharing information and messages with young refugees, including health promotion messages. Also, resources and messages delivered by social media should come from sources that refugees regard as trustworthy and credible, such as refugee activist groups, volunteer groups, or other refugees. This finding is mirrored in limited empirical studies which have shown variations in Internet use among different groups of refugees, influenced by concerns related to safety and accuracy online, and which have highlighted the issue of trust as important in refugees' use of digital resources (Mikal & Woodfield, 2015; Gillespie et al., 2016).

### **7.5.2 The importance of the offline world**

Another unexpected finding was that, for a couple of participants, social media was not necessarily regarded as a good thing; in fact, they perceived that their lives would be better without it. It seemed that they felt that, to some extent, social media had replaced real life face-to-face contact, particularly in their lives in Norway, and this was a cause of sadness and regret. However, for other participants social media was a way to connect with people - to make or establish new friendships, or to connect with others who had similar experiences, in an online space - and it facilitated friendships that transcended into the offline world. Nevertheless, whilst social media certainly had value for most participants in the study in this way, and could supplement the limited opportunities that they had to meet people in Norway, it did not replace 'real life' connection and communication.

In the field of health promotion, studies show that there is interest among refugees in Internet-based communication, including social media, for receiving health information, but that other methods of communication are still desired. Use and preference for digital technologies may vary across different groups. For example, a study exploring the preferences of newly arrived migrant and refugee women for obtaining health information in Australia found that refugee women preferred information talks and ethnic radio to web-based information, which was the preferred method of migrant women (Lee, Sulaiman-Hill,

& Thompson, 2013). O'Mara (2013) has used the example of Sudanese refugees, who have more of an oral than written tradition, to contrast with Samoan migrants, who are well networked, to propose a hybrid approach to using social media for health promotion with culturally and linguistically diverse communities which integrates 'online' and 'offline' participation. In order to understand the potential of digital technologies and social media to improve health outcomes, it would seem essential to understand how and why different populations, including different refugee populations, use and relate to them. This moves the discussion beyond a focus on universal access to ICTs and social media, towards why people use them and what they want and are able to achieve with them.

### **7.5.3 'Active' versus 'passive' use of social media**

A striking aspect of the findings of this study was the different ways in which individual participants approached and interacted with social media in their everyday lives. This is illustrated most clearly in the cases of Nasim and Omar. Nasim proactively used the 'Refugees Welcome to Norway' Facebook group to ask for help – initially with learning Norwegian, but also to answer his questions about integration and Norwegian culture, to receive emotional support, and eventually to crowdfund school fees. His life changed radically as a result of his Facebook use: from being isolated in a remote transit camp with no opportunity to meet locals or learn Norwegian, to speaking Norwegian, making Norwegian friends (some of whom he perceived as “family”), and being able to attend school. His approach to social media was that it was a tool to help solve his problems as a refugee in Norway:

*For me, I just try to think of solutions. “Ok, it’s a problem, how can I solve it? What can I do? How should I...” Because it’s about making opportunities, it’s about making solutions. Facebook, for me, it’s a way of showing people who I am and what I can do. (Nasim)*

Omar, on the other hand, viewed social media with suspicion. He valued it for communicating with his family and friends overseas, but he did not trust it as a source of information; he did not look at 'Refugees Welcome' groups because he felt that the people (mostly Norwegians) participating in them were overly “optimistic”; and he was careful about sharing his personal information. *“People put too much private information on social media. I don’t like that idea actually, because my private life is mine”* (Omar). He stated that social media was not important to him; and, other than communicating with family and

friends, it did not seem that it had a significant role in his life in Norway or helped him with integration, accessing information, or language learning.

Of the two cases, Nasim is a clear example of ‘active’, determined use of social media – using it as a tool to solve problems - whereas Omar is an example of more ‘passive’ use. Literature and research has distinguished between these two forms of social media usage: *Active usage* refers to activities that facilitate direct exchanges with others (e.g., posting status updates, commenting on posts); *passive usage* involves consuming information without direct exchanges (e.g., scrolling through news feeds, viewing posts)” (Verduyn et al., 2015, p. 480). Nasim and Omar represent examples of the two extremes, but exactly where most other participants fit is less easy to determine. Most admitted to being passive users of the ‘Refugees Welcome’ groups – ‘watching’ these groups but not actively interacting with them – but seemed, at various times, to be active in other groups and platforms.

Furthermore, whilst it is possible to point to some *effects* that differences in their usage of social media had for the participants in this study (and it seemed that active posting was associated with tangible positive outcomes – such as reported by Nasim, Hamid and Farah in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3.1), what is unclear are the *causes* of this difference. What made Nasim more active and Omar more passive in their respective use of social media? The answers to this are not found in this study, since it was a finding that emerged from the data rather than something initially considered for exploration. It is possible to speculate on reasons, though: for example, prior experiences may have informed their attitudes towards social media (Nasim had never used social media before coming to Norway; Omar had been using it for eleven years), or personality traits. However, this is merely speculation, since little was asked about participants’ about their personal backgrounds and experiences due to ethical considerations. Literature suggests that differences in social media use by migrants during adaptation to host countries can be a result of individual cultural and socioeconomic factors (such as language, level of education, age, communication styles, cultural background) (Alampay, 2006, p.12; Alencar, 2017) and individual attitudes toward integration; as well as the socio-political context of the host country (such as attitudes in the host country towards newcomers and integration policies) (Alencar, 2017, p. 6).

There is also debate in the literature about the effects of the passive use of social media, including effects on users’ integration and well-being. Research with migrants in Ireland

found that passive ‘monitoring’ of friends on social media facilitated durable and long-lasting transnational relationships for migrants which reduced their isolation, but that in turn this decreased their motivation to integrate into the host society (Komito & Bates, 2011). In relation to well-being, empirical research on Facebook use and young people has suggested that active use can have positive outcomes in the long run; that the negative effects can be greater for passive Facebook users; and that passive use undermines well-being (Tromholt, 2016; Frison & Eggermont, 2015; Verduyn et al, 2015). Negative effects of Facebook use are attributed largely to passive users being more likely to perceive the lives others that they see being better than theirs, which enhances feelings of envy. However, the case for the impact of active versus passive use of social media is not yet clear, and, as far as know, there have not yet been any studies using refugees.

The issue of ‘active’ versus ‘passive’ use of social media by participants in this study generates more questions than answers. It was a striking and fascinating theme that emerged from the findings, rather than explicitly addressed in the research questions. However, it is an intriguing aspect of participants’ social media use which could be further explored.

#### **7.5.4 Agency**

A related issue to consider in light of the findings of this study is the role of agency as a factor of refugees’ use of social media. As previously mentioned, ‘agency’, according to Sen, is “the ability to pursue and realize goals that [one] values and has reason to value” and may advance individual well-being (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 37). My participants were similar in terms of their access to social media and the set of resources that they each had:

educational resources – all were well educated; material resources – all had a mobile phone and/or laptop; language resources – all spoke English and at least some Norwegian; financial resources – the cost of accessing the Internet was not an issue raised by any of them.

Importantly, despite previously lacking control over their own lives, in Norway they all had a certain social, environmental, and economic stability that allowed them to freely use social media. However, in the case of Nasim and Omar, they made different choices regarding how to use it and whether to realise the capabilities it offered them. This can be seen as exercising their agency. Andrade and Doolin (2016, p. 413) assert that “Whether the individual chooses to realize the ICT-enabled capabilities or not is itself a manifestation of agency”.

However, it needs to be remembered that not all refugees arriving in Norway have the same resources that my participants had, certainly in terms of education and language. The moderator of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group highlighted that most refugees do not speak Norwegian or English on arrival, may not be literate, and find it difficult to navigate online information. They therefore require the opportunity to acquire skills needed to use social media and an understanding of what it can offer, in addition to having access to it. All refugees arriving in Norway should have the same opportunities to realise the capabilities offered by social media if they wish. Ensuring that they have the ability to realise these capabilities could provide them, in turn, with the ability to exercise their agency to use social media in ways they believe enhances their well-being (Andrade & Doolin, p. 413).

Participants in the study had differing perceptions of social media in terms of the value and trust that they placed in it and their preferences for online or offline communication and interaction. I believe that these factors, together with unexplored individual factors (such as prior experiences, personality, attitudes towards integration), influenced how they approached social media and how they chose to use it (including using it in a more ‘active’ or ‘passive’ way). Having the ability to make that choice, and to decide whether or not to realise the capabilities that social media use offered, is a manifestation of agency and represents a development outcome in itself. “For individuals who see intrinsic value in media and technology usage, having the choice of whether or not to use it is in itself a development end, a chosen outcome, and an achieved functioning” (Kleine, 2013, p. 129).

#### **7.5.5 Summary: linking findings with health promotion**

I have summarised the findings of this study, as discussed above, in Figure 3 below, *the role of social media in promoting well-being among young refugees in Norway* (shown in full size in Appendix 10). This illustrates the properties of social media as a resource which were of value to participants in this study; the capabilities identified from its reported use; and the potential well-being outcomes of its use. The roles of personal conversion factors and agency in participants’ decisions regarding how to use and whether to realise the capabilities enabled by social media are also represented.

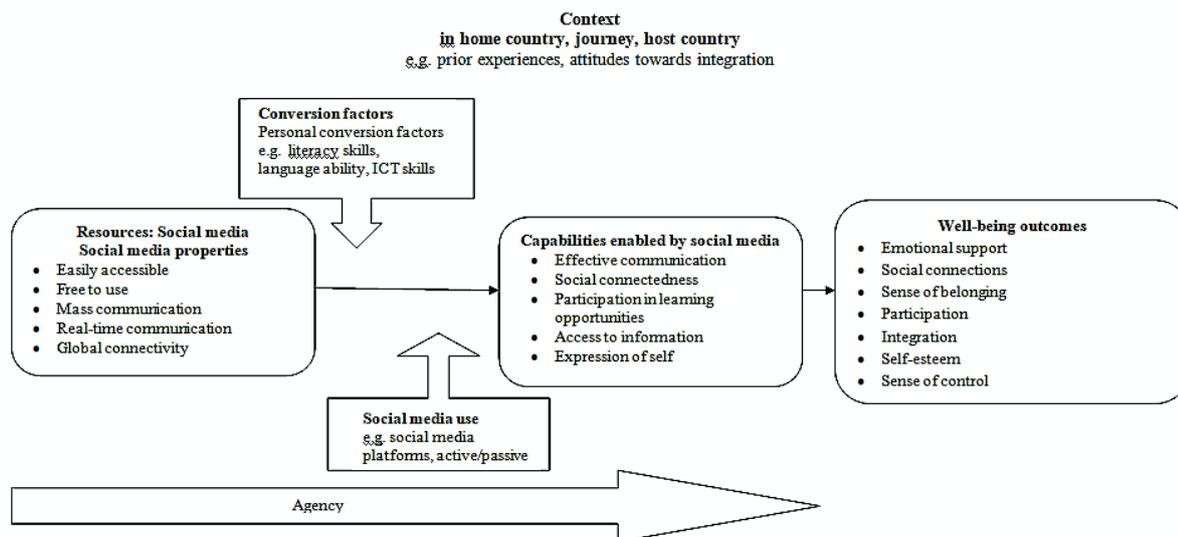


Figure 3. Summary: The role of social media in promoting well-being among young refugees in Norway  
Adapted from AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017, p. 1797

These findings have relevance for the field of health promotion. Digital technologies, including social media, are increasingly being embraced by health professionals as tools for engaging with and providing information – including health information – to the general population. It is recognised in health literature and practice that digital technologies have the potential to impact public health in multiple areas, including information seeking, health-care follow-up, data storage, and interactive health messaging (Glik et al., 2014). However, there is also concern that research and evaluation of health promotion delivered via social media is failing to keep pace with the proliferation in health promotion initiatives using them (Lim et al., 2016) and that greater evaluation of the effectiveness of using social media in health promotion is necessary (Korda & Itani, 2013). Whilst there is a good deal of empirical research on the use of digital technology and social media by young people (especially college students) and its role in their well-being, the literature specifically connecting refugees, social media, and well-being is small, and researchers have tended to view social media as a tool for achieving particular pre-supposed outcomes (such as social inclusion) rather than examining its ‘non-instrumental’ use or exploring outcomes that are of users’ own choosing. By asking refugee users what they value about their use of social media and are able to achieve from it and analysing findings in the context of well-being outcomes, this study therefore hopes to contribute to the academic field of Health Promotion.

The findings also link with global health promotion priorities, including several of the actions from the seminal Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (World Health Organization, 1986).

‘Create Supportive Environments’ calls for a systematic assessment of the health impact of a rapidly changing environment, particularly in areas of technology; ‘Strengthen Community Actions’ calls for the empowerment of communities, to include drawing on material resources in the community to enhance self-help and social support, requiring full and continuous access to information and learning opportunities for health; ‘Develop Personal Skills’ calls for the provision of information and education for health, and enhancing life skills and enabling people to make choices conducive to health. Each of these action areas can be related to capabilities identified in this study. Whilst social media use alone cannot “create health” (World Health Organization, 1986, para. 14), and it is not the preferred method of engagement for some refugees, the case of Nasim shows that social media use can play a valuable part in health creation by enabling users to take decisions and have control over their life circumstances - especially when that control has previously been denied to them.

## **7.6 Limitations of the study**

### **7.6.1 Participants**

It needs to be acknowledged that the participants in this study were a particular group of young refugees: educated English speakers. In this sense they were probably different to many refugees arriving in Bergen, and it can be supposed that being literate and having an education, and speaking English, enabled them to use and navigate social media in Norway more easily. The interview with the moderator of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group revealed that language was in fact a key barrier for most refugees on arrival in Bergen, which limited their ability to access and interact with social media in Norway. However, since much online content in Norway is available in English as well as Norwegian and most Norwegians speak English, this was not so much of a barrier for my participants. Speaking English could help them in the transition period until they learned Norwegian.

Although education level was not part of the inclusion criteria for participation in the study, and was not initially considered in the research design and questions, it became apparent during the course of the interviews that almost all participants were engaged in some form of education or training, or had received at least high-school education prior to coming to Norway. Conversation revealed that five of the eight were hoping to apply to university in Norway, and at least four had received some university-level education (albeit often interrupted) before they arrived. The methods used to recruit them may have influenced the

bias towards recruiting educated participants (with the exception of the participant recruited through Facebook, about whom little was known prior to the interview). Those recruited through local organisations were already engaged in activities with them, including volunteering and education; those recruited through personal contacts knew these contacts either as a result of university study or through a project which had recruited refugees through local schools and colleges. Consideration of education level is important because “it is also expected that the better educated and more literate will be using ICTs more than the less educated and illiterate” (Alampay, 2006, p. 14). Further research exploring the role of education and socio-economic status as factors in the use of social media among refugees would therefore be of interest. Also, while a gender balance for participants in this study was intended, only two females were recruited. Whilst this gender imbalance does reflect the fact that there is statistically a greater number of male than young female refugees in Norway (approximately 60% of refugees in Norway with foreign citizenship from Africa and Asia in 2017 were male), the gender differences in social media use would also be relevant for more in-depth study (Statistics Norway, 2018b).

### **7.6.2 Avoidance of harm**

The fact that participants in this study were young refugees meant that they were considered by NSD to be a sensitive group, and avoidance of harm to them in the research process was a priority for me as a researcher. For this reason, and due to my limited experience in interviewing, I decided not to ask participants about their experiences prior to arrival in Norway (for example, about their migration journey or families) or about health-related issues, in order to minimise the risk of causing distress if the topics were upsetting to them. I therefore chose to focus purely on asking about their use of social media. Whilst some participants did volunteer information on other, more personal, subjects during the interviews, I did not follow these up in any depth. For this reason, information about participants’ backgrounds and ‘stories’, which might have shed light on their social media use and their attitudes towards social media, were not explored.

### **7.6.3 Challenges with conducting online observation**

There are specific considerations with online observation which may have affected the quality of the data gathered during my observations of the two Facebook groups. Key ethical questions related to using online observation as a research method are still unresolved among researchers, such as whether researchers should disclose their presence and motives for

participating in online spaces and whether online spaces should be treated as ‘public’ or inherently private. “There is disagreement about whether data derived from public sources such as Twitter should be fair game for researchers, or whether repurposing such data for research violates the expectations of content creators.”(Hutton & Henderson, 2015, p. 178). This uncertainty about ethical implications influenced how I approached my observations. As discussed in the Methodology chapter (Chapter 5), I decided to exercise caution by observing only ‘public’ Facebook groups and groups whose moderators had given me permission to do so. This meant that I could not observe the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ group, as originally hoped, since it was a closed group. NSD requirements also meant that I could not record or use identifying quotes from group participants when writing up my online observations, which would have illustrated my findings better. Finally, it should be noted that it is quite difficult for a researcher new to online observation as a research method to locate literature that gives practical details on how to conduct an online observation. In a review of qualitative studies in social media research, Snelson (2016, p. 12) concludes that “there remains a need for a more cohesive framework that clearly identifies best practices in the selection and coupling of appropriate methods and technologies for social media research.”

Other issues emerged during the observation of Facebook groups that I had not considered prior to the study. It became apparent from interviewing the moderator of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Bergen’ Facebook group that comments and posts to the group were carefully moderated by group administrators to ensure that negative or offensive posts were not shown. Whilst this is understandable, especially for a ‘Welcome’ group, it does raise questions about how far the posts and interactions on some online groups are influenced and controlled, which may not always be apparent to observers. The difficulties mentioned in interpreting ‘Facebook Reactions’ (the emoticons available on Facebook to express a reaction to a post) have also been highlighted in this study. The limited number of available ‘Reactions’ may push Facebook users towards a certain reaction, and also limits the range of possible responses they can give. The fact that there is no ‘dislike’ button on Facebook also discourages negative reaction in general. These factors need to be considered and reflected on by researchers trying to interpret them. Observing interactions in these online groups may therefore not be as straightforward as it seems. Interest in using social media as a research tool is new but rapidly growing (Snelson, 2016) and “there remains a need for a more cohesive framework that clearly identifies best practices in the selection and coupling of appropriate methods and technologies for social media research.” (Snelson, 2016, p.12).

#### **7.6.4 Difficulties of broad terms: “social media” and “refugees”**

The terms “social media” and “refugees” are often used to refer to homogenous groupings, but this is a clearly problematic approach. In the case of social media, there are a wide range of social media platforms available which are constantly changing and updating, as is the way that people choose to use them and integrate them into their lives. Even within the same platform, the way that it is used by people may differ according to a variety of factors including their motivations, values, and knowledge. In referring to the challenges of Uses and Gratifications research with social media, Quan-Hasse and Young (2014, p. 277) explain that studies suggest that “even within a single social media tool, motivations for use can vary by feature, and that features with similar functionalities may not necessarily elicit the same motivations for use.” As the complexities involved in talking about ‘social media’ as one entity emerged during the course of the study, these issues become more apparent to me. Like many others, I have treated “social media” in this study in broad terms. However, a more nuanced approach would be preferable in future work.

The term “social media” may also need defining more clearly by researchers. Whilst I provided a ‘prompt sheet’ of the most popular social media platforms in Norway to my participants and gave them a definition of “social media” at the beginning of the interviews, it was noticeable that some participants did not consider certain popular platforms (particularly YouTube) to be social media unless asked about them directly. Terminology can therefore also be an issue when discussing issues of technology and social media.

There is also a tendency in research to treat refugees as a homogenous group, defined by their refugee status. Participants in this study had their refugee status in common, but they were individuals from different countries with vastly different experiences. I cannot claim to have explored these differences in the scope of this study, partly due to the limitations explained above, the difficulties of recruitment, and the time constraints of both the study and the interviews. In hindsight, it might have been preferable to focus on participants from one country, in order to generalise findings to the context of refugees from that country living in Norway. However, practically it would have been difficult to find a group of such participants in the time available. I had also initially hoped to recruit a more balanced mix of male and female and newly arrived and more settled refugees, in order to gain a picture of differences between these groups, but this did not prove possible. Yet, despite its limitations,

this study does provide an insight into the role of social media in the lives of an underrepresented group in the literature: young refugees living in Norway.

#### **7.6.5 Generalisability and transferability of the study**

“Since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69).

As a qualitative study, this limitation of generalisability applies to the findings from this project. However, as Creswell (2014, p. 203) points out, the intent of a qualitative study is not to generalise findings to individuals, sites, or places outside of those studied, but its value lies in the particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific setting and in the depth of study. Aspects of this study - such as methods and findings - may be transferable to other studies and useful for other researchers, but the restricted range of educational background of my participants and their diversity of their countries of origin would need to be taken into consideration if applied to other refugee populations.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

The overall objective of this study was to examine how young refugees in Bergen use social media in their lives in Norway and how this use contributes to their well-being. A summary of key findings, and implications arising from them, are presented below. Where applicable, these are related to the research questions that guided the study. Findings and implications that were not initially considered are also presented. This summary is followed by suggested areas for further research and recommendations for research and practice.

➤ RQ1(a): What are the uses and gratifications of social media for young refugees?

The three main U&G factors, or motivations, reported by participants in this study for their use of social media were: communication, accessing information, and - distinct from other studies - learning. Using social media for entertainment or passing time did not prove to be as important as expected. All participants reported that their use of social media had increased since being in Norway due to their need to communicate with family and friends overseas, having better Internet connection, having less to do in their lives in Norway, and in order to ‘fit in’ to Norwegian society.

*Implication:* That most participants used social media as a tool for ‘learning’ (for example, languages, but also how to do everyday tasks, such as cooking a meal) was an unexpected finding from this study. Since asylum seekers are unable to access formal learning provision and language courses whilst their applications are being processed, the potential for social media to provide learning opportunities to those awaiting asylum decisions, as well as to newly arrived and more settled refugees, could be considered. This could include language learning, but also health education.

➤ RQ1(b): Is there a difference between gratifications sought and obtained?

The online survey/diary, which was set up and intended to be the main method of gathering information from participants about the gratifications obtained from their social media use, was not completed by participants and was subsequently abandoned. This research question was therefore unanswered. Future work on uses and gratifications of social media use should include a focus on the distinction between gratifications ‘sought’ and gratifications ‘obtained’, and the relationship between the two.

- RQ2: What do young refugees report that they are able to achieve from using social media that is of value to them in their lives?

The key achievements that participants reported as a result of using social media were: communication, social connection, learning, and access to information. With the exception of ‘social connection’, this list closely reflects their motives (U&G factors) for using it. In addition, ‘self-representation’ was important to one participant, who purposefully used his Facebook account to tell his own story and act as an ambassador for his home country.

Analysis of these reported achievements resulted in identifying the five corresponding capabilities, mentioned above, that social media use offers to refugees: effective communication; social connectedness; participation in learning opportunities; access to information; and expression of self. These are capabilities which can play an important role in well-being for refugees; for example, by providing emotional support, social connections, a sense of community and belonging (in their home country and new society), a sense of control, as well as opportunities to participate and integrate in a new society. In Figure 3 in Section 7.5.5 of Chapter 7 (p. 83), I offered a summary of the potential role of social media in promoting well-being, showing the relationship between social media, capabilities, and well-being outcomes.

- RQ3: If they have been exposed to messages, both positive and negative, on social media aimed at asylum seekers and refugees in Norway, how do young refugees interpret and respond to these?

In exploring the impact of messages on social media aimed at asylum seekers and refugees in Norway, this study focused particularly on the ‘Refugees Welcome’ Facebook groups and the Norwegian government’s ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations’ campaign. It was found that Norway’s ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations’ campaign had no direct impact on participants and their decision to come to Norway. Their response to the ‘Refugees Welcome’ groups was largely positive, even though their use of these groups was mostly passive. The ‘passive’ use of the ‘Refugee Welcome’ groups by refugees was mirrored in findings from the online observations, during which almost all users of the ‘Refugees Welcome to Norway’ and ‘Refugees NOT Welcome to Norway’ Facebook groups appeared to be Norwegian, with very little interaction or input in the groups from non-Norwegians.

Most participants believed that migration information campaigns and negative messages on social media about immigrants could potentially influence other refugee's migration decisions regarding coming to Norway, but they stressed that other factors – cost, risk, and information from personal contacts – were very important in migration decisions. Furthermore, it was highlighted that some refugees have no choice in their final destination country - in this respect, migration campaigns will be of little relevance to them.

On the whole, participants in this study largely chose to ignore negative messages and comments aimed at refugees on social media and to only inhabit 'safe' spaces where they did not encounter these. With a couple of exceptions, most participants were not 'active' users of groups targeted at refugees and asylum seekers in Norway, even if these groups were supportive, as in the case of the 'Refugees Welcome' groups. However, they were aware of and responded positively to them, often 'monitoring' these groups without making their presence known.

*Implications:*

- Evaluation of the impact of the 'Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway' campaign on asylum seekers and potential asylum seekers is needed. Questions for further exploration include: Does the campaign have any real effect on migration decisions and migrant numbers? Does it fuel anti-immigrant sentiment among the host population in Norway? Does it impact on the well-being and self-esteem of the asylum seekers that it is aimed at, or indeed other immigrants that it is not explicitly targeting?
- It should not be assumed that because refugees are not actively participating in groups aimed at them, such as 'Refugees Welcome' groups, that they are not 'watching' them and that these groups are not valued by refugees. Most participants in this study were aware of and monitored 'Refugee Welcome' groups in Norway, and perceived them to be useful and informative.

In addition to the findings outlined above which were related to the research questions, a number of other important findings emerged from the study, some of which were unexpected. These included a difference in participants' perceptions of trustworthiness of social media. 'Real-life' communication and connection was also important for some participants, with

some preferring in-person contact to online methods of communication and receiving information. Although all participants in the study had access to the Internet, and all used social media in their lives, the value that they placed in it and the ways in which they used it ('active' or 'passive' use) varied significantly.

### **Recommendations for research and practice**

The study raised some issues that could be considered in further research:

- Why did some participants trust web page content more than content posted on social media? Research on perceptions of trustworthiness with different forms of digital technology could yield useful information for the most effective form of digital media for delivery of information to particular groups.
- What causes refugee users to adopt a more 'passive' or 'active' approach to social media use? What roles do individual cultural and socio-economic factors, attitudes toward integration, issues of trust and security, and the socio-political context and attitudes of the host country play in this? Is there any link between active or passive use and well-being amongst refugees?
- The potential benefits to refugees of using social media for self-expression and self-representation (for example, through blogs, photographs, or digital storytelling) could be further explored. As a marginalised group, often discredited in the mainstream media, they do not have many other outlets through which they can demonstrate who they are, what they can offer, and tell their stories in their own voice.

The study also generated some recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners working with refugees in health promotion and other areas where digital technologies are being used or considered:

- Ensure that all asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Norway have the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to navigate digital technologies and an understanding of the capabilities offered by them, in addition to access. This could be included as part of 'Introduction' programmes. Provide information on social media in refugees' own language, or the main languages of the local refugee populations. In Bergen, interview data noted that this is Arabic, Tigrinya, Somali, Kurdish, and Farsi.
- Explore issues of trust and security and actual use of digital technologies - such as preferred social media platforms - with refugee populations before designing

interventions or campaigns employing these. Include target groups in the design and implementation process. Consider working with sources and networks on social media that refugees regard as trustworthy and credible, such as organisations working with them or other refugees.

- Explore preferences for other methods of receiving information and communication, including health information, as these may be preferred and more effective. Just because refugees are using it in certain areas of their lives, it should not be assumed that social media is the preferred option for receiving information. A combination of online and offline methods may be more effective.
- Consider using the platforms that refugees are already routinely using in their daily life (such as WhatsApp and Facebook) to deliver learning and health education. Given participants' reports of 'social media fatigue' - having too many accounts and apps already - this would seem to offer an effective and cost-efficient way to do this. It also avoids further stigmatising and labelling refugees, who are a highly diverse group and usually use the same platforms as migrant and host populations, and is more inclusive for those who do not have the digital literacy to navigate new apps and sites. Incorporating digital peer learning options - with other, more settled refugees or with local volunteers 'buddy' partners - could also facilitate integration and social connection. For example, in Germany, the successful 'WhatsGerman' language course uses WhatsApp to deliver language lessons via a daily WhatsApp message to over 90,000 subscribed users. Alongside offering immediate help in language acquisition, it also conveys the positive message that newcomers are welcome to Germany ([https://www.whatsgerman.de/whats\\_app\\_sprachkurs\\_eng.html](https://www.whatsgerman.de/whats_app_sprachkurs_eng.html))

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: Recruitment flyer

<b>Participants needed in Bergen for a university research project on refugees and social media</b>	
<p><b>Did you come to Norway as a refugee?</b></p> <p><b>Do you use social media?</b></p> <p>Would you like to participate in research for a Masters' student project looking at the role of social media in the lives of young refugees in Norway?</p>  <p>This research is being undertaken for the Department of Health Promotion and Development, University of Bergen</p>	<p><b>Who can participate?</b></p> <p>We would love to hear from you if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• are aged 18-30 years</li><li>• came to Norway as a refugee</li><li>• use social media</li></ul> <p><b>What does participation involve?</b></p> <p>1) You will be interviewed by a researcher who will ask some general questions about your thoughts about social media and how you use it. This interview will last for 30-60 minutes.</p> <p>2) After the interview you will be asked to take part in a short, anonymous online survey about your daily use of social media. You will be asked to complete this survey over a period of 1-2 weeks.</p> <p>Responses given in the interview and online survey will be confidential. You will not be asked to show your own social media accounts or to provide any details of these.</p>
<p><b>We would like to hear from you about how you use social media in your everyday life, and your experiences using it</b></p> <hr/> <p>Which social media do you use?</p> <p>What do you use social media for?</p> <p>Has the way that you use or think about social media changed since you came to Norway?</p>	<p><b>To participate, or to ask any questions about this project, please contact:</b></p> <p><b>Researcher: Sasha Anderson</b> <a href="mailto:sasha.anderson@student.ib.no">sasha.anderson@student.ib.no</a> Tel. 46932787</p>  <p>Supervisor: Marguerite Daniel <a href="mailto:marguerite.daniel@uib.no">marguerite.daniel@uib.no</a>, Tel. 5558 3220</p>

## APPENDIX 2: Interview guides

### 1) Interview guide for individual interviews with refugees

#### Interview briefing

First of all, thank you for taking time to participate in my research. My name is Sasha Anderson, I am a Masters student in the Global Development programme at University of Bergen. My thesis research is on the use of social media by refugees living in Bergen. I would like to talk to you today about how and why you use social media in your everyday life; about your experiences using social media; and your thoughts on whether your experiences of social media might be positive or negative for you and your life here in Norway.

I would first ask you to read and sign the informed consent letter here which will give you information about my research project. It also explains your rights as a participant and explains how your answers will be used. Please ask me any questions you have about this. I want to emphasise a couple of points in the letter regarding this interview: you can refuse to answer any question and you can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. The responses that you give me will be made anonymous, so you will not be identifiable in any written work, and all personal information that you give me will be treated confidentially. I will take some written notes during this interview. I will also ask your permission to take an audio recording so that I can analyze interview responses in more detail at a later time.

Definition of social media: Just to clarify before we begin what I mean by “social media”: By social media, I mean online platforms that allow you create and share information, send messages, and contribute to discussions - places online where you can interact with other people and share ideas, thoughts, and information using text or photos or videos. Examples include: social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn), messaging apps (such as WhatsApp, Telegram), blogging and microblogging sites (such as Twitter, Tumblr, Wordpress), and photo and video sharing sites (such as Youtube, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest). You might access social media platforms on your mobile phone, laptop, tablet, or desktop computer.  
(Share ‘prompt sheet’ – logos of popular social media sites - as memory aid).

This interview should last no more than 60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### 1. Individual background/Introductory question

- How old are you?
- What nationality are you?
- How long have you lived in Bergen? How long have you been in Norway?
- As you know, I am interested in people’s social media use. Could you tell me a little about your own use of social media, such as when you started using it and why?

#### 2. Context of social media use

- How regularly do you use social media, on average (e.g. every day, every couple of days, once a week)?
- Is there anything that limits how much you use it?
- How and where do you normally access social media? (e.g. smartphone, laptop)
- Where do you normally access social media? (at home, work, elsewhere)

- Which language do you normally use when you use social media (*e.g Norwegian, English, home language*)? Do you use different languages for different sites/groups?

### **3. Uses and gratifications of social media**

I'd like to ask you to take a minute to think about, and note down (map) on this paper if you would like to, the social media sites that you use most often in everyday life. (*Refer to the pre-prepared prompt sheet of social media sites, provided*)

- What specific social media (sites) do you use in your daily life?
- What do you use them for?
- What motivates you to go onto (these sites)? (*If not mentioned, follow up with U&G factors from previous research e.g.: entertainment, passing time, getting information, social interaction*)
- What do you get out of using (these sites)? / What is it about using these sites that makes you feel good?
- How has your use of social media changed since you arrived in Norway?

### **4. Outcomes of social media use/Capabilities enabled**

- Is there anything that social media enables you to do or achieve? (*achievement/agency*)
- What does social media mean to you? What is the most important thing about it for you? (*value*)
- Can you tell me about good things/experiences from using social media - specifically during the time of your arrival in Norway or since living here? (*e.g. meeting people, keeping in contact with family/friends, finding information, learning*)
- Can you tell me about bad things/experiences from using social media - specifically during the time of your arrival in Norway or since living here?

### **5. Campaigns aimed at refugees on social media**

- Have you seen any messages/campaigns on social media specifically aimed at refugees - in particular aimed at refugees living in Norway or planning to come to Norway? (good or bad)

If yes:

- What did you think about (this site/message)?
- How did seeing (that site/message) effect you?

If no:

- Are you aware of such groups/campaigns? (e.g. 'Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway', 'Refugees Welcome to Norway')
- Can you tell me a little about whether you would consider looking at these?
- How do you think seeing these would affect refugees coming to Norway?

### **6. Concluding questions/Debriefing**

- Would you like to say more about anything we have talked about today?
- Is there anything else that you would like to say about social media?

Thank you very much for taking part in this interview and participating in this research project. I will now explain a bit more about the online survey.

*\*Give link to online survey. Remind participants not to give personal information in the open text boxes of the survey.*

*Ask if they have any friends/contacts who might be willing to be interviewed.*

## **2) Interview guide for key informant interview**

### **Interview with key informant from 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' Facebook group:**

#### **Context and background**

- Can you tell me a bit about the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' FB group – its aims and why it was set up?
- Why is it a 'closed' (member) group rather than a public one?
- Can you tell me a bit about your role with the group and how long you have been involved in it?
- How has the group changed since you have been involved?
- Are you involved in any other support activities for refugees in Bergen other than the FB group? Does the group have any complementary offline activities?
- Are you aware of the 'Stricter Asylum Regulations' campaign on social media? Is the 'Refugees Welcome' group a response to this campaign?

#### **Impact of the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' group**

- Who do you think sees the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' FB group?
- From your experiences, in what ways has the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' FB group had an impact on refugees in Bergen?
  - *Ask for examples*

#### **Questions from my online observations/interviews with refugees**

- From my observations, it seems to be mostly Norwegians interacting and posting on the 'Refugees Welcome' groups, do you agree? Do you have thoughts on why this is?
- Do you moderate (i.e. delete) negative comments to the group?
- What are your thoughts about the issue of 'trust' and social media – do you think that the people you are trying to reach and support through the 'Refugees Welcome' FB group trust the information provided by the group?
  - If so, why? If not, why not?

#### **Other support initiatives/structures**

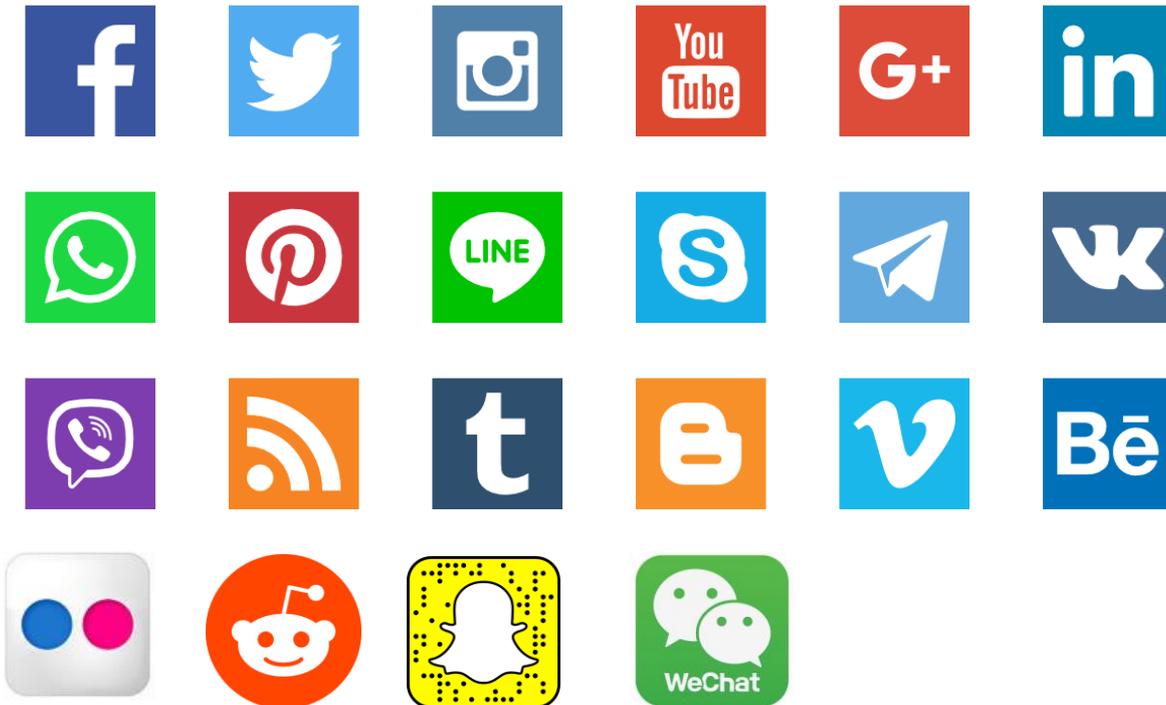
- Are you aware of other support structures in place for refugees in Bergen?
- What advice would you give to others trying to set up support initiatives for refugees on social media?

#### **Role of the group/social media in the lives of refugees**

- From your experience, what is it about the 'Refugees Welcome to Bergen' group that helps refugees most?
  - Is the medium of social media relevant to this?
- From your experience, how/in what ways is social media important for refugees in Bergen?

**APPENDIX 3: Social media prompt sheet for interviewees**

**Some popular social media sites**



**Facebook    Twitter    Instagram    YouTube    Google+    LinkedIn**

**WhatsApp    Pinterest    LINE    Skype    Telegram    VK**

**Viber    RSS    tumblr    Blogger    Vimeo    Behance**

**Flickr    Reddit    Snapchat    WeChat**

**and..?**

## APPENDIX 4: Observation notes template

### Online observation notes template (adapted from Skovdal & Cornish, 2015, p. 90)

<b>Location:</b> (FB Page or Group/Twitter feed)	
<b>Date, time:</b>	
<b>Observations:</b> <i>directly observable facts, rich in detail, reporting:</i>  Who? – posts/comments/reacts  What? – topics, reactions (positive/negative), messages about refugees?	
<b>Interpretations:</b> <i>(beyond what is directly observable – judgement)</i>  What do my observations tell me in relation to the research questions?  What is the significance of what I have observed?  Why did people act like this?	
<b>Reflexivity:</b> <i>(my own responses and feelings in the situation)</i>  How do I feel about what I have observed?	
<b>Next steps:</b>  Any new lines of enquiry?	

## APPENDIX 5: Online survey questions

### Online survey (using SurveyMonkey)

Participants will be asked to complete the survey on a daily basis, over a 1-2 week period.

Participation in this survey will follow an individual interview with the researcher, during which time the purpose of the online survey and how to complete it will be explained to participants. Consent to participate in the survey is also included in the informed consent letter given to participants at interviews.

Separate survey links will be given to newly arrived (living in Norway for less than two years) and settled (living in Norway for more than two years) respondents – this will enable the researcher to determine which group a respondent belong to. However, no personal information or reference numbers will be requested from participants on completion of the survey, so responses will be anonymous.

---

### Text used in online survey:

**What is "social media"?** Social media means online platforms that allow you create and share information, send messages, and chat/discuss - places online where you can interact with other people and share ideas, thoughts, and information using text or photos or videos. Examples of social media platforms include: social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn), messaging apps (such as WhatsApp, Telegram), blogging and microblogging sites (such as Twitter, Tumblr, Wordpress), and photo and video sharing sites (such as Youtube, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest). Some examples are given in Question 1, but please add any of your own.

Please don't worry if you don't know if a site is "social media" or not! I am interested in how and why you use the internet and social media in general as part of your daily life.

**Note: Responses are anonymous - no personal information is being collected as part of this survey. You do not need to answer all questions if you do not wish to.**

**Thank you!**

Question	Answer format
1. Which social media sites did you use today? Please tick as many as you used today and add others below.	-Checkbox list of 15 popular sites & -Open-ended text box If 'none', the survey ends
2. What were your main reasons for using these sites today?	-Open-ended text box
3. What benefits, or good things, did you get from using these sites? (e.g. connecting with other people, getting or sharing information, entertainment, learning, passing time, and others)	-Open-ended text box
4. If you saw any messages or groups aimed specifically at refugees on social media today (positive or negative), can you say a little about these and how they made you feel?	-Open-ended text box

## **Request for participation in research project**

### **Project title: "The role of social media in the lives of young refugees in Norway"**

#### **Background and Purpose of this project**

My name is Sasha Anderson, I am a Master's student on the Global Development programme in the Department of Health Promotion and Development at University of Bergen in Norway. As part of the requirements of my Master's degree, I am doing a research project on the use of social media by young refugees living in Bergen. The purpose of the project is to learn about how and why refugees living in Norway use social media in their everyday lives, to understand its importance to them, and find out about any benefits and negative effects of its use. It is an area of interest because social media is being increasingly seen by the Norwegian government, health professionals, educators, and other agencies as a means of communicating information and messages (about topics such as immigration requirements, health, and learning) to newly arrived and potential refugees to Norway. So it is important to know more about how social media is actually being used, and about positive and negative outcomes and effects of its use.

You have been asked to take part in this interview today because you meet the requirements for participants for this study: you have come to Norway as a refugee and you are in the 18-30 age group. The interview will ask only about your general thoughts and experiences of using social media in Norway. You will not be asked to show your own social media accounts or to provide details about these.

#### **What does participation in the project imply?**

You are asked to take part in an interview today which will last approximately 30-60 minutes. Questions will be about your everyday use of social media – such as what you mostly use it for, and why, positive and negative experiences of using it, and whether you have seen any campaigns or messages on social media aimed at refugees in Norway. I will take some written notes and will ask your permission to take an audio recording of the interview so that I can analyze responses in detail at a later time. After the interview today you will also be asked if you will be willing to take part in an online survey of your everyday use of social media, which you will be asked to complete on a daily basis over a period of 1-2 weeks. This survey will involve a couple of questions regarding the social media sites you used that day, for what purpose, and how using them made you feel.

#### **What will happen to the information about you?**

All personal data you provide will be treated confidentially. The responses to the questions that you give in this interview and in the online survey will be used for research purposes only and will not be shared with anyone who is not directly involved in this study. Only myself and my supervisor, Marguerite Daniel, Associate Professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Development at University of Bergen, will have access to the interview responses and personal information of participants. Your responses will be made

anonymous and your name will be stored separately from the responses that you give. You will not be identifiable in the Master's thesis or other published work using this research.

Data will be stored using password protected software and the University of Bergen's SAFE system for storing research data. Audio recordings will be erased after interviews have been transcribed.

The project is scheduled for completion by 31 May 2018. Your interview responses will be made anonymous by this date.

### **Voluntary participation**

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be destroyed.

### **Feedback on the findings from this research project**

You are welcome to have a copy of my Master's thesis after it has been submitted. You can also contact me at the end of the project, in May 2018, and I will send you key findings from the project.

### **Contacts**

If you have any questions concerning the project, please contact me at [sasha.anderson@student.uib.no](mailto:sasha.anderson@student.uib.no) or +47 46932787. You can also contact my supervisor at University of Bergen, Marguerite Daniel, at [marguerite.daniel@uib.no](mailto:marguerite.daniel@uib.no) or +47 555 83220.

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

## **Consent for participation in the study**

I have received information about the project and

I am willing to participate in the interview

I am willing to participate in the online survey

-----  
Signed by (NAME):

Date:

### **Anonymous online survey**

**Only 4 questions about how you used social media that day. Please complete daily for the next week.**

**Please do not provide any personal identifying information in your answers.**

If you have been in Norway **less than 2 years**: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DTNN3J9>

If you have been in Norway **more than 2 years**: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DTP3F8V>

**APPENDIX 7: NSD ethical approval letter**

Annegreet Wubs  
Christiesgt. 13  
5015 BERGEN

Vår dato: 11.08.2017

Vår ref: 54882 / 3 / LAR

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

**Tilbakemelding på melding om behandling av personopplysninger**

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 26.06.2017.

Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

<i>54882</i>	<i>The role of social media in the lives of young refugees in Norway</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Universitetet i Bergen, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Annegreet Wubs</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Sasha Anderson</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget [skjema](#). Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en [offentlig database](#).

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 29.05.2018, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Dersom noe er uklart ta gjerne kontakt over telefon.

Vennlig hilsen

Marianne Høgetveit Myhren

Lasse André Raa

Kontaktperson: Lasse André Raa tlf: 5558259 / [Lasse.Raa@nsd.no](mailto:Lasse.Raa@nsd.no)

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Sasha Anderson, [sasha.anderson@student.uib.no](mailto:sasha.anderson@student.uib.no)



# Personvernombudet for forskning

## Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 54882

### PURPOSE

The overall purpose of this study is to explore how and why young (age 18-30) newly arrived and settled refugees living in Bergen use social media in their everyday lives; to examine what they report they are able to achieve using social media; and to locate this within the context of development outcomes and well-being. The main research question for the study is "What are the main uses and gratifications of social media for young refugees living in Bergen?"

### METHODS

Personal information will be gathered using an online survey and personal interviews. In addition, there will be performed observation of two or three selected social media sites, e.g. Facebook groups for/about refugees. Here, postings and interactions by, or aimed at, refugees will be observed.

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT

The sample participating in the online survey and personal interviews will receive written and oral information about the project, and give their consent to participate. The letter of information is well formulated.

### OBSERVATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

The use of information available online as a rule implies that informed consent should be gathered from all participants. Cf. email correspondence with the student, the Data Protection Official presupposes that no personal information will be registered during observation. The student will observe general topics, messages and themes in the groups, and notes will be written by hand.

The groups observed will be open, i.e. without restricted access. Please note, however, that open groups need not necessarily be considered public, and that participants in open groups may have different perspectives as to whether their contributions to the groups are public or not. This means that if personal information, such as nick names or direct quotes, is registered, informed consent must as a general rule be gathered from all participants.

The thesis research proposal states that group moderators will be asked for permission in advance. We recommend that groups members are informed as well, for instance by posting information about the research project at the group/forum in question.

### SENSITIVE INFORMATION

The notification form states that there will not be registered sensitive information. It is the Data

Protection Official's view that this is not correct, as the fact that a person has been granted asylum is considered sensitive information. This is because the grounds for granting asylum may be for instance political/religious beliefs, ethnic background, health issues or other sensitive information. When processing sensitive information, the researcher must be even more careful with regards to use of the data, both when it comes to ethical issues, data collection and information security during the project.

#### DATA SECURITY

The Data Protection Official presupposes that the researcher follows internal routines of Universitetet i Bergen regarding data security. If personal data is to be sent by email or stored on a private computer, the information should be adequately encrypted.

#### DATA PROCESSOR

SurveyMonkey or similar will be a data processor for the project. The University of Bergen should make a data processing agreement with the chosen data processor regarding the processing of personal data, cf. Personal Data Act § 15. For advice on what the data processor agreement should contain, please see: <http://www.datatilsynet.no/English/Publications/Data-processor-agreements/>

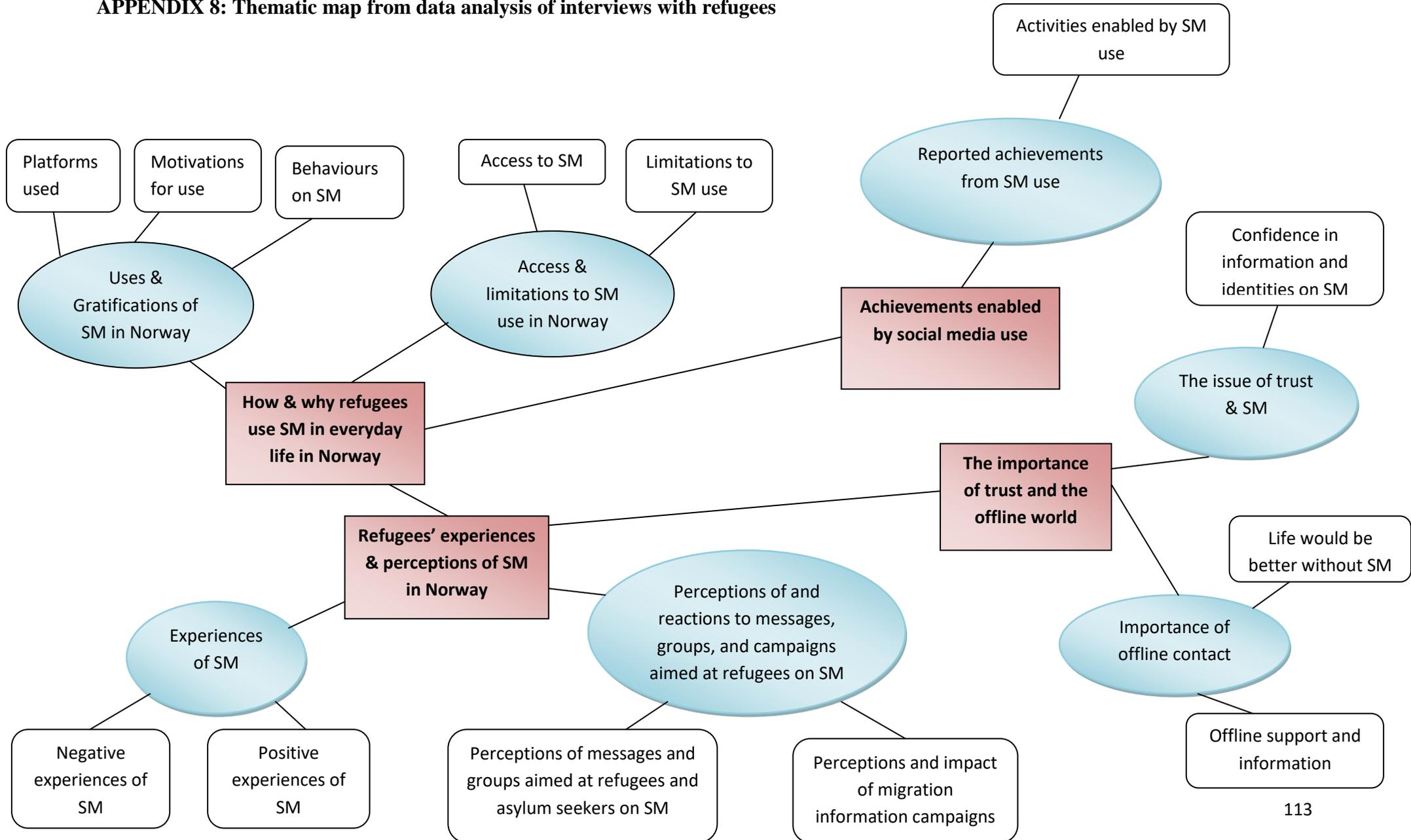
#### PROJECT END

Estimated end date of the project is 29.05.2018. According to the notification form all collected data will be made anonymous by this date. Making the data anonymous entails processing it in such a way that no individuals can be recognised. This is done by:

- deleting all direct personal data (such as names/lists of reference numbers)
- deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data (i.e. an identifying combination of background variables, such as residence/work place, age and gender)
- deleting digital audio and video files

Please note the data processor must delete all personal information connected to the project, including any logs and links between IP/email addresses and answers.

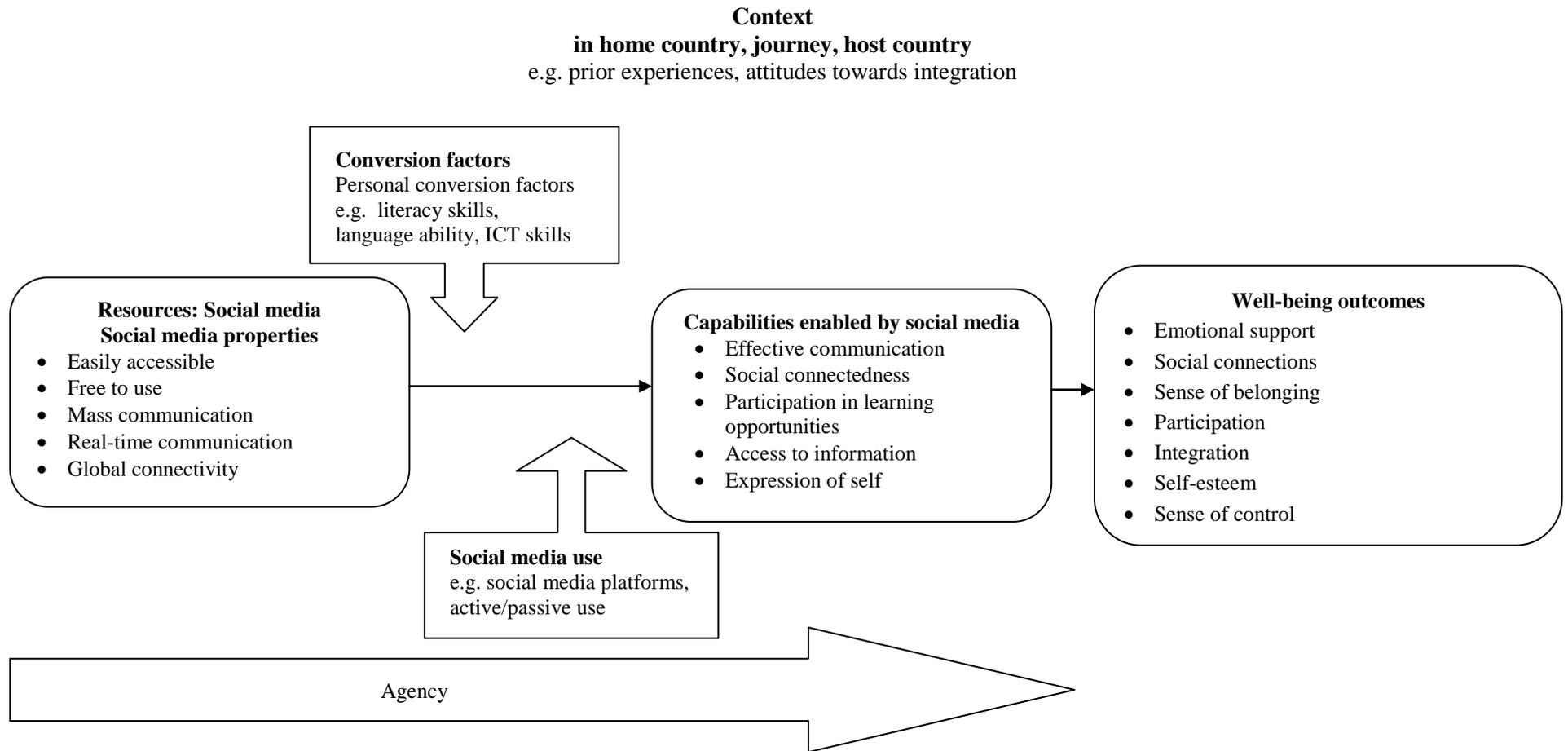
**APPENDIX 8: Thematic map from data analysis of interviews with refugees**



## APPENDIX 9: Data analysis coding table from interviews with refugees

<b>Examples of codes</b> ( <i>N.B. more codes than this were generated</i> )	<b>Basic themes</b>	<b>Organising themes</b>	<b>Global themes</b>
Use Facebook most Use Skype to talk with people Each platform has its own function	Social media platforms used	Uses & Gratifications of social media by young refugees in Norway	<b>How and why young refugees use social media in their everyday lives in Norway</b>
Connect with home country through social media Use social media to find information Started using social media for political reasons	Motivations for using social media		
Do not respond to negative comments Manners and use of language are important Do not like to share private information	Behaviours on social media		
Mostly access social media on the phone Use of SM has increased since being in Norway	Access to social media	Access and limitations to social media use in Norway	
Studying limits use of social media Working limits time spent on social media	Limitations and barriers to social media use		
Learned Norwegian through Facebook interactions Social media enables learning Social media allows communication with family and friends	Activities enabled by social media	Reported achievements from social media use	<b>Achievements enabled by social media use</b>
Bad experiences using social media No bad experiences using social media Negative messages do not make me quit SM	Negative experiences of social media	Experiences of social media	<b>Refugees' experiences and perceptions of social media in Norway</b>
Funded education through Facebook Facebook helped integration in Norway Good experiences using social media	Positive experiences of social media		
Familiar with 'Refugee Welcome' groups Prefer not to be a member of Facebook groups	Perceptions of messages and groups aimed at refugees and asylum seekers on social media	Perceptions of and reactions to messages, groups, and campaigns aimed at refugees on social media	
Migration information campaigns have limited impact Refugees have no choice in which country they end up in Facebook was very important in the refugee journey and decisions	Perceptions and impact of migration information campaigns		
Don't trust Facebook Don't trust that people are who they say they are	Confidence in information and identities on social media	The issue of trust & social media	<b>The importance of trust and the offline world</b>
Prefer physical interactions Prefer to get information from web pages Would prefer life before social media	Offline support and information Life would be better without social media	Importance of offline contact	

**APPENDIX 10: Full size Figure 1. *The role of social media in promoting well-being among young refugees in Norway***



Adapted from AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017, p. 1797