

Refugees and social media in a digital society: How young refugees are using social media and the capabilities it offers in their lives in Norway

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The proliferation of social media-based initiatives aimed at asylum seekers and refugees in recent years is evidence of growing interest in the potential of social media for delivering interventions and messages to refugee populations in host countries. However, surprisingly little is currently known about how refugees routinely use and incorporate social media into their everyday lives in host countries, and their motivations for doing so. The aim of the study reported in this paper was to explore how and why young refugees living in Norway use social media in their everyday lives, to identify capabilities associated with this use, and to make connections with well-being. The researchers adopted a qualitative approach, undertaking in-depth interviews with eight young refugees and two key informants involved in running social media sites aimed at refugees. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (1987) was used to frame the study and guide the analysis of findings. Findings indicated that participants' main motivations for using social media were communication, access to information, and learning. Analysis of their reported achievements suggested that social media offered five related capabilities which could have an important role in advancing well-being: effective communication; social connectedness; participation in learning opportunities; access to information; and expression of self. Other findings, such as differences in approach to using social media ('active' and 'passive' use) are discussed. Although all participants used social media and recognised its importance to their lives, variations in the way they approached and valued it suggest that providers need to consider these factors when using it as a tool to engage refugees.

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Introduction

Refugees arriving in and settling in Norway find themselves in one of the most ‘connected’ countries in the world, where 98% of the population has an Internet connection (Internet Live Stats, 2016). In Norway, access to the Internet is widely, and often freely, available. The Internet and social media provide access to a range of resources, information, support services and opportunities, in areas including health, education and employment, which can sometimes be time-consuming and difficult to locate offline. Many newly arrived refugees are already familiar with navigating the Internet and social media, having used and relied on these tools for vital information and communication during their journeys and whilst waiting for assessment in asylum reception centres. A recent report conducted for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) highlighted that migrating refugees regard Internet access as being essential, often prioritising it over food, education, and healthcare (Vernon, Deriche, & Eisenhauer, 2016).

The proliferation of apps developed in the last few years to support refugee orientation and to provide health and psychosocial support is evidence that the importance of the Internet to refugees and asylum seekers, and its potential for reaching them, is being acknowledged by humanitarian agencies, governments and voluntary organisations. Governments are also increasingly using social media and the Internet to deliver ‘migration information campaigns’, such as Norway’s ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ campaign¹, aimed at informing potential asylum seekers about the dangers and difficulties of ‘illegal’ immigration. Within Norway, issues of immigration and integration have recently become crucial themes in political and public discourse as the country tries to adjust to and accommodate unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees. However, despite this, and the fact that access to the Internet is widespread in the country, the Norwegian context is largely missing in the academic literature on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and refugees.

Research focusing on migrants and refugee groups to date has largely explored the role of technologies in migration process and decisions, and its potential to influence and facilitate or hinder migration and integration (Komito & Bates, 2011; Dekker & Engberson, 2014; Komito, 2011; Brekke, 2008; Alencar, 2017). Research has also been concerned with how technologies can assist in the achievement of specific project-based and economic ends, such as employability, social inclusion, and political engagement (Nicholson, Nugroho & Rangaswamy, 2016). However, such an approach regards technologies as a means of fulfilling assumed ‘needs’ rather than considering what users themselves want to achieve or how they themselves wish to incorporate technology into their lives. ‘Non-instrumental’ use of technology (primarily for entertainment or for passing time), which might be dismissed as ‘time wasting’, has been shown to have important development and well-being outcomes for users, such as facilitating digital literacy, income generation, empowerment and relationship maintenance (Nicholson et al., 2016; Nemer, 2016).

Whilst there is growing interest and acknowledgement of the importance of ICT, including social media, for refugees, little is known about how refugees themselves are

1 The ‘Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway’ campaign began in 2015 and was extended in 2017. It uses Facebook exclusively as its communication channel and is managed by Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

actually using social media in their daily lives in host countries. For example, how they are routinely incorporating social media into their lives, how it is of value to them, and what outcomes they themselves want to achieve - and are achieving - by using it. The authors of one recent study examining how refugees use the Internet reported that, “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). Given that host countries and agencies, including those involved in health promotion, are increasingly considering the potential of social media for engaging with and providing information to refugees, greater understanding of this phenomenon is essential in order to develop effective interventions and resources for use with this population. What constitutes ‘usage’ of social media is also not well understood. Research has distinguished between two forms, ‘active’ and ‘passive’: “*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). How users employ these different forms of usage in different contexts, and the impact that this has on users, is often not considered.

Furthermore, few empirical studies with refugees and asylum seeker populations have considered the links between use of ICTs, including social media, and well-being. Yet several studies with refugees and marginalised groups - including studies not directly concerned with well-being - have found that use of ICT and social media can lead to improvements in key factors of well-being, such as feelings of agency, reduced isolation and increased social connectedness, and can enable participants to make life-enhancing choices and attain development outcomes of their own choosing (Udwan, Leurs & Alencar, 2020; Marlowe, 2019; AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017; Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Felton, 2014; Nemer, 2016). On the other hand, social media use has also been found to undermine well-being, particularly in studies with young people, although these studies have mainly involved non-refugee groups. Negative impacts of social media use have been linked to increased risk behaviours, including risky sexual behaviour (van Oosten, Peter & Boot, 2015), cyber-bullying (Nilan, Burges, Hobbs, Threadgold, & Alexander, 2015) and enhanced feelings of envy about the lives of others (Tromholt, 2016; Frison & Eggermont, 2015; Verduyn et al., 2015). Recent research with Syrian refugees in the Netherlands also highlighted the paradox of social media providing connectivity with family and friends and social support, and the draining emotional digital labour that it involves (Udwan, Leurs & Alencar, 2020; Leurs, 2019). Currently, the evidence about the role of social media in well-being is inconclusive and contradictory, and research with refugee populations specifically remains very limited.

Aim of the study

The study aimed to explore how and why a group of young refugees in Norway used social media in their everyday lives; to examine what they reported they were able to achieve by using it that was of value to them; and to identify capabilities associated with their use of social media. A sub-objective was to make connections between the capabilities identified and their well-being. The study aimed to build on the small but important body of existing work exploring the use of technologies by refugees and marginalised groups which places the perspective of participants themselves at the centre of the research (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; AbuJarour & Krasnova 2017; Nemer, 2016).

Theoretical framework

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach was used to frame and guide the analysis of findings in the study. The Capability Approach shifts the focus from the resources that individuals have access to, such as technologies, towards the outcomes that they are able to achieve with them. It has proven a valuable approach in the context of refugee research (AbuJarour and Krasnova, 2017, p. 1794) but has only recently been applied to technology (Oosterlaken, 2012) and to exploring the use of technology by marginalised groups, including refugees. However, the potential of the Capability Approach as an approach within ICT and development has been recognised by researchers and professionals working in this field: "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 attempting to operationalise the capability approach, Kleine (2010) developed the 'Choice Framework', inspired by Alsop and Heinsohn (2005). The Choice Framework developed the concept of Dimensions of Choice to include 'sense of choice', to reflect the importance of users' awareness of the possibilities that new technologies afford them and the significance of this awareness in understanding whether and how people use new technology.

Using the key concepts of the Capability Approach in analysis of empirical research can encourage researchers to move beyond a focus on technologies as instrumental tools, beyond issues of access, to consider the opportunities that ICTs give to people to lead the lives that they value. While issues of resources and access to them are, of course, important, the Capability Approach shifts the focus from these towards the uses and outcomes that individuals can make from them, in order to satisfy their own desires and needs. In recent years, the framework, principles, and concepts of the Capability Approach have been used in several studies to illuminate issues related to ICT use by refugees and marginalised groups. Examples include studies exploring the ICT use of resettled refugees in New Zealand (Andrade & Doolin, 2016), the role of ICTs in supporting the integrations of Syrian refugees in Germany (AbuJarour & Krasnova (2017), and social media use in community technology centres in the favelas of Brazil (Nemer, 2016).

Two key concepts of the Capability Approach are *functionings* (valuable achievements and activities that a person has already realised), and *capabilities* (real opportunities that individuals have to achieve outcomes of value to them). 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*. Sen's own thesis was that freedom is both the primary objective and the principal means of development (1999). Following Sen's view that the assessment of capabilities has to proceed primarily on the basis of observing a persons' actual functionings (1999, p. 131), this study approached the identification of capabilities associated with refugees' use of social media by exploring how social media was of value to participants in their lives and by analysing what they reported that they were actually able to achieve, and valued achieving, as a result of using it (actual functionings). This approach has also been applied in empirical research by Andrade and Doolin (2016) and others (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 201; Zheng & Walsham, 2008).

Definition: Social media, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

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.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) extend the term Information Technology (IT) to include “a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information” (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2009, p. 120). These may include computers and the Internet (websites, blogs and emails), radio, television, telephones. ICT4D is a recent and evolving field of research and practice which refers to the use of ICT for development.

Methods

The study adopted a qualitative approach to research since it was seeking to explore experiences, interpretations, and meanings and to give a voice to participants. Interviews were conducted with eight young refugees living in Norway and with two key informants who were involved in running and moderating social media sites aimed at refugees in Norway.

Participants

Inclusion criteria for participants in the study were that they should have come to Norway as refugees, should be aged 18-30, and should be regular users of social media. Of the eight participants recruited, six were male and two were female². One was over the age of 30 (being aged 39). Participants represented a number of different nationalities, including Eritrean, Syrian, Iraqi and Yemeni. The length of time that they had lived in Norway ranged from ten months to five years, with the majority (five) having been in Norway for between 2 and 3 years. Although education level was not part of the inclusion criteria for participation in the study, 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. Interviews 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.

Participants were recruited by contacting several voluntary organisations working with young refugees and through a contact at a community project that had engaged with refugee youth. Snowball sampling was also used. A recruitment flyer providing details of the study was distributed to contacts and was given to participants to pass on to others who met the inclusion criteria. One participant was recruited directly through his posts on a Facebook group which aims to support refugees in Norway.

² The proportion of male and female participants in the study exactly represents the proportion of male/female asylum seekers in Norway at the time of the study, which, for the years 2015 and 2016 combined, was 75% male, 25% female (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, n.d.-a; n.d.-b).

Data generation and analysis

Individual semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants using an interview guide. At the start of each interview, participants were provided with a definition of social media and a ‘prompt sheet’ of popular social media icons, to remind them of the wide range of social media sites available.

‘Thematic network analysis’ (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was used to analyse data generated from the interviews, and NVivo software was used to manage and help code the data. The coding process involved identifying and clustering transcript data into three themes: (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). The first two of the Global themes identified are discussed in this paper, presented in the Findings section below. ‘Collaborative coding’ - generating and comparing codes together with other researchers in a workshop setting - was also undertaken, to increase the credibility of the analysis. A summary of the themes developed during analysis of interview data is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of themes developed during analysis of interviews with refugees

Global themes	Organising themes	Basic themes	Examples of codes (N.B. more codes than this were generated)
How and why young refugees use social media in their everyday lives in Norway	Uses & Gratifications of social media by young refugees in Norway	Social media platforms used Motivations for using social media Behaviours on social media	Use Facebook and Youtube most Use Skype to talk with people Each platform has its own function Connect with home country through SM Talking and keeping in contact with family and friends Use SM to find and share information Expressing opinions and political views Do not respond to negative comments Manners and use of language are important to me Do not like to share private information
	Access and limitations to social media use in Norway	Access to social media Limitations and barriers to social media use	Mostly access social media on the phone Accessing Internet and SM in Norway is easy Use of SM has increased since being in Norway Studying limits use of SM Working limits time spent on SM Social media fatigue
Achievements enabled by social media use	Reported achievements from social media use	Activities enabled by social media	SM enables learning Learned Norwegian through social media SM allows communication with family and friends SM enables making and establishing friendships
Refugees’ experiences and perceptions of social media in Norway	Experiences of social media	Negative experiences of social media Positive experiences of social media	Reading offensive or hurtful comments about refugees Seeing upsetting information about home country Negative messages do not make me quit SM Facebook helped integration in Norway Practical help offered through social media Positive messages and ‘likes’ generate good feelings
	Perceptions of and reactions to messages, groups,	Perceptions of messages and groups aimed at	Familiar with ‘Refugee Welcome’ groups Find positive information on Refugee Welcome groups

	and campaigns aimed at refugees on social media	refugees and asylum seekers on social media Perceptions and impact of migration information campaigns	Prefer not to be a member of Facebook groups Migration information campaigns have limited impact Refugees have no choice in which country they end up in Facebook was very important in refugee journey and decisions
The importance of trust and the offline world	The issue of trust & social media	Confidence in information and identities on social media	Don't trust information on Facebook Don't trust that people are who they say they are on SM Regard websites as more trustworthy than SM
	Importance of offline contact	Offline support and information Life would be better without social media	Prefer physical interactions to online interactions Prefer to get information from personal contacts Perception of life being better before SM SM was not so important in home country

Ethics

Approval for this study was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Data Research (NSD). Interview participants were informed about the purpose of the study and informed consent was sought using an Informed Consent Letter. All were told that their involvement in the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time. Data used during the data analysis phase was anonymised and audio recordings were destroyed on completion of the study.

Findings

The presentation of the findings broadly follows the structure of global themes in Table 1, with the emphasis on the first two: How and why young refugees use social media in their everyday lives in Norway and Achievements enabled by social media use.

How and why young refugees use social media in their everyday lives in Norway

Social media platforms used

All participants in the study reported using Facebook and YouTube, and almost all used Skype. The majority reported using Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, although several found Twitter hard to use and were considering deleting it. Half of participants also reported using Viber and/or Snapchat for messaging. However, several had only used Snapchat since being in Norway, on the basis that many young Norwegians use it, so they felt that they also needed to.

Given the range of social media options available to them, participants' choices of social media platforms used in their daily lives in Norway were remarkably similar. There was also some expression of 'social media fatigue' among participants in relation to the number of platforms available and having so many social media accounts, which could sometimes become overwhelming. As a result, 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 contacts and 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 - I join many pages so I can read about the world. And Instagram to see friends and friends' days; what they are doing. (Hassan, age 23)

All participants agreed that accessing the Internet and social media in Norway was easy, and usually used smartphones or personal laptops to access them. Over half believed that their use of social media had increased since being in Norway. Reasons given for this increase in social media 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 previous lives. Several participants also described feeling compelled to use social media 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...it's important to their lives, so it's important to my life. (Hassan, age 23)

All participants used their home language to communicate on social media and all also reported using English, saying that it was a common language for communicating with their friends from different parts of the world and with those who did not speak Norwegian. In addition, the majority 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.

Motivations for using social media

The most common motivations reported by participants for using social media were for communication, accessing information, and learning.

The type of communication spoken most about involved talking to family and friends, who were often overseas, and expressing and sharing opinions and 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 in countries experiencing conflict, was very important:

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. For example, Facebook is very important to communicate with people and you can call for free or using the Internet. And, like, everyone now in the world – not everyone in the world, but in many countries – there is access to Internet and to Facebook. (Farah, age 24)

Participants described the audience with which they shared their opinions and views on social media as mostly their friends, who could arguably have similar views. However, a couple of participants spoke of using social media as a means of influencing others: “It’s a platform for communication. It’s a platform to exchange ideas, different points of view – with friends and a few followers, the younger generation.” (Ali, age 30). One participant used social media to express dissatisfaction with his treatment in a transit camp for asylum seekers in Norway. He saw his situation improve as a result when his case was taken up by the moderator of a Facebook group supportive of refugees in Norway: “He started to make some calls and then things started to be better” (Hamid, age 39).

The kind of information that participants spoke of using social media to access 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 enabled them to locate information and opportunities that could help them find jobs and establish networks in the new city that they lived in. It also gave them the opportunity to provide information to other refugees, usually through Facebook Friends and private groups on Facebook rather than public groups.

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. (Kalila, age 23).

The value to refugees of social media, and its importance for spreading messages and information (and disinformation), is beginning to be recognised by government departments and agencies working with refugees in Norway. As one of the key informants commented:

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.

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 and with their use of YouTube. Several participants described how they turned to Facebook to practise Norwegian with others and used YouTube to learn languages (most commonly English) from video tutorials. Participants also described watching YouTube videos to learn how to make or fix things - often because they had no-one else to show them how: “[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, age 39). “I use YouTube, to learn...For example, I learn how to make food...How to do exercise.” (Jemal, age 22).

Other motivations reported for using social media included for entertainment – watching movies, funny videos and listening to music – although this was reported less than expected. One participant spoke powerfully about turning to Facebook (which he had never previously used before coming to Norway) to seek support and to improve his well-being after becoming lonely and depressed when he was placed in an isolated reception

centre for asylum seekers. He described the Facebook Friends that he made after setting up his account as becoming like “family”:

So I just get depressed in the camp, in the asylum centre, so that’s why I started 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? (Nasim, age 21).

Like the participants in this study, newly arrived refugees go through a process of becoming ‘settled’, and, as noted by Kalia above, settled refugees pass on information and learnings from their experiences and what they find to be useful in that process to other new arrivals, including utilising social media. The findings relating to motivations for using social media are therefore likely to be relevant to both newly arrived and more settled refugees.

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. The key achievements reported were; communication, social connection, learning and access to information. In addition, ‘self-representation’ was important to one participant. Here, there was some clear overlap with their motivations for using social media (communication, access to information and learning).

The type of ‘communication’ achieved using social media mirrored that of participants’ motivations for using it – communication with family and friends – and this was of great value to participants. Several talked about speaking with family members through social media every day. Social media was perceived as an easier method of communication than more traditional forms of communication, such as telephone or email, and allowed ‘real-time’ communication.

The kind of ‘information’ gained through social media use mainly related to that discussed previously under ‘Motivations’: accessing news about home countries, finding information about Norway and their host city, and accessing information relevant to newly arrived refugees (for example, on the asylum process and job opportunities).

The ‘learning’ reported by participants largely related to language learning, with Norwegian and English being the main languages of focus, and YouTube being the primary source of learning through videos and tutorials. One participant, remarkably, taught himself Norwegian in three months solely through Facebook and Skype interactions with strangers after finding that he was unable to access language courses or meet Norwegians face-to-face due to his asylum status and remote location:

I started 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 started to say “Ok, today I’m going to talk with Camilla, Constanza; tomorrow I’m going to talk with who, who, who... (Nasim, age 21).

In other instances, participants did not necessarily recognise their social media activity as ‘learning’ in a formal sense, but nevertheless reported using social media to gain skills and knowledge. This, again, emerged particularly in discussions about YouTube:

I use it [YouTube] 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, age 24)

The ‘social connection’ enabled by social media included making new friends, establishing and cementing friendships with people already known ‘in real life’, and gaining support online from others who had been through similar experiences. “You find so many people who have the same experiences like you. You find friends you can cry with. Or be happy with.” (Ali, age 30). One participant had made 4,000 Facebook Friends, since opening a Facebook account after arriving in Norway, some of whom he had gone on to meet in person, travelling all around Norway to do so, and they transitioned into ‘real-life’ friendships.

Only one participant spoke of using social media for ‘self-representation’ but did so passionately and frequently. He talked of valuing social media for providing him with a platform to represent himself as an individual, a refugee and an ambassador for his home country. He felt that it allowed him to demonstrate to Norwegians that he had something to offer them. Having the opportunity to control the way that he and other refugees were portrayed, in contrast to the portrayals of mainstream media, was also of great importance to him:

[social media] ...it's 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. (Nasim, age 21).

Capabilities associated with social media use

Using the central concepts of Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach as a framework, the study focused attention on the ‘ends’, or outcomes, that social media offered participants, as well as the ‘means’ of use (issues of access, which social media platforms they used). As mentioned above, the achieved functionings that participants in this study identified were: communication, social connection, learning, access to information and self-representation. Based on these findings, five corresponding capabilities associated with social media usage by refugees are suggested: 1) effective communication; 2) social connectedness; 3) participation in learning opportunities; 4) access to information; and 5) expression of self. These are discussed further in the Discussion section.

‘Active’ versus ‘passive’ use of social media

An unexpected 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 two participants, Nasim and Omar. Nasim proactively used Facebook to ask for help - initially with learning Norwegian - but also to answer his questions about integration and Norwegian culture, to seek emotional and practical support and advice, and eventually to crowdfund his 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 as a result of donations generated through Facebook. 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, age 21).

Omar, on the other hand, viewed social media with suspicion. He valued it for communicating with his family and friends overseas but did not trust it as a source of information and 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.” 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 [on it]...”. He described how he trusted two YouTube channels, but nevertheless still researched the references that 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”. Other than communicating with family and friends and viewing YouTube videos, he did not interact or actively engage with social media.

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. Nasim and Omar represent examples of the two extremes, but exactly where most other participants fit on this scale was less easy to determine. Most admitted to being passive users of Facebook groups aimed at refugees in Norway – ‘watching’ these groups, and gaining useful information from them, but not actively interacting with them. However, they seemed, at different times, to be active in other groups and platforms.

Discussion

The capabilities identified in this study share strong similarities with capabilities identified in the limited number of other empirical studies which have examined the use of technologies (although not social media specifically or exclusively) by refugees, particularly those of AbuJarour and Krasnova (2017) and Andrade and Doolin (2016). Both studies also identified communication (defined respectively as “effective telecommunication” and “communicating effectively”), social connectedness and access to information (defined as “participating in an information society”) as capabilities that ICT enabled refugees to realise. Learning, in the sense of informal learning rather than “participation in education programmes” (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017), emerged much more strongly in this study, however.

It is interesting to note the overlap found in this study between participants’ motivations for using social media and the identified achievements and capabilities (opportunities to

achieve outcomes of value to them). Whilst acknowledging that more attention is needed to examine the relationships between the concepts of motivations, achievements, and capabilities, it is worth highlighting the factors common to all three in this study (see Table 2 below):

Table 2: Motives, achievements and capabilities of social media use found in the study

Motives reported by participants for their use of social media	Achievements reported by participants from their use of social media	Capabilities suggested by their use of social media
Communication	Communication	Effective communication
Information	Access to information	Access to information
Learning	Learning	Participation in learning
Entertainment (mentioned by a few participants)	Social connection	Social connectedness
Meeting Norwegians (mentioned by two participants)	Self-representation (mentioned by one participant)	Expression of self
Well-being (mentioned by one participant)		

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.

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. 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).

The participants in this study were similar in terms of their access to social media and their resource portfolio (Kleine, 2010): all were well educated and all spoke English and at least some Norwegian (educational resources); all had a mobile phone and/or laptop (material resources); the cost of accessing the Internet was not an issue raised by any of them (financial resources); all apart from one lived in the same location (geographical resources). 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, they made different choices regarding how to use it (some were more concerned with privacy and trust issues than others and restricted their interactions accordingly), and whether or not 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.”

Figure 1 below illustrates the properties of social media as a resource which were of value to participants in this study, the capabilities suggested by its reported use, and the

potential well-being outcomes of its use. The roles of personal conversion factors³ and agency in participants' decisions regarding how to use and whether to realise the capabilities enabled by social media are also represented.

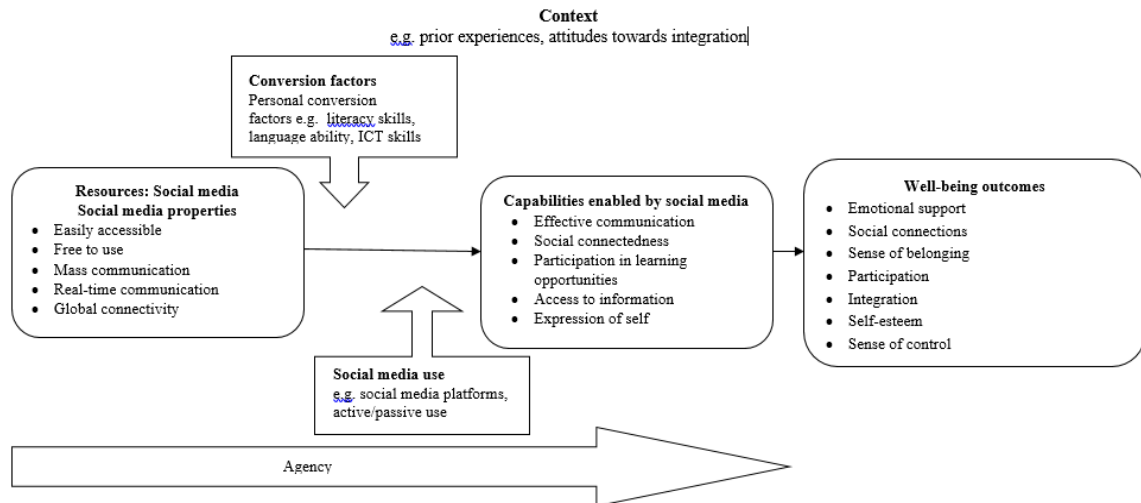


Figure 1. Summary: The role of social media in promoting well-being among young refugees in Norway. Adapted from AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017, p. 1797

However, it needs to be remembered that not all refugees arriving in Norway have the same resources that the participants in this study had, certainly in terms of education and language. As other studies have noted, being well-educated and proficient in English means that the digital divide is likely to affect such participants less and that "it is vital to recognise that social media are not uniformly available or embraced" (Marlowe, 2019, p. 289). Interviews and discussion with key informants working with refugees in Norway 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 require the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to use social media and an understanding and awareness of what social media can offer - 'sense of choice' (Kleine, 2010) - in addition to having access to it. Ensuring that all refugees arriving in Norway have the same opportunities to realise the capabilities offered by social media 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, 2016).

The issue of 'active' versus 'passive' use of social media by participants in this study generated more questions than answers. It was an intriguing aspect of participants' social media use which could be further explored. Whilst it is possible to point to some *effects* that differences in their usage of social media had for the participants in this study (it seemed that active posting was associated with tangible positive outcomes), what is unclear are the *causes* of this difference. What made Nasim more active and Omar more

³ A concept of the Capability Approach, 'conversion factors' are the personal, social and environmental factors that affect individual ability to access and convert resources available to individuals into capabilities.

passive in their respective use of social media? The answers to this were not found in this study, but it is possible to speculate on reasons: 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. 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; 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).

Limitations of the study

A small number of participants were involved in the study, which allowed for in-depth interviews exploring their everyday lived experience. Although the participant group may be regarded as too small to be useful or transferable to other settings, as Creswell (2014) points out, the intent of a qualitative study is not to generalise findings beyond the individuals and sites studied, but the value lies in the particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific setting and in the depth of study. Since little attention has been given to how refugees incorporate social media into their everyday lives in Norway, this study contributes knowledge to this field.

As noted, the participants in this study were, although not by design, a particular group of young refugees: educated and able to speak English. In this sense they were probably different to many refugees arriving in Norway, 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. Much 'Norwegian' online content is available in English as well as Norwegian, so being able to speak English can be very helpful in the transition period to learning Norwegian. Being educated and literate is also considered to correlate to higher usage of ICTs (Alampay, 2006). 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.

Whilst participants were assured that their interview responses and participation would be anonymous, there was potential for questions about their social media use to be sensitive and it is noted that therefore the accuracy and truthfulness of their answers might be called into question. Finally, 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, the gender differences in social media use would also be relevant for more in-depth study.

Conclusion

The main objectives of this study were to explore how and why young refugees in Norway use social media in their everyday lives in Norway, to identify capabilities associated with this use, and to make connections between these capabilities and their well-being.

The three main motivations reported by young refugees in this study for their use of social media were: communication, accessing information, and learning. Using social media for entertainment or passing time did not prove to be as important as expected or as indicated by previous studies. 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 since arriving in Norway, and in order to fit into Norwegian society.

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 for using it. In addition, 'self-representation' was very important to one participant, who purposefully used his Facebook account as a tool to enable him to tell his own story to the world and to act as an ambassador for his home country. The fact that most participants used social media as a tool for learning (whether they described and recognised the activity as "learning" or not) was unexpected as it had not been a finding of similar studies. It suggests the potential for social media as a means of providing learning opportunities to refugees, as well as to asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their applications who are unable to access formal learning provision.

Analysis of the reported achievements resulted in identifying five corresponding capabilities that social media use offers to refugees: 1) effective communication; 2) social connectedness; 3) participation in learning opportunities; 4) access to information; and 5) expression of self. These capabilities can play an important role in well-being for refugees, providing, for example, 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.

The study demonstrated the importance of social media in the everyday lives of young refugees in Norway. However, although all participants used it and recognised its importance in their lives, there was variation in the ways in which they used it ('active' or 'passive' use). Furthermore, they were careful and purposeful in the limited range of social media platforms that they used and expressed 'social media fatigue' about the prospect of signing up to more accounts. This suggests that careful consideration needs to be given to the design of interventions or campaigns employing social media targeting refugees. Using preferred social media platforms that refugees are actually already successfully using, and regard as trustworthy and credible, is likely to be more effective - and furthermore recognises that refugees usually use the same platforms as host populations and do not need to be stigmatised by having their own separate 'refugee' platforms and apps. Finally, as the case study of Nasim and Omar shows, just because refugees are using social media in certain areas of their lives, it should not be assumed that they all place the same trust and value in it and that social media is always the preferred option for receiving information. For some, a combination of online and offline methods may be more effective.

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