

# Young and old use social media for surprisingly different reasons

[Society & Culture](#)[1]

[Society & Culture](#)[1][Social media](#) [2][The Internet](#) [3][Youth](#) [4][Norway](#) [5][Forskning.no](#) [6]

Young and old Norwegians have different reasons for using social media websites, but younger users are becoming bored with social networks.

More than half of Norway's five million population is on Facebook. For many of them, the social network has joined the ranks of the communication tools that are used on a daily basis.

As social media changes how we interact with each other, our activities on such websites have become a key target for research.

"If the information sent between people becomes different because of this technology, we need to know more about it," says Anne Inga Hilsen at the Oslo-based, independent research foundation Fafo. "It's important to understand how society changes."

## Surprising differences between generations

Hilsen and her colleague Tove Helvik conducted a small, explorative study of generational differences in Facebook use: They recruited young and old highly IT-proficient social media users through Facebook and led an organised group discussion about their online behaviour.

Hilsen says she was surprised by what they had to say.

There are numerous examples of young people who are getting themselves into trouble because they upload unflattering pictures which come back to haunt them, or because they post derogatory comments about co-workers or bosses.

Such anecdotes, often found in media, add to the popular notion of younger social network users as careless and eager to express themselves, whereas older users are generally seen as more restrained. But Hilsen and Helvik found "pretty much the opposite."

While the informants under 25 used social media to organise and plan their lives, for example by inviting people to parties and by making dinner appointments, people in the 40-or-older group primarily used social networks such as Facebook to show their friends what they were doing and what they cared about. They uploaded pictures of their families, wrote anecdotes about their vacation trips and posted descriptions and receipts of things they were cooking at home.

"The older informants used the network to express themselves, while the younger ones used it to figure out where they were going to meet with their friends and what they were going to do at night," says Hilsen. "This difference was surprising to us."

### Young users leave Facebook at home

Another interesting finding was that the older informants spent more time on social media in their spare time than the younger users.

“The young users used Facebook to coordinate how their spare time was going to be spent,” says Hilsen.

Younger users were also less keen on bringing their Facebook friends on vacation. “They would leave their computers at home,” she says. “The older users, meanwhile, were never far away from the internet.”

Hilsen stresses that their sample was too small to make broad generalisations on how different generations use social media. But the study’s surprising findings might indicate a trend where younger users are becoming bored with social media.

### Bored with social media?

A British survey conducted in 2010 and 2011 by Gartner Inc. shows signs of a “social media fatigue” for some users.

6,295 respondents between the ages of 13 and 74 were asked about how they use social media and what they think about it, and while many of them spent more time on their favourite sites than before, several were less enthusiastic.

“The trend shows some social media fatigue among early adopters,” says Brian Blau, the research director at Gartner.

“31 percent of aspirers - younger, more mobile, brand-conscious consumers - indicated that they were getting bored with their social network.”

### The Net Generation

The young users in Hilsen’s study belong to the so-called Net Generation – people who grew up with internet access – and most of the early adopters of social media came from this population. Facebook, for instance, was initially a social network exclusively available to university students.

“I’ve been on the internet since 1998,” said a 24-year-old informant in Hilsen’s study. “I’ve grown up there.”

“Much of my life is on Facebook,” said another.

For such members of the Net Generation, the novelty factor of social media has withered. And some of them might just 'like' it a little less than they used to.

 [Younger people have grown up with Facebook and social media. But are they now getting bored?](#)  
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 [fb.jpg](#) [9]

[Social media changes the role of the journalist](#) [10] [Mobile phones as a social means of education](#) [11]

[Anne Inga Hilsen's profile](#) [12]

[Anne Inga Hilsen & Tove Helvik, The construction of self in social medias, such as Facebook, AI & SOCIETY, Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Communication, 2012 \(abstract\)](#)

[13] [Gartner Survey Highlights Consumer Fatigue with Social Media, 2011](#) [14]

[Isak Ladegaard](#) [15]

May 31, 2012 - 07:02

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**Links:**

- [1] <http://sciencenordic.com/category/section/society-culture>
- [2] <http://sciencenordic.com/social-media>
- [3] <http://sciencenordic.com/internet>
- [4] <http://sciencenordic.com/youth>
- [5] <http://sciencenordic.com/category/countries/norway>
- [6] <http://sciencenordic.com/category/publisher/forskningno>
- [7] <http://sciencenordic.com/sites/default/files/fb.jpg>
- [8] <http://sciencenordic.com/sites/default/files/aih16.jpg>
- [9] [http://sciencenordic.com/sites/default/files/fb\\_0.jpg](http://sciencenordic.com/sites/default/files/fb_0.jpg)
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- [11] <http://sciencenordic.com/mobile-phones-social-means-education>
- [12] <http://www.faf.no/pers/bio/aih-english.htm>
- [13] <http://www.springerlink.com/content/062t2q7444531mh1/?MUD=MP>
- [14] <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=1766814>
- [15] <http://sciencenordic.com/content/isak-ladegaard>