FACEBOOK AND GREEK RETIREES’ RELATIONSHIPS
A study on how Facebook usage affects Greek older adults’ social bonds

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Abstract

By applying the ethnographic method and drawing from the theoretical framework of social capital, this study sought to explore how the social relationships of Greek retirees are affected by their Facebook usage. It also aimed to investigate how the social medium is integrated into their day-to-day lives. This research was motivated by the increasing number of older adults using Facebook globally over the past years and the need to address this phenomenon in a qualitative way. Through the use of diaries, in-depth interviews, a focus group and participant observation of 34 Greek retirees in the context of their everyday lives, the results have shown that their bonds benefit in multiple ways from their Facebook employment. Their closest relationships, as well as their less intimate ones, are strengthened by both their offline and online interactions related to the platform. As the world’s population grows older now more than ever and older adults’ presence in social media is on the rise, studies like the one at hand can offer insights towards a better understanding of these emerging dynamics and the unique association between later life and technology.

Keywords: Facebook, retired Greeks, relationships, social capital, ethnography
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1. Introduction

It’s a sunny day in this picturesque small city, located in the suburbs of Athens. A beautiful morning of March, a Tuesday. The day of the knitting class, one of the many activities the participants attend in their quotidian lives. A gathering that takes place once a week, in a café with a sea view. For the sakes of the research, I am there as well to observe. It’s me and six other women, sitting around a table. As I soon come to understand, the class is more about socializing, rather than exercise the actual practice of knitting. An excuse for them to get together. They keep talking about a wide range of things, nothing foreboding Facebook’s reference in their chit-chatting. Not until a member of the group starts talking about a funny video she watched on Facebook the previous night, posted by the daughter of a common friend. “It made me laugh so hard”, she giggles. They all agree on how beautiful and nice this girl is, while others say that they haven’t seen the video since they are not friends with her on Facebook. That said, the woman who brought up the video, starts looking for it on her phone. She has trouble finding it, the others intervening to help her out with advice (“go to your profile or use the search engine”). When she finally does, she invites everyone to watch: “Here it is, come, come”. And they all gather around her to check it out.

When the time came to decide on the topic for my Master’s thesis, my thoughts kept going back to Facebook. Trying to solve the “riddle” of the theme to be chosen, it hit me! One day, while logged in on the platform, I realized that my newsfeed was full of posts from my mother’s friends, most of them retirees or about a similar age. I thought there was something there, a phenomenon I wanted to investigate, curious to understand more about it. My mind immediately set off making associations around the issue. During this processing of my potential choice, I realized that all the older people I knew using Facebook, engage with it in a fashion that somehow enables their social connections. This would be the starting point for my study. Thus, I begun to look into that.

Even though they are not early adopters of technology, older adults* constitute the group with the greatest increase in Internet usage in the past decade. In their report “Older Adults and Internet Use”, Zickhur & Madden (2012) maintain that “once online, most seniors make internet use a daily fixture in their lives”, explaining that “once they are given the tools and training needed to start using the internet, they become fervent users of the technology”. A recent US survey (Anderson & Perrin, 2017) indicates that seniors keep moving towards more digitally connected lives, as internet use and home broadband adoption have risen substantially. Today, people consume media on a plethora of platforms and devices. According to the same source, four-in-ten older adults own smartphones and one-third of them have tablets.

* Definitions of the term “older adults” vary within previous research. In order to position the current study to the relevant literature, I define “older adults” as being aged 55 or more years. In this essay, I will use the terms “older adults” and “Greek retirees” interchangeably.
As internet adoption and smartphone ownership has grown among older people, so has social media use. Although young adults still account for the majority of their users, for the first time since their emergence, social media platforms are being used by an increasing number of older adults (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart & Madden, 2015). Latest Facebook statistics\(^2\) show that 56% of seniors online, ages 65 and up, are on Facebook and 63% of them are between 50-64 years old. The demographic profile of Facebook has changed, having drifted upwards towards the elderly. As Miller (2011) points out, Facebook is rapidly moving “from being a site largely dominated by youth to becoming an instrument available to people of all ages” (p. 169).

This phenomenon has been observed in Greece over the past few years as well. Numbers may still be low (about 17% of people of 55 years old and up use social media\(^3\)), but older adults start to embrace this technology and their exposure to new media is growing in volume. Greece is a unique case when it comes to internet diffusion and the exploitation of the new technological capabilities, since until the last decade, the country was left behind concerning this matter, compared to other European countries. In the beginning of the ’90s, internet in Greece was solely a privilege of academics and researchers. In 1995, only 1% of people living in urban spaces (with minimum 50,000 residents) had internet access. This percentage rose in the ’00s to 21% in big cities and 12% in semi-urban districts, thanks to the extended use of personal computers and the replacement of the dial-up by ADSL connections (2005), which meant better internet speeds. Since then, internet penetration has experienced an impressive upturn, which led to the 56% in 2010 and -due to Facebook and the large popularity of social media in general, together with the spread of smartphones- the 92% in urban areas and 82% nationwide\(^4\). Nowadays, 35% of Greeks at the age of 65-74 are connected to the Internet, for about 2 hours per day in average (Kourtoglou, 2017)\(^5\).

In addition, as it is the case worldwide (with 1.45 billion daily active users as of March 2018, according to the platform’s First Quarter 2018 Report\(^6\)), Facebook is the most popular social medium in Greece and the fourth most visited website in general by the Greek internet users\(^7\). Based on the company’s official reports, more than 40% of the population (5 million people) have an account.

This awakened interest of older Greeks to use the Internet and Facebook is also reflected to their avidity to learn. In the beginning of this project, the work of an Non-Governmental Organization called “50plus\(^8\)” crossed my research path. Its main goal is to promote lifelong learning and improve the quality of older people, over the age of 50 years old. One of their programs, labeled “Becoming Digital”, consists of delivering internet and social media seminars. The numbers are quite impressive: Until the end of 2018, total attendance is expected to exceed 12,500 participants. “The average age of the participants is 65 years old”, explained the demographics Dr. Myrto Ranga, who is in charge of the program. “People’s response and demand was beyond our expectations”, she noted. Numbers aside, what mattered most to this study was the participants’ reasons for applying for these seminars. “The reasons are mostly social. They want to improve their social life and be able to talk to their friends and families via the internet and social media.
Many of them have relatives abroad, while others want to become more familiar with new technologies to communicate with the younger generation”, she noted.

1.1 Aim of the study

Building on the “social” aspect of new media, the purpose of this study is to explore the correlation between Greek retirees’ Facebook use and their social ties and examine the crossover between their online and offline networks. It mainly sets to understand how older Greeks engage with Facebook in terms of their bonds.

Even though scholars on an international level have been focusing on older adults’ partaking in social networking sites over the past years, with the exception of a few works (Georgalou, 2015), this topic remains severely understudied in Greece. Considering the dynamics between older Greeks and technology, along with Facebook’s phenomenal popularity among them, the present project aims to address this gap. Additionally, despite the growing volume of research on Facebook, the ways in which the platform impacts on the users’ social bonds have yet to be clarified, in terms of a more interpretive perspective. So far, scholars have been mostly following content analysis or psychological approaches to these kinds of issues (Lambert, 2006). As Ivana (2018) points out, “the apparently simple question of how Facebook actually works in the context of social ties has been overlooked”, claiming that more qualitative approaches that offer “a relational alternative” (p. 4, 6) to the existing ones are needed.

Therefore, this research aspires to advance previous debates and add to the richness of the literature, by employing a qualitative, ethnographic approach on the subject under study. Its goal is to contribute to the creation of new knowledge in the field, by providing a deeper understanding on the adoption of Facebook from older adults, regarding their social connections.

1.2. Research questions

Shaped by the aim of the study, the main research question is:

RQ1: How does the Facebook use of Greek retirees affect their interpersonal relationships and how do their online and offline networks interact through their engagement with the platform?

The present work also intends to address the following sub-question:

RQ2: In which ways is Facebook integrated into the Greek retirees’ routines and daily practices?
1.3 Overview

Below, I present an overview of the report, describing shortly each of the chapters and their respective subsections. The structure will be as following: Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the topic of the paper, the gap identified and the thesis’ aim and research questions. Chapter 2 consists of the theoretical part of the thesis, where I define the main concepts and terms of the issue at hand, present the study’s theoretical framework and the various empirical dimensions that will inform my project. Theory is followed by Chapter 3, where I describe and justify my choice of the research’s methods, the procedures of analysis and sampling and the ethical considerations of the study. In Chapter 4, the findings of the study will be displayed. Chapter 5 constitutes the discussion part of the thesis, where the findings will be discussed, in relation to the theoretical framework and the research questions. Chapter 6 presents the prototype that emerged from this thesis, a website I created as a representation of the results of the research project. Chapter 7 concludes this paper, by providing the main idea of what was discovered around the topic at hand. In this last section, the limitations of the study are addressed and suggestions for further research on the subject are given as well.

2. Theoretical background

In this chapter, I present empirical and theoretical research relevant to the topic at hand and the research questions, overview that will provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the terminology and lead them through the course of the study. Furthermore, this section will relate the present project to the broader ongoing dialogue in the literature and constitute the groundwork for the discussion and conclusion. I start with Social Networking Sites and their main characteristics, along with a short mention on Facebook’s history, statistics and features, with an emphasis on Facebook Groups (2.1-2.2). Then, in chapters 2.3 and 2.4, I introduce the analytical framework of the thesis and the literature about the connection between Facebook and family bonds. The 2.5 section refers to the locality of the internet, as an extra motivation for this project.

2.1 Cyber communities, SNSs and Facebook’s affordances

According to Coley (2006), there are three types of cyber communities: Social Networks, Chat Systems (with Instant Messaging-IM) and Blogs. Facebook, the focus of this research, falls under the first category, that of Social Networking Sites (SNS), having an IM system integrated as well (Messenger)**. Defining Social Networking Sites, boyd and Ellison (2007) note that they consist of “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 111).

** Throughout this text, I consider Messenger as a feature integrated to Facebook and as such, a part of it, not a distinct application.
They center around the profile, which boyd and Ellison (2007) characterize as the SNS’ backbone, “displaying an articulated list of friends who are also users of the system”. As Goswami et al. (2010) point out, the basic SNSs features are: “Creation of individual profiles, searching for other people’s profiles, establishing connections or ties to other members, messaging, chatting, commenting, sharing of photos or videos or links to other interesting Internet sites and communicating emotional or situational states through status updates”. SNSs provide their users with various features, each one having its own technological affordances that facilitate communication (Jung & Sundar, 2016). The term “affordance” refers to the design aspect of an object, “the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used” (Norman, 1988, p. 9). When applied to technology, it means “a particular capability possessed by the medium to facilitate a certain action” (Sundar, 2008) from the part of the user within it, the specific applications and “permissions that a technological artefact encloses. These emerge during the interaction process between users and the artefact” (De Castro et al., 2018). Finally, Conole & Dyke (2004) describe technological affordances as “the relationship between the infrastructure of information and communication technologies and people’s use of those technologies”.

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, as a Harvard-only SNS, its membership being limited to the university’s students. In 2006, it changed to open sign up and was made available to anyone over the age of 13 years old with a valid e-mail address. Providing its users with a great variety of affordances and services, it has gradually evolved to be the dominant social medium of our era. According to the company’s First Quarter 2018 report (25 April 2018), Facebook has 1.45 billion daily active users on average for March 2018, which “constitutes an increase of 13% year-over-year”. Facebook’s mission statement was “to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them”.

Facebook shares many characteristics with the other SNSs. Its features embodying different kinds of social properties, it affords great opportunities for human interaction. Ellison, Lampe, Steinfield and Vitak (2011) note that “after creating a profile, SNSs’ users typically add contacts (called ‘Friends’ on Facebook) who are bi-directionally linked, meaning that both users must approve of the connection before it is valid. These Friends can usually see one another’s full profile by default. Facebook facilitates communication among these network ties; it contains a suite of communication tools, such as instant messaging, wall posts, and comments, and allows users to share photos, short essays (‘notes’) and web links with one another” (p. 125). The two most popular “social buttons” (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013) of Facebook are “Like” and “Share”. First came the “Share” icon, introduced in October 2006, “as an easy way of sharing web content with one’s contacts in order to invoke further social activities on the platform such as resharing, commenting and later liking” (Kinsey, 2009). The most characteristic feature of Facebook is the “Like” button, designed as a hand giving “thumbs up”. It was launched in 2009, as a shortcut with the aim to
replace short affective comments to posts. By employing it, users express that they like, enjoy or support certain content posted by their friends. “Liking was put forward as a social activity that can be performed on most shared objects within Facebook, such as status updates, photos, links or comments” (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). On May 2016, Facebook introduced “Reactions” (Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, Angry), providing users with new ways to express emotions to posts. According to Facebook, liking and sharing are valuable for users and the company because they enable to experience the web more socially. “The Like and Share buttons on Facebook encourage network interaction, generating easy and regular network connections”, as Davis & Chouinard (2017) contend. Another Facebook feature is “tagging”, rolled out in 2005. It means to mention a person, page or group in a post or comment. When you tag someone in a post, a link is created to the person’s profile and the “tagged” user is notified about it. Depending on how the tag settings of that user are configured, the post will show up on their own personal profile and in the news feed of their friends. Finally, one of the most popular features and activities on Facebook is gaming (Yang and Brown, 2013). Via the “Gameroom” application, Facebook offers to its users a wide variety of games, which they can play either on the independent app or through the website.

Many researchers in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) have stressed the importance of “usability”, namely the ease of use of the features, for the effectiveness of computer interfaces and applications. Usability is achieved when the affordances of the technological artifact are apparent to the user, meaning that the latter is provided -through the design- with sufficient and clear information in order to easily employ them (Norman, 1990; McGrenere & Ho, 2000; Boyle & Cook, 2004). McGrenere & Ho (2000) underline as well the issue of time, writing that “an affordance is easier to undertake when the time to perform the action is reduced”. To this end, all Facebook buttons and features are meant to be used in a quick and easy way, through a user-friendly layout, offering its members a social online channel to communicate in a pleasant fashion.

2.2 Facebook Groups

Social networking sites are designed to foster social interaction in a virtual environment. Their main purpose is “to make new friendships or to maintain those that already existed” (Coley, 2006). According to Joinson (2008), “these connections (or ‘friends’) are the core functionality of a social network site, although most also provide opportunities for communication, the forming of groups, hosting of content and small applications”. As Sheldon (2008) notes, on Social Networking Sites, “communication takes place asynchronously and within the network of ‘friends’ that the user has established”. Boyd and Ellison (2007) argue that “what makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks”. Tufekci (2008) points out that “a profile on an SNS is not a static entity; rather, it is a locus of social interaction that evolves and changes to reflect various dynamics within social networks and communities”.

One of the main affordances of Facebook and a central expression of this sense of community and social performance on the popular social medium, is Facebook Groups. A Facebook Group is a
function within Facebook, through which users create a page, connected to the platform’s social networking functionality, for the purpose of gathering people with a common interest/identity or declare an affiliation or association with people and things. Groups range widely and they can be formed on any topic. All Facebook members can create and join these groups. As the platform officially describes them, “Facebook Groups are the place for small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion. Groups allow people to come together around a common cause, issue or activity to organize, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos and share related content. New posts by a group are included in the News Feeds of its members and members can interact and share with one another from the group”\textsuperscript{13}.

Facebook Groups incorporate numerous features, “useful and fun enhancements” \cite{Park2009} for their users. They allow the latter to post content such as links, media, questions, editable documents, and comments on these items. Apart from the usual affordances of the platform (friends, Likes and reactions, tags, posting and sharing, comments etc.), Facebook Groups provide their members with the opportunity to plan and create events and invite other users to attend. Together with the “events” tool goes the “reminder” feature, that notifies interested users for the upcoming events. This way, as Pempek et al. \cite{Pempek2009} note, Facebook Groups facilitate offline social interactions. Park et al. \cite{Park2009} contend that “participation of social activities on Facebook is mostly carried out through the Groups application [...], a particularly popular and useful module that allows discussion forums and threads based on common interests and activities”. They also highlight the application’s ability “to recruit members and spread messages easily through social networking” and to strengthen offline community. Sjöberg & Lindgren \cite{Sjoberg2017} state that “a Facebook Group, if successful, assumes the form of a community, where the participants, to differing degrees, share information, knowledge, and experiences through interacting with each other”.

Fostering this feeling of community, like it does via the platform’s Groups, is a priority for Facebook, as its founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, pointed out in the company’s report for the first quarter of 2018. “We need to keep building new tools to help people connect, strengthen our communities, and bring the world closer together [...] We're doing this by encouraging meaningful connections between people”, he underlined.

\textbf{2.3 Social capital, Internet and Facebook}

Relationships are the main component of this thesis, which aims to explore the Greek retirees’ Facebook use in terms of their social ties. Due to its relevance with the issue at hand, I opted for the concept of social capital to be the research’s theoretical lens and analytical perspective, as the one that would best inform my research and forward its goal.
As a theoretical framework, social capital refers to the benefits (or “resources”) people receive from their social relationships (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). According to Putnam (2000), it consists of the connections among individuals and the process via which communities thrive, the key-element that holds them together (p. 19). As Steinfield et al. (2008) point out, “the ability to form and maintain relationships is a necessary precondition for the accumulation of social capital”.

Putnam (2000) introduced the distinction between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital, terms made on the base of the different strength, quality and characteristics of the type of ties each one describes. Bonding social capital is found between people in emotionally close relationships that provide personal support, such as family and close friends, usually within a pre-existing community. As Putnam notes, a crucial aspect of bonding social capital is the concept of intimacy. On the other hand, bridging social capital is closely linked to the notion of weak ties, those beyond ones’ immediate network, that foster a sense of belonging within a broader community and provide useful information and connections. The development of weak ties is equally important to that of the strong connections, since they constitute the “bridges” between the bonding groups and social circles. What Granovetter (1973) described as the “strength of weak ties”.

The concept of social capital has attracted the attention of scholars coming from different social science disciplines. Due to the wide use of the internet in everyday life, research has distinguished between offline and online social capital (Resnick, 2001), based on the distinct affordances online tools provide people for communicating. Offline social capital refers to the social ties and resources that are accessed in face-to-face encounters (Abbas & Mesch, 2016), it is thus associated with bonding. Online social capital, linked to bridging, occurs on the internet and consists of qualitatively different interactions. Motivating his study’s aim to create a set of scales to measure social capital for both online and offline contexts, Williams (2006) contends that “not only do social interactions occur in a different way within the Internet, they do so in parallel and in conjunction with ‘real’ life offline […] As people spend more time online, researchers have sought to understand what happens to offline social networks and what kind of new networks form online”. Righi, Sayago and Blat (2012) concluded that Facebook can foster involvement of older people in local online communities, by giving emphasis on the particularities that comprise their offline networks.

Consequently, since the rise of SNSs, one of the ongoing discussions in social media studies has been their capacity to build and enhance social capital. Moreover, older adults’ engagement with the Internet and social media has been largely associated in research with bridging and bonding (both on- and offline), hence the interest of this study in social capital. The works I present below are not focused on older adults in their entirety, but they are all relevant with the thesis intentions. Some lean towards bonding and others emphasize more on the bridging aspect of social capital.
The ability of technology and Facebook to develop and sustain strong ties (bonding social capital) has been the subject of several studies. Exploring Facebook as a source of social connectedness in older adults, Sinclair & Grieve’s (2016) study revealed that older adults can derive feelings of social connectedness on the platform and that “online and offline social connectedness emerged as distinct, yet related, constructs”. Employing a psychological approach to the issue of older adult’s participation in online communities, Nimrod (2014) suggested that online social networks may serve as a potential alternative means by which older adults can stay socially connected. His work revealed “various positive impacts on members’ offline social life, interests and activities, as well as instrumental contribution”, since the respondents would often arrange in-person meetings with other members of their online community. In their qualitative inquiry on the participation of Israeli retirees in cyberspace, Blit-Cohen & Litwin (2004) suggested that informants’ participation in the virtual world enriched existing relationships with selected persons in their support network, which was thus strengthened and expanded. “The cyber-participants’ connections with the social network included various types of contact that occurred in both the physical and the virtual world”. Haythornthwaite (2005), studying the impact of communication media and the Internet on connectivity between people, concluded that those using more means of communication, are more likely to develop stronger ties and “relations that include emotional and social support”. Through an ethnographic approach, drawing from the work of Bourdieu and Putnam, Lambert (2016) highlights the significance of intimacy on the development of social capital on Facebook. He points out its importance in the making of bonding social capital and the potential for “exchanging resources with strong ties” on the platform.

As mentioned above, a part of research advocates the idea that social networking supports loose social ties (bridging social capital). In their longitudinal study employing surveys and in-depth interviews, Steinfield et al. (2008) suggest that bridging social capital might be augmented by social network sites like Facebook, since “they enable users to create and maintain larger, diffuse networks of relationships from which they could potentially draw resources”. From a similar standpoint, Wright (2000) maintains that through the Internet, older adults developed friendships rather than support relationships, having “larger companionship networks than social support networks online”. In the work of Ellison et al. (2007), Facebook use was strongly associated with bridging social capital, since the participants mostly used it to maintain large and heterogeneous networks of friends. The researchers also introduced the term “maintained social capital”, which “assesses the ability of individuals to maintain connections with a previously inhabited community”, while having progresses through life changes. For Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte and Hampton (2001), Internet use may lead to larger social networks with more weak ties and supplements network capital by extending existing levels of face-to-face and telephone contact. Taken together, their results indicate that “the Internet is increasing interpersonal connectivity”. Similarly, according to Doyle & Goldingay (2012), older adults experience the use the internet as supportive to social inclusion and connectedness.
Using a psychological approach (most often by employing the Uses and Gratifications Theory), several previous works have studied social media and Facebook’s power in fighting social isolation and depression of older people, highlighting the utility of SNSs in the catering of social capital to their users. Ballantyne et al.’s (2010) findings showed that technology can reduce loneliness and that its use “assisted the participants to discover new and innovative ways of linking with people in the community - online and in person”. In addition to that, Mesch (2012) discusses the issue of the association between self-disclosure and the formation of online relationships, noting that introverts’ sociality is enhanced by online interactions, therefore the latter rely heavily on this kind of communication. Similarly, Desjarlais & Willoughby (2010) concluded that introverts may get social compensation when online. They argue that computer usage creates “a comfortable environment” for the socially anxious, for whom “online modes of communication offer greater freedom of expression”.

Facebook’s capacity to the development of social capital has also been associated with motivation of use. As Joinson (2008) states, one of the main reasons for which people use Facebook is the “re-acquisition of lost contacts”. Conclusion which agrees with that of Jung, Walden, Johnson and Sundar (2017), exploring the motivations of older adults for joining the platform. “The ability to keep in touch with those who are distant and/or inaccessible, previous work and school colleagues, old friends, and organizations”, emerged as a central incentive. Bonds-Raacke & Raacke (2010) showed as well that locating old friends is a main reason for people to use Facebook. Choi’s (2006) study on Cyworld, the Facebook’s South Korean equivalent, led to similar conclusions, since the majority of the participants suggested as the platform’s main advantage the facility to redeem “social ties that are potentially at the risk of being diminished, lost, or even have previously been lost, particularly because of physical distance”. Employing a psychological perspective, the aforementioned inquiries are thus informed by a different theoretical frame than the one this project intends to, that is to analyze in a more sociological vein. Nonetheless, I considered them relevant and important to mention, since they negotiate issues that the present study touches upon.

Other research projects have connected social capital with the features people use on social media -like Facebook- and their technological affordances (Joinson, 2008; Sundar, 2008; Brandtzæg, Lüders, & Skjetne, 2010; Zhang, Jiang, & Carroll, 2011; Righi et al., 2012; Jung, Walden, Johnson, & Sundar, 2017). “As Facebook has evolved to offer a variety of tools to fulfill different needs, it should be interesting to investigate how the users utilize those technical features for their own purposes”, Lee, Kim and Ahn (2014) note. These works study the relationship between the socially-focused embedded qualities of the various Facebook features (photo and video sharing, posting, Groups, messaging, chatting, Likes, comments) and the benefits users receive by employing them. As Jung and Sundar (2016) state, functions differ between SNSs, as each one encompasses its own technological affordances that generate various social-related action possibilities. Promoting different cultures, every social medium has a unique design and sets of features, that directly affect the kinds of interactions happening within it. As boyd (2010) argues,
the architecture of SNSs, their properties and affordances inform the practices that unfold there. Sundar (2008) contends that a technological affordance is suggestive and perceived by the user, who constitutes an integral part of interpreting the affordance. “The platform sets the boundaries for engagement between individuals. What kind of connections and engagements people make on this platform are determined by its design, together with the ways people appropriate the system to their own needs and interests”, comments Appleseed (2013). As mentioned before, the core features of each SNS encourage or aim to different social exchanges. Instagram, for example, is picture-oriented, constituting an “image network”. Twitter is a microblogging platform focusing on brief texts and news. Facebook, combining most of the features from the rest of the social media (see the 2.1 section of the chapter) and having established a “sharing” and “liking” culture, is considered the most successful SNS in building online communities. According to Ellison et al. (2007), this is due to the platform’s affordances and “its heavy usage patterns and technological capacities that bridge online and offline connections”. Facebook’s affordances, expressed through the functionality of its features and concepts such as immediacy, interactivity (Sundar, 2008), visual modality (Jung et al., 2017; Joinson 2008) and usability among others, are designed to trigger various types of social behavior (Appleseed, 2013) and provide the platform’s members with multiple social profits (community building, sense of belonging, intimacy, knowledge/information exchange, direct communication, establishment of social identity and status in groups, social support, positive memories).

New media offer technological features that do not exist in traditional mass media (Jung & Sundar, 2018). Discussing the shift of internet applications towards a more social direction over the past two decades, Lindgren (2017) stresses the importance of the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0. “The epitome of the 1.0 era was the traditional web ‘page’ which allowed for very little interaction. Popular sites that emerged in the 2.0 era are Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. They are designed to allow for new levels of user interactions and introduce a whole new sociological dimension to digital media through notions such as those of friends, groups, likes and so on” (p. 28). Therefore, interaction and socializing have been central aspects of this new internet era, which is dominated by social media. Lindgren (2017) notes as well that digital platforms such as Facebook “enable online sociality, engagement and community building”, by providing users with new tools and “infrastructures for social exchange” (p. 29). Opinion with which Zhang et al. (2011) agree, by underlying that social networking applications “provide an infrastructure for social participation in online and offline communities that facilitates user contribution and communication”. Basing their work on concepts such as social identity, social engagement and social ties, they discuss how social bonds are “mutually reinforcing and cultivating with the affordances of Facebook” and how online social interactions actually influence offline community. Their findings suggest that Facebook appropriates different affordances for strong ties and weak ties in the context of social engagements. Examining the affordances of social media, Appleseed (2013) argues that people use online groups “to build their identity to the outside world, while also continually arbitrating their purpose and position within the group itself”. Studying participation in Facebook Groups and its social outcomes, Park et al. (2009) found a positive association
between membership in those groups and active involvement in the respective events or associations in local communities. Even though exploring the participants’ social ties compared to Facebook’s affordances was not the main focus of the present research project, the issue is discussed in different parts of the thesis, since this connection emerged in its results and proved to be relevant and corresponding to one of the research questions.

2.4 Facebook and familial relationships

Among other social variables, social capital encompasses family as a concept. Considering though the importance of family for this study, since it has emerged as a major theme, present in all phases of the research process, I deemed important to dedicate to it a separate section in the theoretical part. Below, I present an orienting empirical framework around its correlation with Facebook, towards what will follow in the report.

SNSs’ and Facebook’s association with familial bonds has been addressed by a growing body of scholarship over the past decade. A main subject has been the positive effects SNSs have on familial relationships. Hogeboom et al. (2010), investigating the links between Internet use and the social networks of adults over 50 years of age, found a positive association between Internet use and frequency of contact with friends and family. The results have also indicated that Internet users of this age group were more likely to participate in organizations, meetings or clubs than nonusers, implying a positive influence on community involvement. Likewise, Coelho et al. (2017) inferred that SNSs, like Facebook, may improve older adults’ family relationships, since their use leads to an increase of both their online and offline interactions with relatives. Exploring the impact of technology on communication processes within families in today’s digital age, Rudi et al. (2015) underline that new media technologies “offer families multiple formats for collaboration, information exchange, and spending time together, which contribute to feelings of family strength and closeness”.

In their report “Networked Families”, Kennedy et al. (2008) state that technology is enabling new forms of family connectedness that builds on shared internet experiences between parents and children. Harley & Fitzpatrick (2009) suggested that SNSs boost older adults’ (decreasing after leaving the workplace) social connectedness, by favoring intergenerational connections. The elderly taking advice on technical issues and learning from the young how to use the different internet platforms, invites “an affinity between different generations and a process of reciprocal learning and sharing of knowledge”. SNSs facilitate intergenerational communication by connecting members of younger and older age groups, which can be beneficial for both sides (Mesch, 2012). There is also evidence to suggest that frequent familial intergenerational contact leads to greater emotional intimacy (Harwood, 2000) and intergenerational social and instrumental support (Tomassini-Kalogirou et al., 2004). Furthermore, the online communication between parents and children seems to have become more regular and normalized. Mullen & Hamilton (2016) studied adolescents’ attitudes to parental friend requests and presence on Facebook, their findings suggesting that for the majority of the young participants, “friending” their parents on the
platform does not predict a negative impact on their relationship. Moving around the same idea, Ball et al. (2013) concluded that SNSs have altered communication between children and their parents, “posing interesting communication challenges for familial relationships”.

Facebook’s ability to eliminate distance and connect dispersed families has been a subject of extensive discussion in the literature to date. According to Miller (2011), “its importance lies in its perceived and actual ability to reconstruct relationships, especially within families and with absent friends, that had been gradually fading away due to the attrition of other aspects of modern life, such as increasing mobility” (p.217). Through an ethnographic study of American Jewish migrants in Israel and their elderly parents in the United States, Climo (2001) concluded that computer-mediated communication has the capacity to maintain family bonds over vast distances for many years. He also maintained that this communication has the capacity to carry expressions of affection and foster intimacy. In their survey, reviewing research surrounding SNSs and older adults, Coelho & Duarte (2016) report that family stands out as the foundation for the employment of SNS’s services among elderly. “Across all the work performed in recent years concerning SNSs and older adults, there is a clear indication of what makes them adopt these tools: the possibility of keeping in contact with family members which by some reason, or a combination of factors, physically or emotionally, got away”. Similarly, studying adults over the age of 50, Zickuhr & Madden (2012) reached the conclusion that staying in touch with family members who are geographically distant has been one of the main motivations of older adults for engaging with social networking.

An important concept in these types of studies is that of *co-presence*, namely the ability of new media to create a sense of connection and “being together”, while physically away. “The concept of co-presence stands for a range of ways of being together that do not necessarily involve being in the same physical–material locality”, state Pink et al. (2016, p. 113), to add that its study “brings to the fore the specificity of how everyday human relationships are shaped, in part, by the qualities and affordances of digital media technologies”. Ito et al. (2010) stress as well “the importance of new media for families separated by vast geographic distances”, since the former are able to eliminate “the distances in time and space that typically plague transnational families” (p. 171). To the same direction, in their study on how and why senior citizens interact on Facebook, Jung and Sundar (2016) note that “SNSs can lessen the social, if not the geographical, distance needed to maintain relationships with children and grandchildren by means of multimedia features that enhance social presence”.

### 2.5 The locality of the internet

To give an extra motivation to my thesis, it is crucial to note that nowadays technology advances at an unprecedentedly fast pace, receiving new forms and meanings. SNSs have invaded our lives, grow exponentially in significance and numbers of users and this flowing dynamics challenges research, “forcing” scholars to a constant pursuit of the new trends. Therefore, the engagement of
older people with media technologies may have different connotations today, compared not only to 20 years ago, but even to a period of 5 years. Moreover, people from different social backgrounds perceive new media in distinct ways. To quote Daniel Miller (2011), who has done exceptional research work on Facebook, “the Internet was whatever any particular group of users had made it into” (p. 13). Christine Hine (2000) argues as well on the importance of context and internet’s local character. “The technology is going to have very different cultural meanings in different contexts. It could be said that ideas about what the Internet is are socially shaped, in that they arise in contexts of use in which different ways of viewing the technology are meaningful and acceptable” (p. 29, 30). As Burrell (2012) states, “the meanings and uses of a machine or system are not predetermined by the form alone but come to be understood in distinctive ways by different user populations and other relevant groups” (p. 21). Consequently, it is probable that senior Greeks’ Facebook usage doesn’t match that of, for example, their American peers, due to their distinct mentality, idiosyncrasies and conceptions.

To summarize the theoretical section, the major theme found in the literature around the issue at hand is that of social capital and its distinction to “bonding” and “bridging”. Relationships lying at their heart, therefore fitting the purpose of the research, these concepts will function as its main analytical nodes and permeate the totality of the thesis. Drawing from them, this study will assess Facebook's impact on the Greek retirees' social relationships, based on whether their engagement with the platform leads to the accumulation of social capital or not. Either that derives from their online or their face-to-face encounters. Theory holds that people may accumulate social capital, thus benefit from the Internet and SNSs like Facebook in multiple ways and for all kinds of relationships, the closest (family, friends) and the less intimate (more heterogeneous) ones, in both online and offline contexts. In many cases, these last two are inter-connected. According to most of the previous works, older adults use SNSs mostly to maintain and re-acquire pre-existing offline relationships. Moreover, as pointed out in this chapter, social capital accumulation might as well be facilitated or driven by Facebook’s affordances and features. The effects of the internet and social media on familial bonds were also elaborately presented, since family constitutes a core theme of this study. In this case as well, SNSs and Facebook were proved to provide social resources to their users in a variety of levels (shared experiences, offline interaction, intergenerational connections, elimination of distance), creating new channels of familial communication.

Compared to the approaches followed by previous research, this study intends to delve deeper into the aforementioned relationships that are linked to the older adults’ engagement with Facebook. Namely, to highlight and provide a more detailed description of them, by closely examining their particularities and the ways they are being unfolded and experienced by the participants themselves, in the context of their everyday lives. With the hope of extending the existing knowledge on the topic under study, I aspire to achieve these goals by taking advantage of the qualities of the ethnographic method. Methodology is discussed in the following chapter.
3. Methodology

In this section, I present the methodology employed in the study, describe the research and analysis processes and my experience of the fieldwork. I also provide information on sampling and the participants of the study. Finally, I mention the ethical considerations that this research project had to take into account.

My project aspired to understand the influence the Greek retirees’ usage of Facebook has on their online and offline relationships and interactions. I wanted my results to derive from real-life experiences that would allow me as a researcher to capture the essence of the issue at hand. Thus, the best match to the study’s purpose would be to pursue an empirical approach. To this end, taking into consideration its qualitative and interpretative nature and core elements, I decided to apply the method of Digital Ethnography. According to Pink et al. (2016), relationships, which are the main focus of this thesis, constitute a key-concept “in social and cultural theory that can be used for the design and analysis of ethnographic research” (p. 34).

Ethnography is rooted in cultural anthropology and literally means “to study people”. It emphasizes people and is engaged “in constant interpretation of their environments within specific contexts” (Bryman, 2008b, p. 13). Digital Ethnography is ethnography, transferred to the computational world, research practices in online settings. “It means that we work to understand how media and technology are meaningful to people in the context of their everyday lives”, as Ito et al. (2010, p. 4) note. An advantage of Ethnography is that it is flexible when it comes to methods. As Rachel (1996) argues, “ethnography is a lived craft rather than a protocol which can be separated from the particular study or the person carrying it out. The methodology of an ethnography is inseparable from the contexts in which it is employed”. The data collection methods in this research consisted of diaries, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and a focus group.

3.1 Diaries

Initially, I asked the participants to keep a Facebook diary for two days, to reflect upon their practices and experiences on the platform, write down their thoughts and feelings and document everyday use. After explaining them in written (e-mail) the aim of the study, the given instructions were not strict, in order for them to be free to write whatever they felt relevant to the research and their answers not be guided. Diaries can be a valuable data source in qualitative research, a flexible way of accessing information about activities, thoughts and feelings and “hard-to-observe phenomena” (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 113), which could not be acquired differently. In addition to that, diaries can use as the basis for the interviews to follow, which agreed with my research plan. Diaries functioned as my initial contact point and relationship-builder with the informants and a supplementary yet important source of data, leading to in-depth interviews and participant observation.
3.2 Participant observation and semi-structured interviews

The second stage of the research consisted of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, which were conducted simultaneously. Participant observation is at the heart of ethnography. Transferred to the digital world in this research, it took the form of me “browsing along” with the participants on Facebook. “In digital ethnography, we might be in conversation with people throughout their everyday lives. We might be watching what people do by digitally tracking them, or asking them to invite us into their social media practices” (Pink et al., 2016, p. 21). I asked them beforehand to explain to me their moves on the platform while performing them, as if they were teaching me how to use it. This gave me the opportunity to observe their Facebook routines, closely and in real time, and ask them questions about these patterns. This process took place at the participants’ houses. The dynamics of participant observation in digital contexts is of strategic value in virtual ethnography, since via observation, the tacit becomes explicit for the researcher, “both within our relationships with participants and as parts of people’s relationships with others that we wish to observe unfold” (Pink et al., 2016, p. 125).

Throughout the whole time in the fieldwork, to capture the atmosphere of each site, record my observations and thoughts on what was said or done and aiming to achieve a high-level documentation of the research process, I kept notes, took pictures, audio and video-recorded discussions. This material would be later useful in the analysis process, research representation and prototyping.

In Ethnography, the researcher is an integral part of the research process, being actively involved in it and adopting both an observing and participatory stance. As Hammersley & Atkinson explain, the ethnographer participates “overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions” (1995, p. 3). Geertz (1988) considers this concept of “being there” as structural for ethnographic research. Kahn (2011) states that ethnography emphasizes human relationships, one of them being that between participants and researchers. In order to build trust and reach to an understanding of the correlation between the informants’ Facebook use and their social ties, I had to become a part of their “gang” in a way (most of the participants knew each other - see the sampling section) and immerse myself into their routines. Pink et al. (2016) underline that “in order to understand how digital media are part of people’s everyday worlds and how relationships are played out […] we need to look beyond the digital” (p. 28). Thus, apart from observing the respondents in their personal spaces, I synchronized my agenda to theirs’ and followed them around to different offline sites, where their daily activities and leisure pursuits were taking place.

The research site was Porto Rafti, a small coastal town of about 10.000 inhabitants in the Athenian suburbs, known for its fine vineyards. In the summer, the place gets really busy and crowded, since the sea makes it a resort for people from Athens and the cities of the broader area. During the winter though, the picture is totally different. The streets are empty and the place is quiet and cold,
almost looking like deserted at times. This is when the participants stated enjoying their hobbies and recreational gatherings the most and—according to them—also the time when their Facebook engagement is mostly appreciated. Both their online and offline activities serve their purpose of having fun, socialize, kill time and take their minds off the heavy winters of Porto Rafti. During the research process, I visited the site almost two or three times a week, since I reside in Athens.

While conducting the fieldwork, the close connection between the participants’ online and offline networks appeared to be difficult to ignore and inevitable to keep track of. Their Facebook engagement was directly leading to their real-life networks and everyday pastimes. Whatever the motivations for using the platform, or their distinct interests, routines and preferred features were, the one element all their narratives about the social medium had in common, like an underlying thread, was the reference to their social ties and groups. As Hine (2000) suggests, ethnographers “might start from a particular place, but would be encouraged to follow connections made meaningful from that setting” (p. 60). One of the main sources of these kind of alternative routes when doing research is language, which “can be instrumental in providing clues about things to follow and sites to visit. Paying attention to what is indexed in interviews pays off, by revealing new paths for the ethnographer” (Hjorth, Horst, Galloway & Bell, 2017, p. 57). In this study, the participants’ references to their dancing, knitting, bridge classes or walking groups (among others) while sharing their Facebook stories during the observation and interviews, took me to spots not included in the initial research design. Relationships kept coming to the fore, solidifying my initial idea of placing them at the center of the thesis project. This entanglement of the informants’ Facebook usage with various aspects of their lives was very enlightening towards the aim of the study, providing me with insights on the issues raised by the research questions. By hanging out with the participants, going on “intensive excursions” into their lives (Pink, 2013, p. 352) for over a month, I managed to detect patterns and attribute meaning.

As mentioned above, in parallel with observations, I conducted interviews with open-ended questions (see Appendix I) with the participants, to gain a deeper understanding on their engagement with Facebook. “Interviews form an important part of the way that we as researchers can be with people as they play out their social, embodied and sensory and technological relationships with and through these technologies” (Pink et al, 2016, p. 125). Apart from its contribution to the research, data-wise, this method helped me to know my respondents better and develop a relationship with them. According to Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), this facilitates the researcher to easily guide the conversation towards the issues of interest. The interviews were conducted over a period of five weeks. They lasted one hour in average and were audio-recorded, in order to be adequately transcribed and analyzed, serving the purpose of the study. I talked to twenty-three people in total, four of whom I didn’t meet in person. Due to being geographically distant, these four respondents answered instead my questions in written form, via e-mail.
3.3 The focus group

After having finished with the observation-interviews, the research was led to its last phase: the focus group. In Greece, gatherings with close friends, more often than not result in taking the form of a feast or celebration, food and drinks always involved in the process. It’s a safe way of having fun, together with strengthening social bonds. Everything, even the slightest excuse, may lead to such kind of get-togethers, let alone a group conversation about Facebook, namely my focus group. This latter ended up being a special occasion for the participants, “to celebrate the end of your research process”, as was Amanda’s, the hostess of the event, catch phrase in the informal invitation for the night. Twelve of the respondents from the previous stages of the study participated in it, eight women and four men. Everyone was in a good mood.

My main objective was to make them discuss and interact around the topic at hand, in order to open up new dimensions of the issue and further explore the ones that had previously arisen during the fieldwork. Lunt & Livingstone (1996) highlight the method’s capacity to bring about diversity and a variety of opinions. It consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix II) based on patterns I had detected in their diaries and interviews, transformed into more general questions deriving from theory, news articles and timeliness. “Early findings and insights can be incorporated into later focus group interview for the purpose of confirmation or amplification”, as Krueger notes (1998, p. 24). I moderated the conversation and asked follow-up questions, trying to move it towards other directions when needed. I aimed to encourage interaction among the respondents and stimulate a discussion on issues that hadn’t emerged during the previous stages of the research. “Focus groups or joint narratives can be very fruitful where the interaction of the members adds to the knowledge produced in data collection” (Flick, 2009, p. 208). Some concepts that came up during the focus group were similar to those from the diaries and the interviews-observation and others were new or more thoroughly examined. It indeed proved to be a special night for everyone. For me, because I had concluded my fieldwork rich in notes and interesting stories, with an informed knowledge on my research topic. And for them as well, since they once again had a wonderful time together.

3.4 Analysis

Since my research was qualitative and the main corpus of my data empirical, deriving from real-life experiences, observation and my personal interaction with the participants, I used an interpretative approach to analyze them.

The analysis was performed in two stages. Before elaborating on them, it is essential to mention that even though the correlation between the Greek retirees’ Facebook usage and their relationships was my central focus from the outset of the research process, during the fieldwork I tried to touch upon different dimensions of the participants’ engagement with the social medium. I gathered
information on several aspects related to the topic at hand (e.g. which devices they use to log in, how much time they spend on the platform, whether they use other social media, privacy issues and concerns, what they would change about Facebook), in order to have extra material that could possibly answer alternative (sub)questions I was considering including in the thesis project. After having completed the fieldwork, during the writing process of the report, I finalized the aim of my study and narrowed it down, adjusting the research questions to the basic idea I had along the way: the link between the respondent’s Facebook employment and their social bonds.

As a result, in the beginning of the first stage of the analysis process, which included delving into my primary material (collected from diaries, observation, interviews, focus group, field notes, audio recordings and videos, namely the stories of the participants, their actions, my jottings and even moments that were not recorded but I recalled from the field), the accumulated data was processed and filtered and the material that was deemed irrelevant to the study’s goal was excluded from the next steps. According to Gray (1984), one of the guidelines to follow in the analysis process is to “ask the data a consistent set of questions, keeping in mind the original objectives of the research study. The intention here is to uncover whether the data fit with these objectives” (p.331). After the sorting out, the rest of the data was submitted to a synthesis and reflection procedure, namely an interpretation from my part guided by the two research questions, with the objective to detect patterns, relevant to the main focus of the study. More specifically, through Strauss and Corbin’s “open coding” technique, “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 61), different kinds of relationships linked to the informants’ Facebook usage surfaced, as well as data pointing to the interrelation between their online and offline networks and elements revealing how the platform is integrated into the participants’ routines. Subsequently, after this labelling of data, I identified links between the generated categories based on their core properties and I clustered those trends into reasonable broader themes and sub-themes, so that they be again in accordance with the research questions. My aim was that this categorization clearly depicted the essence of the phenomenon under study (Elliott & Timulak, 2015).

The second and final phase of the analysis was directed by the theoretical concepts of the study. By enabling the secondary data from the literature in the process, I categorized these relational clusters and groups of tied-in facts under the concept of either bonding or bridging social capital (accordingly to their association with those ideas), which constitute the two main analytical nodes of this thesis. In ethnographic research, “we need to order what we find into manageable analytical units so that it will be meaningful in a representational world where the everyday becomes abstracted into categories for scholarly analysis” (Pink, 2007, p. 17).

These central themes that emerged from the analysis’ process, are presented in the next chapter, the one displaying the findings of the research, illustrated through the words of the participants.
3.5 Sampling and participants

Due to time constraints and the challenges posed by the chosen ethnographic method (the researcher being present in the informants’ houses and daily lives), the participants were recruited through a non-probability, convenience sampling, made up of people I knew from my old neighborhood and who were easy to access. Additionally, the research site was a place I already had a connection with, which is important for an ethnographic research conducted in a short space of time. “This connection will ensure a certain amount of respect on your part for the location and culture, and reduce the amount of time it will take to become a trusted, viable cultural participant” (Malley & Hawkins, 2013)\textsuperscript{14}. Purposeful sampling is at the core of qualitative inquiry. As Creswell notes, “particularity rather than generalizability is the hallmark of good qualitative research” (2014, p. 203). According to Patton (2002), “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p.273). As Alaszewski (2006) points out, “whereas a single account would be treated as unrepresentative in experimental or survey work, in naturalistic research it can become a ‘life history’ which can be used as a case study to generate insights and understanding into a specific phenomenon” (p. 60).

The number of the participants in this research was 34 (see the full list in Appendix III). Apart from five who reside in the city, the sample consisted of twenty-nine retirees who live in Porto Rafti, a small rural community outside of Athens. The inclusion criteria for the study was that the participants be of Greek nationality, retired and Facebook users. The average age of the participants was 65 years old, ranging from 54 to 85. Since the research focused on Greek retirees, the age of the participants was not taken into consideration, as long as they didn’t belong to the workforce anymore. The respondents were 20 women and 14 men. The study was conducted in three phases: Diaries, Interviews-Observation and Focus Group. Some of the informants participated in all of them, while others in one or two. All participants were given pseudonyms to mask their identity and protect their anonymity.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This research bore the obligation to conduct good social science responsibly. It followed the standard international research ethical guidelines and was performed with the main concern of doing no harm. It fully respected the participants, ensured their privacy and protected their anonymity.

Depending on the field and the chosen research method, the ethical challenges can be of different nature. The ethical dimensions of research in online settings, like the present, is a very sensitive issue that needs to be carefully managed, with respect to the privacy of the participants. In ethnography, where a group of human beings is being observed, the presence and the active engagement of the researcher in the process is another ethically-charged factor. As Hine notes, “online interactions are sufficiently real for participants to feel they have been harmed or their
privacy infringed by researchers” (Hine, 2000, p.23-24). According to Allen (1996), consent should be a constant negotiation throughout the ethnography and not solely an agreement in the beginning of the research.

Moreover, since my study employed visual methods (video, photographs), the ethical implications was a subject that needed to be handled with sensitivity, concerning both the research process itself and its representation. As Pink (2007) stresses, the publication of the research may raise extra issues, therefore the researcher’s intentions should be made clear from the beginning to the subjects of the material taken in the fieldwork. “The publication of certain photographic and video images may damage individuals’ reputations; they may not want certain aspects of their identities revealed or their personal opinions to be made public” (p. 17). In line with that, before the research started, the participants were given a consent form, informing them on the purpose of the study, what it would entail and their rights (the right to withdraw etc.). By signing it, they agreed to voluntarily participate, that some parts of the research process would be audio and video-recorded and that this digital material would later be used to compose a prototype (website). Three of the participants didn’t want their pictures or relevant footage to be published.
4. Findings

To justify the use of the word “Tales” in the title of his book *Tales of the Field*, John van Maanen explains that it represents the “inherent story-like character of ethnographic fieldwork accounts” (2011, p. 8). Similarly, the stories of its participants about their Facebook experiences and practices, is what constitutes the touchstone of the present study as well. It is through these narratives that the informants’ relationships, affected by their Facebook use, unraveled.

Below, I present the most illuminating excerpts of the participants’ stories and the different types of bonds they describe, as parts of the broader themes that emerged from the analysis. Accordingly, these themes are categorized under the broader umbrella of either bonding or bridging social capital. Therefore, the sections 4.1.1-4.1.4 are associated to the participant’s closest relationships influenced by their Facebook use (bonding social capital) and the chapters 4.2.1-4.2.3 describe the link between their less intimate social ties with their use of the platform (bridging social capital).

I display my results in a way that is relevant to the research questions and theory, highlights the core patterns and tensions as they derived from the fieldwork and takes the report coherently to the discussion section.

4.1 Bonding

4.1.1 Distant relationships and co-presence

Due to the financial crisis in Greece, the past five years the country experienced the phenomenon of “brain drain”, with many people, especially the young, leaving to work or study in other countries. Most of the participants had someone, a relative or a beloved person, living abroad. In those cases, Facebook intermediates to create a sense of co-presence. Amanda (63) has two daughters, one of them studying abroad. Facebook has been a great means to communicate with her in the most immediate way available:

*We have made a group on Messenger named “Family”. We exchange messages, pictures and phone calls every day. During the game nights of our favorite basketball team, the three of us comment the game on Messenger and I feel as if my youngest one, who is away, sits right here, beside me.*

The absence of Antony and Anthi’s (69 and 64 years old respectively) daughter last year was not as hard as they were initially afraid of, thanks to Facebook. “She went to South America for a whole year, by herself. If it wasn’t for Messenger, we would have been worried sick. She was sending pictures of every place she was visiting and it was like we were there with her. We felt that we didn’t miss anything”, notes Anthi. Similar are the cases of Gina (63) and Sonia (58). “Facebook has solved the problem of how to communicate with my daughter, who lives in the US over the past five years. We often talk via Messenger and I can also watch her posts and keep in
touch. Sometimes, we make video-calls while she does the dishes”, says Gina in a light mood. “Both my daughters have left Greece. Facebook gives me a sense of communication with people who are far away”, declares Sonia.

Petra (58) has as well to deal with the difficulties distant families experience, namely the absence of her older son. “He lives permanently in London and he misses the sun and Greek food. Thus, he has asked me to send him pictures of the sea from the place I live and of plates from the ethnic cuisine”. The newest member on the platform among the participants was Nicky (59), who signed up 4 months before the research was conducted. She has immediately become a Facebook enthusiast. “One of the best things it has offered me is that I am able to communicate with friends that live abroad, in every corner of the planet! They send me pictures of the cities they reside in and their houses… I feel closer to them and this makes me really happy”, she cheerily states.

4.1.2 Intergenerational communication

The relationship between parents and children, in terms of the Greek retirees Facebook usage, was highly referenced during the interviews. This bond appeared to be related to the platform in many ways.

Online Interaction

Except for two informants, all the participants are “friends” with their children on Facebook, follow and “Like” their activities, interact with them. “Sometimes, at night, when my son has a late shift and I see that he is active, we talk privately on Messenger”, Lina (54) explained. Messenger is a channel of frequent communication between Victoria (57) and her children, as well. She often shares with them funny moments on the application: “Today, I received a message from my daughter, depicting our bleary dog”, she writes in her diary. Anthi (64) loves making jewelry. After finishing the process of making one, she often seeks for her daughter’s applaud on
Messenger. “I send her pictures of the jewelry I make, expressing my satisfaction and she usually says ‘amazing, mum, well done’, this making me happy”. Nicky (59) has a soft spot for her grandson, who lives with her son in the city, several kilometers far from her place. Facebook has facilitated their communication. “Via my son’s account, we exchange pictures and teddy bear emoticons with my little guy”. Many participants were also connected with their children’s friends on the platform. “My children’s friends were very happy that I joined Facebook and I would be able to communicate with them online as well”, Suzan (60) notes in her diary. On that, Amanda (63) pointed out that her daughters communicate with her own friends as well online.

**Children teaching Facebook to seniors**

Given that familial bonds are traditionally very strong in Greece, my early assumption when starting this thesis, was that family and children would come out to be a central motivation for older adults “boarding” Facebook. This idea, that older people are driven to Facebook by their need to keep in touch online with family members, was not verified in the fieldwork. In some cases, the participants’ children didn’t even have a Facebook account (either by conviction or due to lack of time). On one occasion, the grandchild created one long after her grandma, who provided her with advice on how to manage the platform’s affordances. As Emma (64) narrates:

> The other day, my youngest granddaughter came to inform me that she had made a Facebook profile and that she wouldn’t add any friends. I told her to have some, only a few.

The essence of my point lies exactly on the kind of interaction described above. Although not the main reason for their parent’s occupation with Facebook, (grand)children appear to be involved in different ways and to be playing an important role in the informants’ engagement with it. First and foremost, it is them who set up the Facebook accounts of most of the respondents in the first place. Apart from that, in many instances, children’s participation to their (grand)parents’ relation to Facebook consists of them taking on teaching duties. Amanda (63) brags about her daughters’ assistance: “They helped me in the beginning and they still do. They are always willing to come down to my -lower- skills level and show me things on Facebook”. When I visited Eva (82) for the interview, I noticed that she kept a notebook beside her tablet. Elaborating on her engagement with Facebook, she explains that:

> My grandson taught me the basics of Facebook. Even now, I ask my children for help. If I ask something twice, they protest! [laughing] So, I need to take notes of their instructions, hence the pad.

The case of Jane (85), the oldest participant in the research, was quite representative of Facebook’s effects on older adults’ closest relationships, since her engagement with the platform is closely related to her family. Her granddaughter created her Facebook profile and “helped me during my first steps”. The interview was conducted with three generations being present: Jane, her daughter and her granddaughter. We sat at the kitchen of the daughter’s house, who declared her pride for
her mother’s Facebook skills: “She gathers her questions and next time she sees us, shoots them! She gets everything without asking twice”. The granddaughter got into the conversation to add that:

Once, she had baked a bread and wanted to post it on Facebook. Since we were in different places, I gave her instructions over the phone and she managed to do it.

Jane values deeply this interaction with her family, having Facebook as its starting point. “I wouldn’t have made it without them. Thanks to them, I haven’t fell into depression”. What she cherishes the most are the moments of chit-chatting with her daughter and granddaughter about the activities of her kin on Facebook, gossip being another node of their close connection. “She mostly uses it as a keyhole to our relatives’ lives”, says her daughter. They all burst into laughter when Jane’s granddaughter humorously comments that “my grandma is a bit of a stalker”, informing me that “it’s in this kitchen these discussions between the three of us usually take place”.

Figure 3: Jane (85) learned how to use Facebook from her daughter and granddaughter
Playing games together

Apart from the young teaching retirees how to use Facebook, communication between family members is also fostered by gaming. Parents and children often play games together on the platform, interaction that builds intimacy and strengthens their bond. Here, again, children are the teachers and parents the pupils. Amanda (63) describes how her child helped her master several games.

When I first got on Facebook, I started playing the same games as my daughter. She showed me many ways to cheat, in order to achieve higher scores. One of them was by creating fake Facebook profiles and exchanging gifts between those and my real account, which would give you extra lives. We had five or six different accounts that we were both using.

A big fan of Facebook games is also Jane (85). Her favorite is *Candy Crush*, in which she competes with both her daughter and granddaughter, the former bragging to have the highest score amongst the three. I got to experience her passion for the game first hand, since after the interview ended, Jane asked her granddaughter to help her with it, since “I am stuck for a whole week to this level and I am going crazy! It’s such a pain in the ass!” . They sat side-by-side at the kitchen table, the granddaughter holding the tablet and Jane being obviously frustrated about the difficulty of this stage, nervous for the outcome at the same time. “If only you would make it happen”, she told her grandchild, who actually did it after two failed attempts. Jane hugged and kissed her grandchild, cheering in happiness “Well done! Thank you! How did you do it?”
4.1.3 Online and offline networks

As mentioned in the methodology section, the majority of the participants in this research reside in Porto Rafti, a small provincial town on the outskirts of Athens, where people have a strong sense of community. Almost on an everyday basis, they gather on different occasions and join the same activities. Depending on their interests, they participate in a variety of recreational events such as dance lessons, knitting, jewelry, photography and bridge classes, winter swimming, hiking, theatre and landscaping groups. Many of them even go to these assemblies together, sharing a ride or picking each other up, in the case one has a car problem or has the “problem” of not owning a car! That is to say, they care about each other and enjoy each other’s company. These people welcomed me from the outset of the research process. They allowed me access to their special group, facilitating my fieldwork. By entering the lives of the respondents as a researcher, I experienced first-hand the closeness of their bonds and the role Facebook plays in their strengthening. The “in-the-same-world” character of fieldwork (Van Maanen, 2011, p.12) allowed me to dive into the informants’ routines and gain insights on the ways they (inter)act and perform their sociality.

Throughout the research process, I came to understand that the participants’ online and offline networks are closely tied. Both diaries and observation-interviews showed that the majority of them mainly use Facebook to interact with the same people they are friends with in real life. They have transferred their interests and hobbies online, by creating relevant Facebook groups, which they use for having fun (they post and “like” pictures, comment), organizing, promoting and keeping abreast of these jointed pastimes.

The “Winter Swimmers” is a group of friends gathering every day at the beach of Porto Rafti, swimming and having fun together. They even organize mini-parties on-site, with music and food. Peter (63), a regular member of the offline group and the manager of the online one, uses Facebook almost exclusively due to this hobby of his. “We have a Facebook page, where we post footage from our daily gatherings. I don’t share personal information, only the events of our group”. Really proud of his swimming company, he informs me that they have been on the news. He logs in on Facebook and shows me the video of him being interviewed by a journalist.

Figure 5: "Winter Swimmers" is Peter’s (63) favorite activity, both on Facebook and offline.
Using the platform this way, they manage to enhance their involvement in these activities, thus fortify the relationships that exist beyond their virtual world. Philip (66) has a passion for photography and he is a member of two relevant clubs. He spends most of his Facebook time checking the news and notifications from these real-life groups that have a page on the platform. During the browsing along process, after showing me these Facebook pages, he gets up from his desk chair and fetches some pictures he took for a photography class exercise, displaying them on the laptop's keyboard.

![Figure 6: Philip (66) channels his passion for photography into relevant Facebook Groups.](image)

Well known for his political action over the years and a prominent figure in the local government scenery, George (77), with 1,600 Facebook friends, is also on the platform because it serves well his personal interests.

> It has been useful to me, because of the groups I participate in, offline. The platform provides me with the opportunity to talk to many people at the same time, read multiple opinions and communicate the ideas and activities of our political group. Something proven to be very helpful in this fight of ideals and efforts we make for our community. My posts solely consist of social or political local issues, usually complaints about a bumpy road, infrastructure or a flood caused by a downpour [laughing]

Even people who have an aversion to Facebook, use it to facilitate their everyday activities. Though not a big fan of the platform (“in short, it is a means of manipulation”), Dora (64)
recognizes its potential in spreading information and advertising. “I got on Facebook last summer. I have never posted anything personal. The only reason for doing that is because I am on the board of a local theatrical group and I wanted to be able to watch the group’s posts and share them, aiming to advertise their events to a wider audience”.

4.1.4 Facebook in their routines

In the fieldwork, observing the participants in their homes and following them around to their outdoors activities, it didn’t take me long to realize that Facebook was omnipresent, an integral part of their everyday lives. Not in terms of the time they dedicate to it (about two hours per day in average, according to the respondents’ answers during the interviews and their self-reporting in the diaries) but in the sense that the platform always finds its way in their discussions, interactions and routines, in ways that it benefits their interpersonal relationships.

Gossiping

During my first day in the field, I went to a dance class which many of the participants of my research attend on a weekly basis. It was my first offline contact with most of them. I introduced myself to those I hadn’t previously met and stayed to watch the dance session, without any expectations that the rest of the night might be of relation to my project. To my surprise, during the intermission and between other stories and jokes, a comment from the dance teacher initiated a Facebook conversation with the “pupils”. They started gossiping about a woman, an ex-classmate, who had made a badly received comment under a picture posted by the teacher. They kept making fun of her and her “silly” post, agreeing that they didn't really like her. When the dance class was over, Nicky (59), the teacher, humorously confirmed that:

When something on Facebook is very funny, very stupid or very irritating, everything that falls under the category of ‘very’, yes, we talk about it! And we have fun!

After interviewing Gina (63), a painter who mainly uses Facebook to promote her work, she invited me to an art exhibition featuring several of her works, held the day after. She had also announced the event on her Facebook account. Not long after my arrival at the small gallery in the center of Athens, some friends of Gina’s came by, a couple of her age. We all stayed up to the closing time. When locking down the place, Gina and the man from the couple started talking about a common friend of theirs who had posted some pictures on Facebook and who had apparently “gained some weight lately”.

In Porto Rafti, gossip can also be fueled by politics, Facebook playing its part to this side of the participants’ lives as well. Petra (58) is quite active as a citizen on a local level and confirms that many relevant conversations with her political companions have Facebook as a starting point. “We live in a very small town and the number of topics for discussion is limited. Therefore, we often
talk about what people post on Facebook. Sometimes, we make fun of the alleged roadworks of the local authorities, advertised on the platform. We tend to lampoon local government officials”.

Share screen time

Another standard weekly activity for several of the participants is the knitting class, which takes place in a café by the sea every Tuesday. It was a summer-like day in Porto Rafti, when, for the sakes of the research, I was there as well to observe. It was me and six other women, sitting around a table. No one from the company was knitting, which I found strange in the beginning, before I realize that the class was just a cover for them to get together. They kept talking about a wide range of things, nothing foreboding Facebook’s reference in their chit-chatting. Not until Nicky (59) started talking about a funny video she had watched the previous night, posted by the daughter of a common friend. “It made me laugh so hard”, she giggled. They all agreed on how beautiful and nice this girl is (“a very pretty picture of her with her mother showed on my newsfeed the other day”, added Vivian, aged 59), while others said that they hadn’t seen the video since they are not friends with her on Facebook. This said, Nicky started looking for it on her phone. She had trouble finding it, the others intervening to help her out with advice (“go to your profile or use the search engine”). When she finally did, she invited everyone to watch: “Here it is, come, come”. And they all gathered around her to check it out.

Couples and shared Facebook spaces

Among the participants, there were seven couples. In the cases that schedules permitted it (four out of seven), I insisted on interviewing them together. I wanted to observe the ways they interact through their Facebook routines, remaining loyal to the research’s aim. What I got out of it was that the couples employ and perceive Facebook as a commonly lived experience, something they mostly do together.

Two of the couples I interviewed share a Facebook account. “I don’t have an account in my name, it’s my husband’s and we both use it. We have 99 friends”, says Sonia (58). The same arrangement have Lucy (65) and Jack (69), who connect to Facebook from one common profile, usually simultaneously, via different devices. “I was afraid to give my personal data, so we created one under my husband’s name”, states Lucy. Gina (63) and Philip (66) share a laptop and they “negotiate” their Facebook time. As Gina explains in a light mood,

The matter of who will use the computer is our daily little cute fight. We use Facebook on shifts. The one who doesn’t, usually stands over the shoulders of the other, claiming it [laughing]. Philip, being an expert, more than me at least, has the upper hand on this. I come second when it comes to the computer and I keep trying to conquer my space.
They keep the laptop in the living room, where they both relax when one of them uses it. “Most of
the times, when one of us is on Facebook, the other is sitting on the adjacent couch and we discuss
our friends’ online activities. Something we like, inviting each other to look at the screen, or
comment on stuff that piss us off, when for example people over post”, notes Philip. I spent several
hours with them in their house in the city, almost all morning and afternoon. During my stay, there
were times when they would joke about Facebook. At some point, Philip made fun of his wife
about the household chores, this resulting to her “threatening” him: “Be careful of what you say”,
she laughed, “or else I will unfriend you!”

![Figures 7-8: Couples co-exist - both online and offline - through Facebook](image)

Peter (63) and Lina (54) have their common “Facebook space” as well. Their private “digital
corner” in the lounge, where they log in on Facebook together at night, discussing whatever they
deeam interesting on the platform. “We sit there with our coffees to futz around and comment on
our friends’ posts”. At times, Peter, who is an amateur guitarist, practices his songs during this
Facebook ritual. “If I know the lyrics, I usually accompany him by singing”, says Lina, who enjoys
these nights by playing games on the platform. The Facebook routine of Marios (69) and Vivian
(59) consists of them laying on different couches, exchanging pictures via Messenger. “We relax,
talk, and enjoy Facebook”, explains Vivian. When I ask them about the number of their Facebook
friends, they both grab their tablets to check. When the count shows 65 for Marios and 188 for
Vivian, she doesn’t miss the chance to tease
him for outnumbering him. “The truth is though that
he has more friends than that, since he keeps forgetting his Facebook passwords and creating new
accounts every time. He has four already!”, admits Vivian and they both laugh.

Driven by the need to do something for herself, fill her free time and remain current with her
family, Jane (85) is using Facebook since 2015. No day passes without her logging in on Facebook.
“Of course not! I am on it, in and out, all day long. I stay up with Facebook until 12:30 at night”.
Her husband has lost his sight due to a health problem and she took over the role of the… story
teller. “He can’t see, therefore I find interesting articles on Facebook and read them out loud to
him. He is so jealous of me being able to use Facebook! He would be so good at it. Sometimes,
while he listens to the radio, I am on Facebook and we discuss the news”.

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The exchange of Facebook skills

There are times when Facebook is brought into the informants’ daily interactions and chats in relation to the medium itself, as a technology and its features and affordances. In different moments of our shared time in the fieldwork, they exchanged advice on how to improve their Facebook skills for a variety of its services. They also expressed their concerns and questions to each other. Vivian (59) narrates a relevant incident:

We were wondering how this ‘user is active’ dot works. When does it show that you are online? The other day, before our jewelry-making class, I saw that our teacher was active on Messenger at 6 am in the morning! When I asked her why, she said she was not. We immediately checked her mobile and confirmed that the application was off and we were puzzled. We discussed it during class and a friend commented that maybe Facebook always shows that you are logged in. Who knows?

Discussing about Facebook is a relaxing activity for them, usually occurring in the context of their shared offline activities or by the phone. Through these discussions, they keep enriching their knowledge on the platform, since they manage to get more and more familiar with its terminology and various features. “In one of the groups I am a member of on Facebook, someone had added my name under a picture of one of the group’s activities, without me knowing”, continues Vivian. “Everyone kept saying to me all day ‘good for you, you went swimming today’, but I hadn’t! A friend of mine, with whom I was at the time of my alleged presence at the event, called me to joke about it and informed me that I was accidentally ‘tagged’. This is how I learned what ‘tag’ meant!”.

Emma (64) was troubled for a different reason. She wanted to know how to block people that make irritating posts. “Well, now I have this skill, since the daughter of a friend, who was my co-player at the Bridge classes, showed me. It is not necessary to delete them. You can unfollow them, without them noticing”, she announces to everyone quite satisfied, during a coffee gathering we had with most of the participants, one day. Nicky (59) shared the story of how she discovered Messenger:

I wasn’t aware of it. While exchanging comments with a friend under a post on my timeline, he asks me ‘can I call you on Messenger?’ and I write ‘what is that?’ [laughing] I called a friend who was on Facebook long before me and she came by my place to help me install the application on my phone.

Now, Nicky not only is well aware of what Messenger is, but she taught her friends something they didn’t know about, in one of our research encounters. While discussing Facebook skills of people in their age group, she addressed the company by saying “there is this voice-recognition feature I use on Messenger, that allows you to dictate what you want to say and transcribes it to text, instead of you typing it. You should use it, it saves you a lot of time”. She called me close to her to show me how this service works, by dictating on Messenger phrases such as “yes, hello, the system is amazing, it gets everything right”.

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All in all, when their children are not around, Greek retirees don’t get frustrated with Facebook’s tools. Instead, they try to find a solution together, they call each other to ask, they talk about it in person by exchanging information about their experiences on the platform. And, often, they make fun of each other about their occasional limited Facebook literacy. Facebook, once again, being a bonding factor in their relationships.

4.2 Bridging

When it comes to their online networks, what Greek retirees are looking for on Facebook is not to meet new people. They mainly seek to maintain or restore existing relationships and achieve a bridging with their past.

4.2.1 Reconnecting with old acquaintances

A main theme emerging from my discussions with the participants was how Facebook gives them the opportunity to re-connect with old friends and past acquaintances, people with whom they do not meet in real life but they like having a contact with from time to time or include in their social cycles, even if it is solely online. Many of the respondents have found (or have been found by) old classmates on Facebook and interact with them regularly via the platform. A lot of these people live abroad, so, as the participants said, there was no other way to communicate with them.

Discussing the advantages of Facebook during the focus group, many of the participants praised its capability of bringing them in contact with long-lost people from their past. Eva (82) talks excitedly about that:

It revives your relationships and this gives me a sense of awe. It meant the world to me to be able to get informed on the events of my old school and the lives of my classmates from back in the day. It’s so great!

Marios (69) shares her enthusiasm, narrating that “I found a friend whom I hadn’t met for 50 years. We exchanged messages and then talked on the phone. We both got crazy and felt such a great joy. This couldn’t have happened otherwise”. Antony (69) has a similar Facebook story to tell:

Last Christmas, I received a message from a classmate of mine from primary school. She wanted to confirm that it was me! She married a rich guy and went to America, I had no clue she had left our village. I haven’t seen her in ages, for almost 60 years. I knew her as a little girl and she is an old woman now! We reminisced about the past and since that day, we text each other now and then.

Johanna (61) states that “a new communication era” started for her as she explored Facebook’s potentials. “I found classmates from high-school and relatives as well, with whom we had lost
Facebook communication often leads to offline meetings with these old acquaintances, as Amanda (66) describes:

An old classmate, who lives in the US, detected me from the section ‘education’ of my Facebook profile info and we became friends online. Next time he visited Greece, we arranged through Facebook a reunion with everyone from our old school crew. Sometimes, I ‘Like’ his posts just to sustain a sense of communication.

4.2.2 Reminiscence and nostalgia

The past came up very frequently as a theme during interviews. For some, it is the main reason for being on Facebook. Either for bridging with their old friends and classmates or their places of origin.

A Greek born and raised in Egypt, in the town of Ismailia, Helen (80) returned to Greece in 1967. She made a Facebook account in 2012, now having 400 friends. She is very active on the platform, which she mainly uses as an… operations center, from where she organizes meetings with old classmates. “Everyone kept saying to me ‘Leave the e-mails, we need to communicate in a better way. You MUST join Facebook!’ And I did. I found in there everyone from back then. People I hadn’t seen in 40 years or so”. She is a member of every Facebook group relevant to Egypt and the town she grew up in and the link between her old friends and classmates. As she explains, “it happens that I remember many things from the past. This excites my co-patriots and initiates a lot of discussions on Facebook”. Apart from being an event planner for the Ismailians, Helen evokes nostalgia by posting memorabilia of a commonly beloved era.

I think I live more in the past than in the present. As we grow old, memories become more intense. I have loads of souvenirs from back then. I take photos and post them on Facebook. People make a fuss over them!

Figures 9-10: Helen (80) often posts pictures from the past that evoke nostalgia
Helen’s house, the decoration exuding a strong Egyptian aura, perfectly symbolizes her utilization of Facebook as a channel of reminiscence. During the interview, discussing how she posts objects from her childhood, she opens a showcase, getting something out of it. With a great finesse, as if she was performing a ritual, she proudly shows me two tea cups that depict the Canal of Suez. Giving them a look of affection, she says “I have put those on Facebook”. If Facebook has the capacity of bringing about such warm feelings by functioning as a space of past moments’ accumulation, Helen has managed to capitalize on it. The platform has helped her bring the past to the present and relive it in a way, together with her Facebook friends back from the day.

Nostalgia and the need to reconnect with his roots, was what motivated Jim (65) to get on Facebook. He created an account with one and only purpose: To find old friends and classmates and create an online community of his birthplace, a small village he grew up in, situated in the Greek North. “In a way, I wanted to preserve the memory of my place of origin, contribute to its legacy and leave its mark in history”, he explains, getting emotional. He rarely posts anything. His cover photo depicts a panoramic view of the village. He is a member of a dozen or so groups, all related to his village and the broader community.

He has also made a Facebook group named after his high-school, the main photo being one from a school excursion, from 47 years ago. Finding people from back then and inviting them in the group is his sole activity on Facebook. “I search and try different names, first and last, that I recall, writing them in Latin or Greek letters, trying to spot my fellows from the past”. One of these old acquaintances he located on Facebook, with whom they have served together, resides in an adjacent town. “We exchanged messages and agreed to schedule a meeting soon. I haven’t seen
him for 42 years”, he notes. During the browse-along process, Jim shows me a post on his wall. “This is the best one”, he says. It is from a man, writing “look at us, becoming digital friends as well, my childhood buddy”.

For Emma (64), Facebook is a ride between the past, namely her island of origin, and the present. “It’s been many years since I left, so news and pictures from my village excite me!”, she cheerfully declares. “Once, a girl from my old neighborhood got engaged and people posted pictures from the ceremony and the after party. I was so happy. It felt as if I was there. I like to see photos from these kinds of events, because I don’t experience them anymore”.

4.2.3 The lonely, the housebound and the introverts

Offering other types of connection, Facebook can be very beneficial for people who, for various reasons, lack close ties or experience the decrease of their social networks.

Danny (64), a former photo reporter and very active both in politics and life, was hospitalized for a month last year due to a chronic lung disease. Since then, his life has changed dramatically. He can’t breathe on his own and needs to constantly carry his oxygen support with him. As a result, he doesn’t leave the house much. “If it wasn’t for Facebook, I would have lost it!”, he says. “Being a war photographer, I have travelled all over the world; Now that I am stuck at home, Facebook is a way out for me, a means to communicate with people”, he underlines. He has five different profiles and almost a thousand Facebook friends, “many of them from Italy, where I studied when I was young”.

When her husband died in 2009, Helen (80) got depressed, as she reveals in her diary. “I wasn’t in the mood for anything. After a while, Facebook came into my life and helped me recover, since I started communicating with my old friends. If I don’t post for a couple of days, they all get worried. People care about me on Facebook…” The platform, together with her many online friends, keeps her company throughout the day. She admits taking a great pleasure when her Facebook friends “Like” her posts. “I receive many ‘likes’ and I am very happy when this happens”. She usually logs out before she falls asleep, at 2 am in the morning! “I don’t know what I would do without Facebook, since I can’t read books anymore or move easily and far from home for many hours. My loneliness led me to it and it ended up being a great companion to me”. Facebook gives her a sense of community. “In my case, a community expanding all over the world, with all these international friends I have”. In a similar vein, Eva (82) explains her fondness of the platform:

I am a Facebook fanatic! [laughing] I log in several times a day, from the morning till night. My mobility is limited now. I like talking to my Facebook friends, people I know for very long. In my age, people’s social cycle tends to decline. A few good friends are left and it is a delight to be able to chat with them.
Nicky (59) lives her life with great energy and enthusiasm, taking part in many activities. She says that she usually prefers face-to-face interaction, but when she went through a rough time some months before the interview was conducted, Facebook has been a comfort to her. “It was a remedy. I was lucky, since when I first signed up to the platform, some unfortunate things were happening in my life and I was sad. It helped me a lot. It gave me the sense that I wasn’t alone, that I had a roommate, a friend with me. That’s why I truly understand what Facebook means for people who are sick or bedridden”.

It’s not only the housebound that benefit from the usage of Facebook. The latter provides opportunities for accumulating bridging social capital to the introverts as well, those people who are socially challenged. A good example of that is Philip (66), the only participant declaring his preference for the mediated communication of Facebook, instead of the traditional, in-person contact between people. “I am a solitary person. I don’t make calls to my friends, I’m difficult with the phone. Therefore, the fact that I can learn things about my friends via their Facebook activities -some people post everything they do- or declare my presence through a ‘Like’ or a comment, is very important and will do for me”. His wife, Gina (63), agrees with that, arguing that “Facebook is indeed ideal for the more recluse and introverts. Just like television used to be for the elderly, before social media”.


5. Discussion

This research set out to explore how the Facebook use of Greek retirees affects their interpersonal relationships, along with how their online and offline networks interact through their engagement with the platform (RQ1). Furthermore, it aimed to investigate the ways in which Facebook is integrated into their routines and day-to-day practices (RQ2). In this chapter, a discussion of the empirical findings is presented, in light of the research questions and the literature review.

5.1 Interpersonal relationships

Regarding the first part of the main research question (RQ1), on how the participants’ relationships are affected by their engagement with Facebook, the results made evident that their bonds, both offline and online, physical and virtual, are strengthened. The present study has also proved that Facebook, on different levels and in several ways, has the capacity to benefit interpersonal ties of different strengths. More specifically, Facebook’s use has resulted in the solidification and enhancement of Greek retirees’ most meaningful and closest, familial or friendly relationships (bonding social capital), together with the maintenance of their “weak ties” (bridging social capital), current or past acquaintances that do not belong to their inner social circles but constitute important connections for them.

This comes to agree with the main body of previous research (Ellison et al., 2007; Joinson, 2008; Jung et al., 2017; Lambert, 2016; Nimrod, 2014; Sinclair & Grieve, 2016; Wright, 2000), claiming that the Internet and social networking sites can function as a source of social capital for older adults. “The virtual world is a potentially important arena for the production of social capital by older adults”, as Blit-Cohen & Litwin (2004) note. In line with that, Ito et al. (2010) argue that “new media provide communication venues that individuals incorporate into their lives to form, maintain, and strengthen social ties and relationships” (2010, p. 365-366). Sharing this stance, Haythornthwaite (2005) contends that “as the new media have become familiar, and their use adapted through common and group conventions, they come to function as vital means of maintaining social connections in everyday life”.

The results identified a number of relevant aspects and dimensions of the issue at hand. They illustrated that social capital is being accumulated by the Greek retirees on many relational levels. More precisely, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, different kinds of relationships emerged as benefited from the participants’ employment of Facebook, namely their strong, closest bonds, as well as their weaker ones. Below, I will first discuss the platform’s capacity to enhance the Greek retirees’ most intimate relationships (bonding). Facebook’s association with the participant’s less close ties (bridging) will follow.
Bonding

Based on the findings of the study, the accumulation of bonding social capital from the Greek retirees through their engagement with Facebook, branches out to two sub-themes: 1) Distant relationships and co-presence and 2) Intergenerational communication.

In alignment with earlier works (Zickuhr & Madden, 2012; Jung & Sundar, 2016; Lambert, 2016), this research has shown that Facebook facilitates communication between family members or friends who are geographically distant or “by some reason, or a combination of factors, physically or emotionally, got away” (Coehlo & Duarte, 2016). This affordance of Facebook and the consequent accumulation of bonding social capital, has become particularly important for Greek older adults over the past decade, since the financial crisis in Greece has led to the “brain drain” phenomenon. The unemployment rates reaching unprecedented heights, many people are leaving abroad to take their chances and seek for a future elsewhere. This was clearly reflected in the present study, since a lot of the informants had someone of their inner social circle abroad, either it was a child or a close friend.

This increased mobility of people in the contemporary world, has established internet technologies as a basic means of connecting those who live for away from each other, due to their “effortless transcendence of distance” (Choi, 2006). Therefore, nowadays, SNSs have become the main vehicle for transnational relationships to traverse, suggesting new ways of communication and “breaking down binaries such as here and there, virtual and actual, online and offline, absent and present” (Pink et al., 2016, p. 113). Referring to that, Miller (2011) writes about “the death of distance”, as a main consequence of Facebook that “counters the dispersal of families” (p. 193) and brings their members closer, providing them with the opportunity to be in constant interaction with each other. He praises Facebook’s potential to do that, since for most people, their immediate family and closest social relationships are those who determine their well-being and happiness or unhappiness, as he points out.

Several respondents stated that when using Facebook to contact their beloved in different countries around the world, they feel as if the other person is close and that they are part of their lives in a way, to the extent that this mediated communication permits. “On Facebook, it really doesn’t matter where that person is offline; Your interaction can be just as intimate or personal whether they live in the next street or the next continent”, states Miller (2011, p. 194), to add that this way, Facebook contributes to a “reconstruction of our orientation to kinship and close social relationships, with the technology compensating for increasing distance and absence” (p.218). The findings of the present study match those of Climo’s (2001) about the nature of communication in dispersed families. He reached the conclusion that not only ICTs provide ways for families to sustain ties with geographically dispersed members, but also that this mediated communication has the potential to foster intimacy and expressions of affection. This feeling of closeness and the potential of new media, such as Facebook, to trigger it, has been central in the relevant literature, usually focusing on the concept of “co-presence”. It is what some of the Greek retirees described
“as if the other person is sitting next to me” when communicating via Facebook. “The way we feel when we are co-present is central in the construction of a close bond”, states Ivana (2018, p. 13). Similarly, discussing the role of digital media in the development and maintenance of ties, Pink (2016) contends that it is via the practice of co-presence that modern relationships across the world are being shaped, in and through these technologies.

As it became clear throughout the research process, the visual aspects of technology heavily contribute to the creation of an intimate environment. The main channel of contact between the participants and their children or with friends living in various parts of the planet, is Facebook’s Messenger. They exchange messages, pictures or make phone and video calls via the application. As Ito et al. (2010) note, “voice and vision are often viewed as the ideal modes of communication for transnational families, because they mitigate the distances in time and space” (p. 171). All things considered, the study showed that for the Greek retirees, Facebook has been a valuable tool for sustaining close relationships which have become geographically distant, being able to express through them sentiments that “bind them across space and over time” (Climo, 2001).

Apart from successfully mediating between distant relationships, the findings suggest that Facebook animates the Greek retirees’ interactions with the younger members of their family as well. Contrary to what previous research (Zickuhr & Madden, 2012; Coelho & Duarte, 2016) has revealed, in this work family and children didn’t emerge as a central motivation for the participants to engage with Facebook. Greek retirees mostly reported that they use it for communication, as an extension of their real-life social networks and activities (see the following sections). Notwithstanding, the results were in accordance with past works on the fact that SNSs can be effective tools for maintaining or strengthening familial relations and intergenerational communication (Hogeboom et al., 2010; Coelho et al., 2017).

The present study confirms the positive effects Facebook has on these types of bonds. Either it is online or offline, the Greek retirees’ engagement with the platform results in them spending quality time with the younger members of their family, their children and grandchildren. These interactions bring them closer and foster intimacy, leading to family cohesion, healthy and positive family communication. “This give and take surrounding media is a way to become closer and feel connected; the computer mediates between the generations”, mention Ito et al. (2010, p. 170). The results of this research come to contradict those of Johnston et al.’s (2013), who didn’t detect a connection between Facebook and the development of strong social bonds, as well as Turkle’s (2011) earlier conclusion that the Internet can result to disconnecting people from family interaction.

It is important to note here that almost all the participants were friends with their children on Facebook. Previous research has pointed out that young children often avoid accepting their parents’ friend requests on Facebook, being afraid of the latter monitoring their activities (Mullen & Hamilton, 2016). This was not the case in the present study. The respondents consisted of retired
people, most of them over the age of 60, having older children, far from adolescence. Except for one occasion, none of the informants expressed a desire or motivation for using Facebook to stalk their children. And from their part, apart from one or two instances, children welcomed their parents’ “friendship” on Facebook. Greek retirees interact with their children on the platform on a regular basis. This might be because after a certain age, when people grow older, their needs lean to different directions than controlling their descendants. Their relationship with their children matures, both sides yearning for a better communication. As recent research has shown, the online communication between parents and children seems to become more regular and normalized (Ball et al., 2013).

This intergenerational interaction via the usage of Facebook takes place both online and offline. The online part is twofold. It consists of a) the participants’ communication with their children via Messenger and b) them playing games together. Messenger is again the basic tool Greek retirees use to contact their children. They exchange pictures or text each other, mostly discussing about the more pleasant and trivial aspects of their daily lives. As some of them cited, the application is easy to use and creates a sense of immediate communication. Studying parents' use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) for family communication, Rudi et al. (2015) found as well that parents use Social Networking Sites to connect with family members visually as well as via text, since “high speed Internet and data streaming capabilities newly available on smart phones, allow communication that can mimic face-to-face interactions and may provide a rich form of online interaction and exchange of social and emotional support”. They conclude that ICTs allow for family members to stay in contact, which is of great importance for the maintenance of relationships and resources accumulation.

Gaming on Facebook constitutes the other aspect of the online intergenerational interaction between the Greek retirees and their (grand)children. Either by playing together, side by side, or exchanging info about the particular game they are both on, this process tightens their relationship. Usually, the young are the “experts”, the skilled ones who show the older adults the way. It is what Pink et al. (2016) call the “cross-generational media literacy”, transferred from children to their parents and grandparents, practice particularly observed in the uptake of social media games. They teach them, “so that they might play together while occupying a co-present gaming space” (p. 121). The older adults playing games with their children on Facebook applies to what Kennedy et al. (2008) characterized as “new forms of family connectedness that builds on shared internet experiences”.

Regarding the offline dimension of the intergenerational communication, the findings propose that Facebook leads to a frequent offline interaction between the participants and their (grand)children. In most cases, the latter were those who showed the Greek retirees how to use Facebook, this teacher-pupil process leading to the enhancement of their relationship. This interaction was the case for both the younger participants of the research and the older ones (age ranged from 54-85). To highlight the importance this intergenerational connection has for the respondents, it is vital to
mention the following: Even though most of the younger retirees in this study belong to a generation familiar with computers, many using them as part of their jobs before retiring and “now arriving at old age with a lot of technological sophistication”\textsuperscript{15}, they all welcomed and continue to ask for the younger’s assistance when it comes to Facebook skills. It is a probably an easy way to reach out to them. In several cases, the informants needed guidance and encouragement, especially during their first steps on the platform. Theory supports this idea of older people heavily relying on the help of the younger when it comes to internet use. For instance, Doyle & Goldingay (2012) maintain that younger family members often “provide ongoing, long-term support with internet use for their senior family members, as part of the reciprocity of family relationships”. On the same matter, Jung and Sundar (2016) state that “senior citizens' use of SNSs shows promise as an intervention for breeding greater connections with younger generations, given that the latter have spent more time with these technologies”.

Moreover, some of the female participants said that they get a great deal of joy from the fact that their grandchildren consider them being “super-grannies”, due to their Facebook engagement. They stated that this often becomes a subject of conversation between their descendants and their peers. Arguing that social involvement and technological proficiency are interrelated, Harley and Fitzpatrick (2009) underline that “the presence of an older person within an online community can be appreciated by younger members. It also provides opportunities for reciprocal learning so that older members can receive technical advice whilst younger members gain access to a wealth of life experience and wisdom”. Exploring media use in the grandparent-grandchild bond, Harwood (2000) writes that this intergenerational relationship is crucial for older adults and has a direct impact on them. He argues that since their peer relationships are being reduced with ageing, the one with their grandchildren may function for the elderly as an outlet for social interaction. “Media are likely to play a crucial role in maintaining this relationship and help it survive”, he concludes. The present study extends existing literature on this matter, since, to my knowledge, most of the previous works on Facebook have centered on the online communication between older adults and their (grand)children (Burke et al., 2013; Ivan et al., 2016), not examining up close how new media affect their offline relationship as well.

**Bridging**

According to the findings, apart from the accumulation of bonding social capital and the strengthening of their closest relationships, the participants’ engagement with Facebook leads as well to the enhancement of their “weak ties”, which caters bridging social capital. For the Greek retirees, this translates to the benefits stemming from their online interaction with past acquaintances, people that belong to their outer social circles and with whom they seldom or never meet anymore. The “cooperative connections with people from different walks of life”, as Edwards (2002) notes. Participants found a great deal of meaning in maintaining these kinds of connections with other members of their age cohort, “the promise of rekindling old friendships” (Lambert, 2016). Most of them had a story to tell about an old classmate they had found on Facebook, always
accompanied by their excitement to be able to do that on the popular social medium. “Friend
networking sites may be one of the easiest and fastest ways possible to locate old friends”,
underline Bonds-Raacke & Raacke (2010). This aspect of Facebook and the “keeping in touch”
with past acquaintances, was highly valued by them, because it helps to retain a sense of
connectedness and fosters social inclusion (Schuller et al., 2000). Theory supports this result,
highlighting the significance of these types of bonds for people’s lives and well-being. For Putnam
(2000), bridging social capital offers equally important resources as the ones gained from bonding
social capital, since these weak ties provide useful information and connections. Granovetter
(1973) describes this as the “strength of weak ties”, which are valuable to people due to them
functioning as the “bridges” between their more intimate social groups and circles.

For many of the respondents, the above stated Facebook affordance satisfies their need to
reconnect with their past, either the latter is associated with people or with places. During the
fieldwork, this desire was expressed in various cases, where nostalgia emerged as a main
motivation for some Greek retirees to participate in the platform. Through Facebook, those
participants have the chance to talk to old friends and classmates, receive information on their birth
places, reminisce about past events and narrate stories from their youth or different stages of their
lives. This way, memories and feelings from the old days resurface, and the past is, in a sense,
recreated and relived. This online interaction results in lifting the older adults’ spirits and therefore
ameliorates their present. Harley & Fitzpatrick (2009) stress the importance of this “storytelling
and reminiscence” that older people employ when using the social networking tools on their well-
being. “Life review has been identified as a major developmental activity associated with aging”,
they note.

The findings suggest that another aspect of the bridging social capital gained from the Greek
retirees’ usage of Facebook, is related to Facebook’s capacity to be a remedy for loss, isolation,
loneliness and depression. It consists of a very beneficial means for the housebound, the mobility
deprived, the socially or physically challenged. For people whose life has become restricted and
their ability to socialize is limited, the platform operates as a channel to communicate, share and
interact with others. Through it, they declare their presence and have a voice into broad online
networks, resources which -for various reasons- they cannot receive offline anymore. Thus, via
the mediated communication of Facebook, they manage to develop and sustain relationships,
accumulating bridging social capital. It is of note that all the participants in this research belonging
to one of the above-mentioned categories, made it clear that Facebook is essential for them and
that they couldn’t imagine their offline day-to-day reality without it.

Based on what they said during the interviews and their affective attitude towards the platform,
the oldest participants seemed to be the most attached to Facebook among the rest of the
informants. They were also the ones that stay logged in for the most hours per day. Aging is largely
associated in research with decreased social interaction. Cornwell et al. (2008) note that as people
age, their social networks are submitted to crucial transformations, usually towards decline. “Close ties are hard to replace, and decreased frequency of contact can exacerbate the loss of connections”, they write. Consistent with previous works, this study has proved that Facebook can be a relief for these people, who want to maintain some kind of social connection. To describe the role of Facebook in their lives, the oldest participants often used the word “companion”. As Nimrod (2014) states, online communities constitute “immediate solution for loneliness caused by age, declined health, widowhood or being geographically remote, because ‘someone is there when no one is around in real life’”.

The results indicate that the usefulness of this online companionship stands as well for the housebound. The participants who are forced to stay permanently or for the most part of the day at home due to health, age or mobility issues, showed a great appreciation for Facebook’s presence in their lives, it being a space where their condition doesn’t matter and from which they derive social capital. Discussing the liberating impact the platform had on a housebound man in Trinidad and its consolatory power, Miller (2011) notes that Facebook “can become, in the longer term, a far more important instrument within an entirely different segment of the population: the elderly, the infirm, the housebound, the frail and those whose faculties are in decline” (p. 32). Hogeboom et al. (2010) argue as well that older adults use Facebook to supplement their limitations of mobility that inhibit physical connectedness, this being an effective way to cope with stress and depression. Likewise, reflecting on disability activists’ use of YouTube and other social media, Ginsburg (2012) concludes that “these new interactive forms of digital access provide distinctive possibilities for virtual sociality and allow those with disabilities to communicate to a broad range of publics”. The potential of Facebook to offer its users meaningful online relationships, also applies to people who are socially challenged, lacking in confidence or the introverts. That is because the platform consists of “a comfortable environment, with greater freedom of expression” (Desjarlais & Willoughby, 2010) for them, a more secure place to share parts of their lives and communicate, than in face-to-face encounters. Something that several of the participants mentioned during the fieldwork. Thus, for the individuals who experience social anxiety, Facebook might be an alternative medium in which they obtain feelings of social connectedness, “serving as a valuable source of support” (Grieve et al., 2013).

5.2 Online and offline networks

The second part of this project’s main research question (RQ1) was about how the Greek retirees’ online and offline networks interact through their engagement with Facebook. As the results of the research indicate, Facebook and their logged off worlds are deeply entwined, something that clearly emerged from their narratives and that I, myself, had the chance to confirm, after establishing friendship with most of them on the platform. This interplay translates into that the respondents’ Facebook usage, friends and routines mirror and support their real-life practices, social cycles and activities, thus strengthening their interpersonal ties.
First, in line with previous works, this research reveals that older adults mostly use Facebook to maintain and reflect offline social relationships (boyd and Ellison, 2007; Blit-Cohen & Litwin, 2004). Opposite to what Wright (2000) maintains about older people using the Internet, the majority of the Greek retirees in this research mostly befriend on Facebook people they already know, trust and gain social support from and not strangers they never had face-to-face contacts with before. This agrees with Ellison et al.’s (2007) argument that Facebook is mainly employed to solidify offline connections, as opposed to meeting new people. It is what Ivana (2018) refers to as “the continuity between the online and the offline realm”, arguing that “Facebook is never just Facebook, it taps into an underlying relational web and existing bonds” (p. 45).

In addition to that, most of the respondents use Facebook as an auxiliary means to keep up with their offline interests, “as a source of information used in their offline leisure” (Nimrod, 2014). The Facebook Groups they have created and participate in, coincide with their real-life activities (dance, bridge and photography classes, winter swimming, hiking and other local recreational or political groups), as well as the people they interact with and the topics they discuss. In the Greek retirees’ case, “online interactions fill communication gaps between face-to-face meetings” (Wellman et al., 2001). This way, supporting a wide range of interests, Facebook mainly functions as an extension of pre-existing modalities of communication, a common online space for them to share, celebrate and plan those offline activities and gatherings. Using the platform like they do, Greek retirees manage to intensify their involvement in these activities, which in turn leads to the deepening of their relationships beyond the virtual world. Therefore, this intertwining between the participants’ online and offline networks results in the accumulation of bonding social capital. “When people use the Internet to communicate and coordinate with friends, relatives, and organizations, then it is a tool for building and maintaining social capital”, as Wellman et al. (2001) note.

An important dimension of the above-mentioned accumulation of social capital, that needs to be discussed at this point, is how Facebook, as a technology, manages to establish this connection between the participants’ offline social bonds and online networks. As it was previously noted, Greek retirees have transferred their real-life interests online, by creating relevant Facebook Groups, which they use for having fun, organizing and keeping abreast of these jointed pastimes. Most of them seldom post personal information or moments of their everyday lives on their Facebook profiles, but they actively do it in the Facebook Groups they are members of. Some of the respondents spend their entire daily Facebook time on these Groups. They post, “like” or check the relevant notifications, being deeply engaged in these online spaces. As stated in the theoretical section of the report, previous studies have associated social capital with the specific Facebook’s features people select to use on the platform. Jung and Sundar (2016) point out that each SNS has its own technological affordances that facilitate communication and online social interactions. With a few exceptions, the participants do not use other social media. When asked about it during
the focus group discussion, most of them stated that the way other SNSs, like Instagram and Twitter, are structured, renders them not interesting or appropriate for their age and needs. Some mentioned that they signed up and tried to experiment but couldn’t find anything to do on them, since they didn’t feel as familiar as Facebook. They all agreed that Facebook is more about communication and has the capacity to create a sense of intimacy that the other social media cannot. For the majority of the respondents, this closeness is found in their Facebook Groups, due to the latter’s convenient, “useful and fun” (Park et al., 2009) features.

Within these Groups, different kinds of social performance and networking happen, the users being provided with a variety of possibilities. As Zhang et al. (2011) found, Facebook broadly facilitates offline activities and social engagement, by “providing affordances in different phases of social events, from spurring ideas and proposing, to scheduling and planning, to interacting in the event, and to post event sharing”. More precisely, on Facebook Groups, members can pitch their ideas (proposing) for a future happening and through the “Events” feature, they are able to schedule it (planning). They are also provided with the capacity to broadcast, give instant feedback, post pictures/videos and comment on those as the event occurs (interacting in the event) or after it is finished (post event sharing). This ability to create invitations for forthcoming real-life gatherings, accompanied by the “reminder” feature sent to the members of the Group when the time is approaching, raises awareness on the events, thus leads to the strengthening of the respondents’ offline interactions (Pempek et al., 2009). Apart from the aforementioned practices, on Facebook Groups the participants share highlights from their everyday activities, talk and have fun about them by “liking” or commenting under the posts, entertain and support each other, manifest the bond. Additionally, they exchange stories, information and knowledge about their hobbies.

Therefore, Facebook Groups appear to possess qualities and emotional elements similar to their offline counterparts, such as attachment, warmth and “coziness” (Lindgren, 2017, p. 87). By incorporating these “community” features that are easy to use in a timely and immediate way, Facebook Groups accomplish the social mission of the application’s affordances and its intended use. This corresponds to the importance of “usability” for a technological artifact or software to achieve its objectives, as showcased by Norman (1990), McGrenere and Ho (2000), Boyle and Cook (2004). The simple and playful design of Facebook Groups’ interface creates a context of “flowing interactivity” (Sundar, 2008) that invites users to participate and makes them comfortable to express themselves via this digital channel. Either it is by sharing their thoughts and feelings, protesting about the local government’s actions, promoting their offline activities or simply having fun with their friends. This way, Facebook Groups function as online communities that simulate the participants’ real-life social networks and permit the crisscross between them, these two realms working in a complementary fashion. They constitute an “online hangout space” (boyd, 2010) that offers them a shared virtual identity, similar to the one of their immediate offline social contexts (Appleseed, 2013). As Zhang et al. (2011) underline, “technology, to a degree, can be seen as technical representation of real world. In this sense, Facebook does not create a virtual world or
completely online communities [...] These groups have their history and traditions, which are rooted in real world interaction”.

Concerning this correlation between Facebook’s affordances and the intersection of the Greek retirees’ online and offline social networks, another significant aspect to be examined is that of the power of the visual and, more precisely, the major role that pictures play on the platform. During the interviews, many of the respondents talked about how much they enjoy the fact that, on Facebook, they can follow other people’s activities and lives through pictures. This older adult’s attraction of the picture modality has emerged as well in previous works in social media studies. Research has shown that photo viewing is older adults’ favorite social network activity (Brandtzæg et al., 2010; Righi et al., 2012). It is no accident that Facebook places much emphasis on the visual culture. According to Sundar (2008), pictures can generate a feeling of social presence and a sense of realism of the activities portrayed. Furthermore, Jung et al. (2017) demonstrated that photo viewing “is effective in maintaining companionship with family and close friends for older Facebook users” and that the visual modality of Facebook and multimedia elements, such as photographs, enhance bonding and social interaction. They also found that the picture sharing affordance is one of the main reasons why older adults use the platform, which supports the results of Joinson’s (2008) work. The latter included in his “Photographs” theme the users’ ability to tag and post pictures as well. In the Facebook Groups they participate, the informants of the present study often post pictures of them together, taken during their various common everyday activities. They even “tag” each other, which creates a sense of connection between them. “Photos work as external representations and memory holders of previous social events, which also facilitates further social engagements”, as Zhang et al. (2011) report. Sharing photos from past gatherings provides the respondents with a sense of continuance of these offline activities on the digital world. Along with that, stemming from the posted pictures, a common recollection over these meetings takes place online, bringing back memories. This brings the participants closer to their co-members of the Facebook Groups, who, in the case of this study, are their intimate friends in real-life. It as well increases their eagerness for the future offline encounters, thus leading to the strengthening of their engagement with these activities and the community. Therefore, pictures constitute (together with the Facebook affordances and features previously mentioned) a basic component of the intertwining between the participants’ online and offline networks, achieved via their Facebook Groups.

Concluding this section, it is of importance to point out that the study was held in a close-knit and already established local offline community, thus this matching of the informants’ online and real-life worlds was more possible to emerge than not. Further, the physical component of the community (Righi, 2012), namely the fact that in this small area face-to-face contacts are frequent, facilitated the detection of this entanglement during the fieldwork. Finally, the participants befriending on Facebook only people they know, could be explained by the fact that they already feel part of a strong local community and do not feel the urge to create new social bonds and friendships online. This powerful face-to-face dimension of the studied community is an element
that pervades the study’s results. On this matter, future research with a similar focus than the present, should consider including settings of different types and qualities.

5.3 Facebook in their routines

A central intention of the research (RQ2) was to investigate in which ways Facebook is integrated into the Greek retirees’ everyday lives and how its employment is entangled with their relationships and routines. The main finding concerning this question, is that Facebook is deeply embedded into the participants’ lives, in various fashions. Either by emerging as a subject in their face-to-face discussions (Righi et al., 2012) or by functioning as a common (online and offline) space for older adults to communicate and share intimate moments. The concept of intimacy was deemed by Putnam (2000) a fundamental aspect of bonding social capital. Drawing from his work, Lambert (2016) introduced the term “intimacy capital”. He highlighted the significance of intimacy on the development of social capital on Facebook and the potential for “exchanging resources with strong ties” on the platform. By associating the generation of intimacy feelings in the participants’ offline relationships to their Facebook engagement, the present study takes Lambert’s argument one step further, extending the concept of intimacy beyond the digital setting of the popular social medium.

Being present in the Greek retiree’s routines and mediating their offline communication, Facebook becomes a positive variable in the dynamics of their relationships. Even when not logged in on Facebook, participants kept bringing the platform with them wherever they went. They would interact around it, talk about it in their get-togethers, making it a part of their reality in various ways. During research, especially in group gatherings, they would discuss and comment on other people’s activities on Facebook. According to Tufekci (2008), “SNSs replicate many of the functions of gossip: users display their own bonds and activities and observe those of others”. As she argues, gossiping can be an ancillary element towards the accumulation of social capital. Apart from that, there were several moments during fieldwork, when the participants, after the invitation of one of them, would gather around a mobile device to check something on Facebook together, usually a post or a video they had talked about earlier. When people go online with others, it is what Kennedy et al. (2008) call “Hey, look at this!” experiences, enabled by the internet. These shared screen moments through the use of new technologies bring people together, they contend. In addition to the above, this project studied how Facebook usage affects the relationships between couples (they were seven in total among the participants). According to the findings, couples co-exist -both online and offline- through Facebook. They log-in together, chill out with it, gossip and discuss about it, have fun because of it. In sum, they have integrated the platform into their personal space (home) as a common experience, this benefiting their bond. A proposal concordant with that of Coelho et al.’s (2017), who argue that SNSs can improve older adults’ online and offline interactions with relatives. Finally, another manifestation of Facebook’s persistent presence in the respondents’ offline interactions that leads to them getting closer, is their frequent casual
discussions on the platform’s features and the exchange of skills on how to use those (Righi et al., 2012).

All in all, interpreting the results and considering the knowledge I obtained from observations in the fieldwork, it seems that Facebook is integrated into the participants’ lives not so much as a technology and its actual employment (they are on Facebook for about 2 hours per day in average), but rather in a way that once again favors their offline relationships. We could say then that Greek retirees benefit more from Facebook by discussing about it and living around it in real-life, compared to the social profits they gain from their online presence when logged-in. By ethnographically and closely examining how Facebook is connected to the participants’ offline activities, shedding light upon the details of the platform’s relation to their microcosm, this study claims to have contributed to the existing knowledge in the research field, since the literature to date has not touched upon this issue in a similar depth.

6. The prototype

Together with the report, my thesis comes with a prototype, namely a companion website (https://lappadespina.wixsite.com/greekretireesfb). It is the end result of my study, functioning as a demonstration of the research process and providing information on how ethnographic knowledge was produced.

My decision to make a website as my thesis prototype, was positively affected by Sarah Pink’s use of hypermedia in her Energy & Digital Living project16, a webpage she created to present the outcome of her ethnographic research around energy, digital media and everyday life in UK homes. The use of hypermedia as a mode of ethnographic representation has come to gain a lot of advocates in the field over the course of the last decade and it’s becoming established in academic publishing. “Hypermedia texts would aim to combine visual and written knowledge and representations so each might communicate in the way it is best at” (Pink et al., 2004, p. 164). To the same line of thought, Jenna Burrell (2013) promoted the idea of “performing the fieldwork experience for audiences -raw data, transparency, and visuals” and highlighted the capabilities of a blog used for sharing the process and artifacts of field research.

Since its aim was to demonstrate the research process and results, the development of the prototype constituted the last phase of this study. Thus, I created it after the end of all research stages and the writing of most of the main parts of the thesis report. The making of process of the website was performed in two steps. First, I engaged in a solo brainstorming session, in order to get creative. The prototyping process consisted of several “quick and dirty” sketches (Buxton, 2012) that I made for inspiration, trying out different ideas and scenarios for the website’s form and layout. “Sketching is fundamental to ideation and design”, note Tohidi et al. (2006). They consisted of drawings of navigation menu drafts (and the thematic sections/categories they would include) and different versions of how the pages would look like and the content will be presented.
These initial drawings (Appendix IV), together with the material provided by the empirical and theoretical corpus of the thesis report, led to the second and last stage of the prototyping, which was the actual creation of the website. As a host to my website, I used the Wix platform. Since I had my own ideas about the layout from the sketching process, I didn’t use a pre-fixed template. Instead, I chose a plain one and made the website from the ground up, step-by-step, shaping it to match my original thoughts in a way that best served its purpose as my thesis prototype. The use of colours, fonts and layout plays a distinctive role in ethnographic hypermedia representations, thus I tried, via a simple and clear design, to make something pleasant for the eyes and suitable at the same time. I chose white and blue colours (and relevant ones from the same color shades), as a direct reference to the characteristic aesthetics of Facebook, which is central to my study.

The website follows a similar but not the exact logic, structure, content and thematic sections to those of the report, in order to both be consistent with the latter’s essence and also have its own identity as an effective, self-contained, prototype. The menu bar consists of the following categories-pages: Home, Key Concepts, Digital Ethnography, The Participants, Facebook Stories and Making the Prototype. On the Home page, I make a brief introduction to the thesis and its motivation, present the aim and the research questions and include a small section that resumes the website’s parts, with links to the respective pages. The Key Concepts’ page displays the study’s main terminology and ideas, with a bullet-point presentation of the core theoretical concepts that informed the research project. The Making the Prototype page displays the sketches of the website’s design and the making of process.

Each page shares the same navigation menu and includes a combination of text, pictures/videos taken in the field, screenshots from the participants' Facebook accounts, quotations from the informants, the fieldwork materials being directly available to the users. In the Digital Ethnography section, where I mainly present the research methods, I have integrated, in-between paragraphs, photographic material from both the participants’ experience and mine as a researcher (preparation for the different stages of the research, research design, field notes etc). This enlivens the research process for the visitors of the website, bringing fieldwork to life. In digital media, “greater visualization has a beneficial effect on performance”, as Sundar (2008) notes. In addition to that, the “I was there” pictures of the ethnographer, “often used on websites and visual presentations” (Burrel, 2013), assist in the establishment of their research authority. The Facebook Stories section includes the findings of the study, as they stem from the participants’ narratives, again animated through visuals (pictures and videos) from the fieldwork and Facebook screenshots, also accompanied by brief theoretical “interventions” to the side of the main corpus of the text, which solidify the arguments deriving from the written parts. The way the research material and content is presented, provides the reader with the opportunity to be a part of the original moment and see how arguments have derived.
While reflecting on the navigational design of the website, my aim was that its layout would allow users to follow different routes through the project and process information in a non-linear fashion. Therefore, I have included hyperlinks that connect the different elements of the study (text, pictures, theory, videos etc.) and lead the visitors directly to relevant information in other pages, internal or external to the website. Orienting features and visual cues are used so that the buttons appear clickable. Due to this processing of information through associative links, not only is the efficiency of their experience maximized, but also “whichever order users read these different types of narrative, they should gain a sense of their interwovenness and the interdependence between ethnography and theory” (Pink, 2004, p. 173). As Sundar (2008) argues, “a site with a rich layer of hyperlinks, especially if they are interwoven into the main content in a visually integrated way, could give users pause and make them wonder about the relationship between a given link’s content and the site’s main content, leading to elaborative processing and higher knowledge-structure density”. This way, apart from a good navigability, the visitor is offered with a “coherent package” and not a fragmented version of the project’s reality. In this regard, the prototype aspires to be what Ruby (2001) calls a “complete ethnographic statement”. Moreover, the navigability affordance and the simple, playful and easy-to-use interface of my website, can “trigger a sense of leisure” (Sundar, 2008) for the users during their interaction with it, this adding to its effectiveness.

To facilitate access and understanding of the material from the participants of the study who do not understand English and any other of my co-patriots interested in the project (since I will disseminate my results via an interview to a Greek radio program), I translated all the content of the website in Greek. Each page displays the English version first and then follows the Greek one, which constitutes an exact copy of the former, repeating all the visual and textual elements.

The website is a prototype that takes advantage of the vast possibilities offered by the new computational tools and at the same time is in accordance with the latest developments and new directions in (digital) ethnography and representation. These allow for the creation of “multimedia, multilinear, multivocal, interactive and reflexive” (Pink et al., 2006) projects, where stills and words revolve about the data-emerged motifs and interconnect. All in all, this digital interface consists of an alternative narrative, a digital space that mirrors my experience in the field and a means through which to communicate knowledge in a different and interesting way.

The ethnographic knowledge that was produced in the field (and which the prototype represents), along with the finalized ideas deriving from this research project, are presented in the following chapter, that concludes the present study.
7. Conclusion

Many associate social media with estrangement and disengagement from social life, argument which the results of this study do not agree with. This paper focused on exploring the issue of the Greek retirees’ Facebook usage, in terms of their social bonds and networks, reaching to several conclusions. First, that their engagement with the platform benefits their interpersonal relationships, both their online and offline interactions. It strengthens and solidifies their intimate relationships, as well as their less close connections. Furthermore, the findings of the research suggested that, when it comes to Facebook’s employment, the participants’ online and offline networks are closely-related. Their real-life activities and bonds coincide with their Facebook routines when logged-in on the platform, the two levels of experience being deployed in parallel and converging. This leads to the enhancement of their local community as well. Finally, the last knowledge that emerged from the fieldwork, is that Facebook is deeply integrated into the Greek retirees’ lives, not so much as a technology or in relation to the time they dedicate to it, but more as a means that tightens their offline relationships, bringing them closer to their friends and families. In their case, Facebook’s usage consists of “time invested in the relation with the other” (Ivana, 2018, p. 3).

7.1 Delimitations and contribution

This study is not without limitations. Due to ethnography being a) a “highly particular and hauntingly personal” (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 13), subjective account, since the researcher is directly involved in the research process, carrying their own assumptions and interpreting behaviors and feelings and b) able to provide a partial truth, depending on the culture under study, the site and the social context in which the research is conducted (Clifford, 1986), this project does not claim generalizability. Furthermore, due to time restrictions, the fieldwork was conducted over a period of one and a half month, while traditional ethnographic research consists of a long-term process, with scholars spending more than a year in situ. Therefore, due to the timeframe available for the execution of this project, my research falls into the category of what David Millen (2000) calls “Rapid Ethnography” and Knoblauch (2005) describes as “Focused Ethnographies”. In this type of research, “the short-time period covered is compensated for by data intensity”. That is, producing a large amount of data in a relatively short time period, “which then demand an intensive analysis”. That is the main reason why I chose to apply several data collection methods, thus conducting a multi-layered study that would produce rich research material. What Gillham (2008) calls “the complementary strengths of different methods”. The same research carried out over a more extended period of time, could possibly give more insights on the issue under discussion. Finally, the fact that the participants of the research came from a convenience sampling, most of them already knowing each other, facilitated my work as a researcher when I followed them to their everyday activities and helped me extract patterns from the fieldwork faster than I would If I used a different sampling process.
In spite of presenting subjective and local truths, which in the project at hand means Greek retiree’s bonds in relation to their Facebook employment, ethnography can nevertheless suggest ways that lead from these partial cultural realities to generally accepted knowledge. Thus, the aim of this thesis was not to establish a universal truth, but rather its findings to be viewed as insights into the field of study. More precisely, through this regional and particular use of Facebook that is describes, it aspires to advance previous debates in the field, set the foundation for an academic discussion and invite further exploration of the relevant topic. In this context, this research project has contributed to a better understanding of how older adults’ use of SNSs affects their relationships and offline networks, as well as designated Facebook as an emerging communication tool for senior citizens. It has also extended the existing knowledge in the field of media studies, by closely examining the various kinds of bonds of this age group being affected by the platform’s usage, having conveyed insights on the issue. With respect to the methodology, through the qualitative practice of ethnography, the present study has demonstrated an alternative way of studying SNSs and older adults’ engagement with them, that goes beyond content analysis or UGT (Uses and Gratifications Theory) that previous research has heavily employed.

7.2 Directions for future work

Given that Social Networking Sites are increasingly attracting middle-aged and elderly users over the last decade, along with the positive effects these technologies might have upon them and “the potential the internet holds for this age group” (Eastman & Iyer, 2004, p. 208), more research is needed on how this age cohort engages with new media in terms of their social ties. To better understand the mechanisms leading to specific connections between Facebook use and the formation of social capital, one suggestion would be to focus on each one of the relationships that emerged in this study separately, examining them in more depth. As mentioned before, I conducted my research in a small provincial town, where bonds are traditionally stronger and communities are characterized by high level of social activities, organized by the various local clubs situated in the area. The same study carried out in a big city, where the rhythms of life are different and individualism is possibly more intense, could generate different results. Drawing from different theoretical frameworks or applying other empirical approaches to the topic at hand, thus submitting it to different interpretations, might also add new dimensions to this multifaceted phenomenon.

In addition to that, the present study focused on the users’ side of the topic at hand. It would be interesting to see in the works to come in social media studies how Facebook as a technology is adjusting to this phenomenon. How does the platform respond to the growing numbers of older people using it? The ways SNSs change, in terms of design and content, in order to be more inclusive and encourage older people “to actively engage with each other and with the people around them” (Coehlo et al., 2017), is a timely and important issue to be addressed. Moreover, the present project situated Facebook at the center of its attention. Future research could aim to explore the impact other social media platforms have on the online and offline sociality of older adults, or
compare the different effects. Inserting demographics such as educational background, gender or socio-economic status, which were beyond the scope of this research, as variables that may influence older adults’ engagement with Facebook and the consequent effects on their ties, could consist of a potential agenda item for future research. As Facebook keeps transforming year by year and relationships being a highly dynamic phenomenon, another key-question the present study poses to future works is how this link between the platform and older adults’ bonds will evolve. Lastly, my participants’ age ranged from 54 to 85 years old (an average of 65), since the study’s goal was to focus on retirees. Future directions for research could include examining more closely the different age groups within this range regarding their Facebook usage and social ties, to reach more detailed results or find similarities and differences between them. This study’s findings can become the basis for future research, to further capture the nuances of how Facebook and social media in general might play an active role in keeping the older population socially connected.

Notes

1. Check the study of the Pew Research Center here: http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/05/17/tech-adoption-climbs-among-older-adults/
2. Source: https://www.omnicoreagency.com/facebook-statistics/
8. The NGO’s website: https://www.50plus.gr/
10. For the definition, check here: https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/technological-affordances/49914
11. Facebook’s mission statement: https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/
14. Check here for the sampling: http://www.engagingcommunities.org/framing-etical-research/
15. Listen to this radio interview about older adults’ tech skills: https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=247220424
16. See Pink’s hypermedia project here: http://energyanddigitalliving.com/
References


## Appendix I: Interviews questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devices and Computer literacy</td>
<td>- Since when do you have a computer and internet connection at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- For how long have you been using the internet? Was it a part of your job? Did your job involve the use of a computer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What new media devices do you own? (smartphone, tablet, laptop, PC, e-reader etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Have you ever attended any computer-related seminars?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media</strong></td>
<td>- Do you use other social media sites and applications?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facebook</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>- When and why did you create a Facebook account?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with FB</td>
<td>- Do you use it in different ways and for different reasons now? How did your relationship with Facebook evolve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>- What time of the day do you log in to Facebook?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How often do you log in?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Is there a chance that a day passes without logging in?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Do you prefer to log in alone or with others present?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Do you log in Facebook when you are outside of home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Via which devices do you access Facebook?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Features and usage habits                          | - What do you do when on Facebook?  
| - Do you post, comment, “Like” etc.?  
| - How often do you post?  
| - What are your posts about?  
| - Do you “Like” posts? How does it feel when other people “Like” your posts?  
| - Are you a member of different Facebook groups? |
| **Personal info sharing**                          | - Do you share personal information on Facebook?  
| **Online persona and profile construction**       | - What do you have as your profile picture and why?  
| - Which info have you filled in on the relevant section of your profile? Have you shared your real age and personal data?  
| - Are you on Facebook with your real name or under a pseudonym? |
| **Facebook skills**                               | - How did you learn to use Facebook?  
| - Did you have difficulties adopting this new technology? Was there any feature in particular that you found/find difficult to use?  
| **Facebook and family**                           | - Are you “friends” with your children on Facebook?  
| - Do you communicate with your children via Facebook? |
| Online-Offline networks and FB friends | - Do your peers and friends use Facebook?  
- How many Facebook friends do you have? Do you only “befriend” people you know?  
- Do your offline and online networks coincide? Do you have any Facebook “friends” with whom you communicate exclusively online and you don’t meet in person?  
- Do you get more pleasure from the online or the offline communication? Do you prefer traditional communication to using Facebook?  
- Does Facebook give you a sense of community and belonging? Do you feel that you have a support system when using it?  
- Have you met anyone on Facebook with whom you later became friends in real life? Have you made new friends via the platform?  
- Do you make arrangements to go out with your friends via Facebook or use other communication media (mobile/landline phone etc.)? |
| Time spent on the platform | - Approximately how many hours do you spend on Facebook?  
- Do you ever feel addicted to Facebook? Or catch yourself spending too many hours on the platform? |
| Needs | - Which needs do you think are satisfied by your Facebook usage?  
- In what ways do you believe Facebook’s use benefits you? |
| Facebook perceptions | - What is Facebook to you? |
| Drawbacks | - Is there something that you don’t like about Facebook?  
- Is there something that other people do on Facebook that irritates you? |
| Facebook and everyday life | - Do you talk about Facebook with your friends when you meet?  
- Do you ever get bored of it? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before and after retirement</th>
<th>- If you hadn’t retired, would you use Facebook the same amount of time? Did you use it before, when you were employed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New technologies</td>
<td>- What is your general opinion about new technologies and their impact on society? (positive, negative and why)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rising numbers of the elderly on Facebook</td>
<td>- Recent statistics want your age group to have risen in numbers on Facebook use. Why do you think this is happening?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outnumbering the young</td>
<td>- It is also said that more and more young people keep abandoning Facebook for other social media platforms. Do you believe it’s possible to outnumber the younger in the near future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and men on the platform</td>
<td>- Evidently, more women than men use Facebook and they are more active on the platform. How would you explain that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time when they signed up</td>
<td>- Most of you became members of Facebook plenty of years after its launch. What was preventing you from signing up before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What they would change</td>
<td>- If they told you that Facebook could adjust the platform to your tastes, skills and usage habits, what would change to the platform (practically, aesthetically, technically, mentality-wise etc.)? What would you add or remove and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good, evil and the middle</td>
<td>- Some of the characterizations you gave to Facebook during interviews were the following: Not real life, glamorization of life, manipulative tool, hypocrisy, isolation, virtual reality, an outlet for suppressed emotions, an addiction, it’s like a cigarette, gossipernewsmonger, a microcosm that is not enough for human relations to develop / A companion, a game, a means of communication, a company I would miss if it stopped existing, news and information, entertainment, a revolution. Towards which side and stance do you lean and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Facebook</td>
<td>- How would you characterize your relationship with Facebook?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook in their youth</td>
<td>- If Facebook had been first launched when you were a teenager, you think you would use it differently than you do now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook and TV</td>
<td>- Has Facebook replaced television for the people of 60+ years old? Comparing the two media, which one do you think most benefits the elderly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional and mediated communication</td>
<td>- During the interviews, most of you said that you prefer the traditional, face-to-face communication. Which are in your opinion the elements of personal contact and physical presence that Facebook or social media in general cannot replace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy issues and safety on Facebook</td>
<td>- A few days ago, Facebook has been involved in the “Cambridge Analytica” scandal, accused of not being able to protect the personal data of millions of users, in one of the company’s biggest ever data breaches. Did this trouble you? Are you worried about the safety of your personal data on Facebook?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix III: The participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Year of retirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonidas</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dora</td>
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<td>Diaries</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazarus</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalioppe</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manos</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzan</td>
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<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alkinoos</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Diaries, Interviews-Observation</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>1997</td>
</tr>
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<td>Catherine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>George</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Diaries, Interviews-Observation, Focus group</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
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<td>Antony</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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<td>Anthi</td>
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<td>Nicky</td>
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<td>Peter</td>
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<td>2012</td>
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<td>Lina</td>
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<td>Vivian</td>
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<td>Petra</td>
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<td>John</td>
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<td>Danny</td>
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<td>Lucy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IV: Making the Prototype

Brainstorming and sketching for the website

Early sketch for the Home Page

Different ideas for the Home Page
FACEBOOK, GREEK RETIREES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Ideas for a logo

Sketching relationships
Facebook and distant families

A sketch illustrating the results of the study
The final design for the Home Page

Designing the layout for the results section