

“This is a wall of memories”: Time and age identity in Facebook discourse

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INTRODUCTION

Όλα είναι συμβατικά, τι προχθές, τι χθες τι σήμερα! (τι σήμερα, τι αύριο τι τώωωωραααα!).

Everything is conventional, the day before yesterday, yesterday, today, what difference does it make! (today, tomorrow, noooooooooow, what difference does it make!).

This is a comment by Alkis, a Greek Facebook user whose Facebook activities I have been studying for almost three years. The comment is a reaction on a belated birthday wish on his Facebook Wall. In lieu of expressing irritation because of the delay, Alkis suggests that time is a conventional concept, what Jenkins (2002) has appositely called an “abstraction of human construction” (p. 269). Alkis’s suggestion is intertextually livened up by means of alluding to a Greek rebetiko¹ song in the parenthesis, entitled “Τι Σήμερα, Τι Αύριο, Τι Τώρα” (Today, Tomorrow, Now, What Difference Does It Make).² Alkis’s comment illustrates the two main topics of the present chapter; namely, the relative and

relational construction of time in discourse and the key role of music (songs, lyrics, clips) in how Facebook users engage with the theme of time.

Facebook, like any type of social media, is essentially time-bound. At the bottom of every Facebook post there is always a date and a time. Thus, users' content (status updates, photos, videos, links) is categorized according to the period of time in which it was posted in the form of a Timeline. Nevertheless, time is not only indicated by the time-stamp. Time is also made relevant in the content of the posts by Facebook participants, who employ intricate ways to talk about how they integrate and accumulate identity, experience and meaning across different timescales. That is, across who they are in this event and that, at this moment or the other, with this person or another, in one role and situation or another (Lemke, 2000). In this chapter I aim to study the following: How do Facebook users discursively construct themselves as "chronological beings" (Jenkins, 2002)? How do they position themselves vis-à-vis time? How do they make aspects of time relevant in their Facebook interactions? What is the role of music in all of this?

The chapter is organized as follows. I begin by briefly discussing the notion of time and its implications for our life and identity. I then look at how a particular sense of time identity, that of age identity, is constructed in discourse. Next, I outline the ways in which time can be made relevant on the social network site (SNS) of Facebook. After situating my data and methods within the discourse-centred online ethnographic paradigm, I analyze how Facebook users construct time and age identities in their posts and comments. The analysis has a Greek case study from Facebook as a point of departure and is informed by elements from the Coupland et al. (1991) age identity-marking taxonomy. The concluding remarks address the contribution of my empirical analysis to

our understanding of (time and age) identity construction and identification within social media environments.

TIME, AGE, IDENTITY AND DISCOURSE

Time is an abstract notion with manifold and complex meanings. In this section I describe different approaches to the notion drawing on semantics, philosophy and anthropology. Starting with semantics, time is a polysemous lexical category between units, periods and events, which, according to Evans (2005, pp. 49–70), bears eight distinct senses: duration, moment, instance, event, matrix, agentive, measurement-system, and commodity. Table 1 summarizes these senses providing representative examples from Evans’s work (2005). In the conclusion I will revisit some of these meanings to discuss how they fare in terms of experienced and lived time in light of my data.

From a philosophical perspective, time is conceived in a ‘tensed’ way, that is to say, in terms of past, present, and future, as well as in a ‘tenseless’ way, namely as clock times and relations of succession and simultaneity (Baker, 2009). For Chafe (1994), tense linguistically marks the relationship between “the time of an extroverted consciousness and the time of a representing (not represented) consciousness” (p. 205). To explicate this point, Chafe (1994, pp. 205–206) says that in the example “I was there for about six years”, the time of the extroverted consciousness preceded the time of the representing consciousness. Conversely, in the example “then I’ll go my own way”, the time of the extroverted consciousness is expected to follow the time of the representing consciousness.

Senses	Time as...	Examples
Duration	Assessment of magnitude of duration.	<i>It was a long time ago that they met.</i>
Moment	A discrete or punctual point or moment without reference to its duration.	<i>The time for a decision has arrived.</i>
Instance	A particular instance (i.e. occurrence) of an event or activity, rather than an interval or a moment.	<i>The horse managed to clear the jump 5 times in a row.</i>
Event	A boundary event.	<i>The barman called time.</i>
Matrix	An unbounded elapse conceived as the event subsuming all others.	<i>Time has no end.</i>
Agentive	A causal force responsible for change regarding humans and animals.	<i>Time has aged me.</i>
Measurement-system	A means of measuring change, duration and other behaviors, events etc.	<i>Eastern Standard Time is five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.</i>
Commodity	An entity which is valuable, and hence can be exchanged, traded, acquired etc.	<i>They bought more advertising time.</i>

Table 1. Senses of time (adapted from Evans, 2005).

In anthropological parlance, an influential definition of time comes from Jenkins (2002), who places weight upon human activity:

Time is something that humans do, naturally, and human life without time is unthinkable. What we call “time” is, in fact, perhaps best understood as an inevitable consequence of our need to have a working sense of the here-and-now if we are to go about the business of everyday life, in a universe of perpetual, and in a very real sense timeless, transformation (p. 277).

Time, thus, is not just a chronometric or categorical measure, conventionally segmented by the members of a culture into seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries and millennia. It is also a social, interactional and irreducibly subjective

construct related to one's personal history, experience, self and episodic memories (van Dijk, 2009, p. 129). Put it another way, it is related to one's identity – the sense of oneself and others as particular kinds of beings (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

Identity is a temporal process (Mead, 1932). Every human action, social practice, or activity takes place on some timescale – the characteristic time or rate of a process (Lemke, 2000). Humans, therefore, are essentially “chronological beings” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 268) — they cannot live without time: they need to have a past so as to situate who they are in a biography and history (memory); they need a future to envision what they are in the process of becoming (anticipation); and they need to build a sense of the present, of where they are now (perception) (Flaherty & Fine, 2001, p. 151; Jenkins, 2002, p. 268).

Harking back to Evans's (2005) agentic sense of time above, time appears to bring about certain effects, one of which is age. Age identity is a product “of the evaluative component of our life narratives, the cumulative assessment of where we stand, developmentally — as individuals and in relation to our social environments” (Coupland, 2001, p. 203). So, apart from a chronological matter, age is also a developmental, psychological and social process best understood in terms of cultural definition and interactional accomplishment (Boden & Bielby, 1986). Age categorization is something we do in discourse, so its analysis can disclose how cultural meanings of age are enacted, experienced and reproduced in interaction, that is, how age acquires meaning through discourse (Coupland & Coupland, 1995; Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2003; Georgakopoulou & Charalambidou, 2011; Poullos, 2011).

According to Coupland et al. (1991), older age identities in discourse are constructed in terms of two fundamental processes: age-categorization processes and temporal framing processes. The former processes include:

- **disclosing chronological age**

(e.g., I'm not very well these days too. I'm seventy last October.)

- **age-related categories/role references**

(e.g., I'll have to pay for that myself and I'm a pensioner.)

- **age-related experiences of illness and decline**

(e.g., I pray I'll keep my faculties until I go.)

(Original examples from Coupland et al., 1991, pp. 92–94.)

Temporal framing, on the other hand, deals with:

- **adding time-past perspective to current or recent events and topics**

(e.g., I've been going there for eleven years.)

- **associating the self with the past**

(e.g., I wouldn't recognise the place (.) it's years since I've been up this part of the city... years ago I used to come up here scrubbing floors.)

- **recognizing historical, cultural and social change**

(e.g., But times are so different aren't they? ... everything's fast isn't. You've got to sort of run with it.)

(Original examples from Coupland et al., 1991, pp. 94–96.)

This chapter will show that while the Coupland et al. (1991) taxonomy is grounded in the talk of the elderly, it can also be adapted for other age categories as well as for other than face-to-face communicative settings such as Facebook.³ But before that step, a short review of studies tackling age identity in various types of digital communication is in order.

Having studied online discussion forums for elderly people, Lin et al. (2004) showed that age identity can be bound up in negative themes such as physical decline, loss, and resistance to aging, as well as in positive ones like mind-over-body attitude, active engagement, wisdom and maturity, and the freedom of age. Nishimura (this volume) has explored how Japanese elderly bloggers skillfully construct their identities using role language (i.e. lexical and orthographical choices associated with particular character types) to create personae that they expect their audiences to recognize (e.g. a macho man or a dog) and to deal with age and aging in a positive light. Turning to other social media outlets, such as MySpace and Facebook, there has been an abundance of studies (e.g. Livingstone, 2008; Androutsopoulos, 2014; boyd, 2014; Larsen, 2016) on the sophisticated (and often playful) ways in which teens and undergraduate students create and manage separate, narrow contexts tailoring their self-presentations in accordance with these contexts (e.g. a teenager filling out in the ‘About’ section of her profile that she is ninety-five years old). Research on any specific and self-conscious generational cohort, save for young people, however, still remains neglected in the literature. The current contribution will seek to redress the balance by examining how a Facebook user in his early thirties expresses, understands and shares his identity in terms of time.

To summarize, time and age identity in this chapter refers to a sense of yourself (as well as others) as: 1) a temporal being, namely someone with a past, a present and a future; 2) someone moving through time; and 3) someone with a particular age. The next section discusses the resources for temporality that are available on Facebook.

FACEBOOK AND TEMPORALITY

Facebook made its debut in February 2004 in the USA, originally aiming to facilitate communication within the niche communities of Harvard, Stanford, Columbia and Yale college students. As of September 2006, when registration was expanded so that anyone could join, Facebook became an immensely popular SNS worldwide, namely a networked communication platform in which participants

(1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; (2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p. 158).

Facebook participants can post status updates, that is to say, short messages in which they report what they are doing, thinking or feeling, share photos, photo albums and links, create groups of either already connected or about to become connected individuals, as well as comment on the material they or other users, the so-called 'friends', post. Moreover, they can like status updates, comments and other postings by clicking the 'Like' button (an icon displaying a thumbs-up symbol) at the bottom of the content. To

enhance interaction with the content, Facebook introduced in February 2016 its 'Reactions' feature, a palette of new buttons, which along with the famous thumb, the icons now include a heart, a laughing face, a surprised face, a tearing face, and an angry face. In juxtaposition to other SNSs, Facebook has been found to deal in the main with physical friendships and acquaintances that are initiated offline and then transferred online (Georgakopoulou, this volume; Tagg & Seargeant, this volume).

The resources for temporality on Facebook are of two kinds: 1) date- and time-stamps which articulate the 'here and now' of telling, and 2) the content produced by Facebook members, which constructs the time relative to the reported events in their lived experience. The time of telling is indicated by means of time-stamps appended automatically by the system to both posts and follow-up comments. A poster's content is organized in the form of a Timeline (Figure 1), which in December 2011 replaced the Wall (the place where each Facebook user's content is posted and displayed)⁴ as a more interactive space where participants can collect their stories and experiences, add landmarks, go back to stories from their past, as well as see highlights from each month. In March 2015, Facebook launched the feature 'On This Day', which shows users' content from that particular day in their Facebook history (e.g. statuses and photos from one year ago, two years ago, and so on) enabling them to share it anew if they wish.

Turning to the relative construction of time through content, since its conception, Facebook has been present-oriented: its initial prompt was "What are you doing right now?" and users had to start their post with the verb "is" appearing automatically (e.g. "Alkis *is* preparing his ppt slides"). Despite the numerous facelifts in the platform's interface since 2010, the "pre-eminence of the present moment" (Page, 2010, p. 429)

remains at the heart of all Facebook use.⁵ Status updates are characterized by the present tense of announcing and sharing breaking news, namely the reporting of very recent events (e.g. “this morning”, “just now”) or events as unfolding near-simultaneously with the act of narration (Georgakopoulou, 2013).



Figure 1. Time-stamps and Timeline menu of a user’s profile.

Taking these features together, it could be plausibly argued that time on Facebook is multifaceted and multilayered. On the one hand, Facebook’s automatic time-stamps along with the Timeline metaphor imply a representation of life created out of uniform divisions (years, months, days, hours, minutes). On the other hand, as we will see in the

analysis, the sense of identity linked to time and age is actively constructed, and is done in interaction with other Facebook friends.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research reported in this chapter was conducted as part of a three-year online ethnographic study on the discursive construction of identities on Facebook (Georgalou, 2014). Based on empirical evidence from five Greek Facebook users, the study investigates the verbal and visual means via which the participants present themselves on Facebook through the lenses of place, time, profession, education, stance and privacy. Methodologically, the study is situated within the discourse-centred online ethnographic paradigm (Androutsopoulos, 2008), which coalesces online ethnography with discourse analysis of log data. Such an approach takes on two dimensions: a screen-based and a participant-based one. The former centres on systematic, longitudinal and repeated observation of online discourse (Facebook profiles in my study) whereas the latter draws upon direct (face-to-face and/or mediated) engagement with the producers of this online discourse (Facebook profile owners in my study).

My five participants (two female and three male Greek users; mean age = 28) were recruited via convenience sampling (i.e. they were friends of friends) and were then invited to participate in a series of semi-structured online interviews via email, instant messaging and/or Facebook messages. From the time my informants and I became friends on Facebook, I carried out regular observation of their profiles. My dataset comprised of Facebook profile information, status updates, comments, video and article links, photos my informants have taken themselves or have found elsewhere in the

internet, interview excerpts, field notes as well my informants' feedback on my analysis. My informants consented to providing access to their Facebook material signing an appropriate form. Concerning the use of third-party comments in the study, I either asked for their posters' permission or asked my subjects to do so on my behalf. Throughout my dataset I have preserved pseudonymity for my informants (they were welcome to choose their own fictive names) and anonymity for other Facebook users.

The data I introduce in this chapter include Facebook posts from one of my five informants, Alkis, covering the span 2011–2013. Compared to my other participants, Alkis was the one whose data had been mostly coded in terms of time both thematically and linguistically. The decision to single out here Alkis's data was taken for purposes of giving a coherent account that would aptly illustrate certain nuances pertinent to age identity construction within Facebook. Such nuances were not observed to the same extent in my other participants' postings. Alkis was born in 1981 and lives in Athens, Greece. He has gained a BA in Translation and Interpreting from the Ionian University in Corfu, Greece, as well as an MSc in Services Management from Athens University of Economics and Business. He has worked as a freelance translator, a project manager and a real estate agent. He speaks Greek (native), English, French and Italian. He created his Facebook profile in November 2007 in order to maintain contact with friends and acquaintances as well as to express himself. He visits Facebook almost every day and posts 2–6 times per week. For privacy reasons, he has selected an obscure variant of his full name whereas his profile pictures are most of the times impersonal. He does not provide any basic demographic information (occupation, hometown, marital status,

education or birth date). His friend list is hidden from all his contacts; however, in our first interview (December 2010), he claimed he had 430 Facebook friends.

CONSTRUCTING TIME AND AGE IDENTITY ON FACEBOOK

Focusing on selected Facebook posts and exchanges from Alkis's Timeline, both in terms of discourse choices and content, and deriving support by Coupland et al. (1991) age-categorization and temporal framing processes (see Note 3), the main issues addressed in my discussion are: disclosing chronological age, attributing age-related categories, celebrating birthdays, adding past perspective to current states, and recalling the past. The analysis shows how Alkis and his friends utilize Facebook to evoke certain periods of life, recycle memories and feel nostalgia, appeal to shared experiences, and recall past tastes and habits. It also brings to the forefront the pivotal role of music posting in their remembering and reminding processes.

Disclosing chronological age

Revealing one's age is the most crystal clear means of self-identifying in terms of time (Coupland et al., 1991, p. 92). A Facebook user's age can be inferred if they have filled in Facebook's predetermined (yet optional) slots for birth-date and year of birth. Alkis, however, as revealed in our interview, viewing age as a vital piece of personal data, has chosen to camouflage it from other users, at least *prima facie*. Based on repeated views of his profile I deduced that he was born on 1 March 1981, which was later confirmed by Alkis himself after reading drafts of my analysis. Startlingly, despite his privacy concerns

(see previous section), he has made explicit references to his age in individual posts as shown in Examples 1 and 2.⁶

Example 1: “we are getting into our thirties”

Alkis

28 January 2011 at 16:58

Πα μαλ... Λίγο Λαμπαντέ βέβαια - αλλά μας αρέσουν τα ρετρό τώρα που τριανταρίζουμε... !! ;-)

Pas mal... A bit Lambada of course – but we like retro things now that we are getting into our thirties.. !! ;-)

1 person likes this

Example 2: “in my 30s”

Alkis

2 March 2011 at 11:28

Ααα, κι αυτό κι αυτό!!

Ρε παιδιά, στα 30 μου θα γίνω μέταλλο! (οκ, υπό προϋποθέσεις!!)

Aah, and this one and this one!!

Hey guys, in my 30s I will become a fan of metal music! (ok, under conditions!!)

3 people like this

Example 1 was Alkis’s opening comment in uploading Jennifer Lopez’s song “On The Floor”, while *this one* in Example 2 refers to Lady Gaga’s song “Born This Way” for

which she has produced a metal version as well.⁷ Alkis here touches on two cultural stereotypes germane to what is acceptable for one's age. The first stereotype is that as people grow older, they tend to resist modernity showing preference towards old — *retro* as Alkis writes — things. The hype with Lambada, a Brazilian dance, started in 1989, when Alkis was a primary school student. Lopez's song pays homage to Lambada including recurrent elements from the original composition. Alkis does not seem fully satisfied with the song, tactfully evaluating it as *pas mal* (meaning 'not bad' in French) and *a bit Lambada*; yet, he still enjoys it. Interestingly, he does not write 'I like (but rather: 'we like') retro things now that I'm getting into my thirties' (compare with the first person pronoun in Example 2). This 'we' ('we like', 'we are getting') pronominal reference could be seen as creating a certain feeling of shared identity with his peers through shared points of reference, in this case music. With the blinking smiley ;-) and the two exclamation marks, Alkis wishes to further emphasize that 'getting into our thirties' is important to him.

Example 2 fuels the stereotype that when older adults suddenly share with younger adults the same enthusiasm for a music genre, metal in the case at hand, they are likely to be treated as distanced and in some cases derogated outgroups. Alkis appears to acknowledge that pure metal bands (i.e. those using loud and distorted guitars, powerful drum and bass sound and vigorous vocals) are not that appropriate for his age choosing to share — one day after his birthday — the pop and metal mash up "Born This Way", which could mildly initiate him into the metal genre (*under conditions*). One could suggest that by making known his foray into metal in his 30s, Alkis attempts to show that he is not somebody who does the 'done' thing; he is different and distinctive.

What we are facing in the above examples, besides the explicit disclosure of age, is that Facebook participants can take expressive stances towards their age and the experiences of people of a certain age by more implicit means such as music or TV shows, as we will see in the next section.

Attributing age-related categories

A significant age-categorization process refers to the assigning of nominal or attributive category labels to individuals or groups (Coupland et al., 1991, p. 92) such as ‘young’, ‘old’ or ‘our/their age’. Example 3 offers a vivid picture of such labelling. The thread was unfolded when Alkis posted the theme song — performed by the jazz singer Al Jarreau — of the American TV series *Moonlighting* (1985–1989; screened in Greek TV in early 1990s) in which a former model (Cybill Shepherd) and a detective (Bruce Willis) collaborate to solve various cases. In comment 1, FBU1 mentions another character of the show, Herbert Viola (Curtis Armstrong).

Example 3: “our youth!”

Alkis

6 April 2012 at 23:11

Τι όμορφο κομμάτι και τι ωραία σειρά!! :-)

What a beautiful track and what a beautiful series!! :-)

[He embeds the video *Al Jarreau - Moonlighting (Pilot Theme)*.]

4 people like this

1. FBU1 [male]: Τι να κάνει άραγε ο Χέρμπερτ Βαϊόλα;
What is Herbert Viola doing?
7 April 2012 at 00:55 · Like · 2

2. Alkis: Χαχαχαχαχα!! ΔΕΝ υπάρχουν!!
Υ.Γ. Ελπίζω να έχει κουρευτεί! Lol
Hahahahhahaa!! I DON'T believe it!!!
P.S. I hope he has his hair cut! Lol
7 April 2012 at 00:57

3. FBU2 [female]: axxxxxxxxxxxx ta niata mas!
ahhhhhhhhhhh our youth!
7 April 2012 at 01:48

4. FBU3 [female]: Πραγματικά!! Μπράβο Άλκη!!
Indeed!! Well done Alkis!!
7 April 2012 at 03:31 · Like · 1

[Another 9 comments with FBU3 and Alkis talking about a Greek TV series which was inspired by *Moonlighting*.]

5. FBU4 [female]: ναι τετοια κανεις και διαπιστωνουμε πόσο
εχουμε...ωριμασει!!! [...]
*yes you're doing such things and we realize how much we
have... matured!!! [...]*
7 April 2012 at 09:37 · Like · 1

Seeing *Moonlighting* standing metonymically for a whole period of life, FBU2 uses the collective *our youth* (comment 3) to point to a shared age category membership amongst viewers of the show, emitting a feeling of nostalgia. FBU3, in comment 4, provides “generational alignment” (Coupland et al., 1991) with the categorization by writing *Indeed* peppered with expressive punctuation. FBU4, on the other hand, jokingly reprimands Alkis for *doing such things* (comment 5), that is, posting old resources (songs), which make his audience realize the lapse of time and the fact that they have come into maturity, a label she likewise attaches collectively (*we have...matured*). The three dots before *matured* might suggest that FBU4 was tempted to say *έχουμε...γεράσει* (*we have...grown old*), but she eventually selected a more appropriate and self-praising verb. Anyhow, the dots do draw attention to the issue of aging and the users’ feelings about it.

Notably, Alkis’s opening comment to the clip is one of aesthetic appreciation virtually extraneous to aging: *What a beautiful track and what a beautiful series!! :-)*. His posting triggers a sense of nostalgia among his friends, which in turn triggers the age labeling. The point I wish to establish here is that although it may not have been the poster’s original aim at all (Alkis does not seem to participate in this reminiscence), identity constructions can be initiated by Facebook friends, who in their exchanges pick up certain aspects of age identity (e.g. youth, maturity) and play with them.

Celebrating birthdays

Birthday, the annual upgrading of chronological age, is a key element in the self- and other-concept of the aging individual (Bytheway, 2005). Amongst others, Facebook

functions as a birthday reminder (i.e. it tells you when someone's birthday is), provided that the user has filled in their date of birth and made it visible to their audience, facilitating thus the renewal or sustainment of relationships in view of distance and neglect. What is exceptional with Facebook — contrary to birthday cards or wishes over the phone or SMS — is that we have a persistent written record of how the birthday person responds to the wish (and a persistent record of all of the birthday wishes on their Wall, not just one's own), unless they choose to answer with a private message, delete the wishes from their Timeline, not respond to the wishes at all, or not allow anybody to write on their Timeline.

Example 4 is a wish on Alkis's Timeline by his sister. Alkis seems to resist time and, therefore, the 'grown up' label, with two tropes: the oxymoron *I'm growing younger instead of older* and the simile *as they do to small kids*.

Example 4: "I'm growing younger instead of older"

Alkis's sister: χρόνια πολλά αδερφάκι μου <3 θα σε ζουπήξω αύριο γτ μου φαίνεσαι λίγο περίεργα... <3 <3 <3

happy birthday my little brother <3 I'll squeeze you tomorrow cause you seem a bit strange to me... <3 <3 <3

1 March 2013 at 21:21

Alkis: Είναι που μικαρίνω αντί να μεγαλώνω και μου φαίνεται περίεργο!!

:) <3 <3 <3

Να με ζουπήξεις όπως κάνουν στα μικρά! Χαχα

It's because I'm growing younger instead of older and it seems strange to me!! <3 <3 <3

Squeeze me as they do to small kids! Haha

1 March 2013 at 21:24

Facebook users do not content themselves in publicly commenting each individual wish written on their Walls. They also post on their birthday to thank massively their contacts for their wishes, to remind their audience of their birthday, in case they have overlooked Facebook's reminder, or to make some age-related identity claim as I will immediately show.

Decade boundaries, that is, turning 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years old and so on, are considered special milestones that call for equivalently special interactional marking (cf. Nikander, 2009) such as that in Figure 2 which Alkis uploaded as a profile picture the day he turned 30.

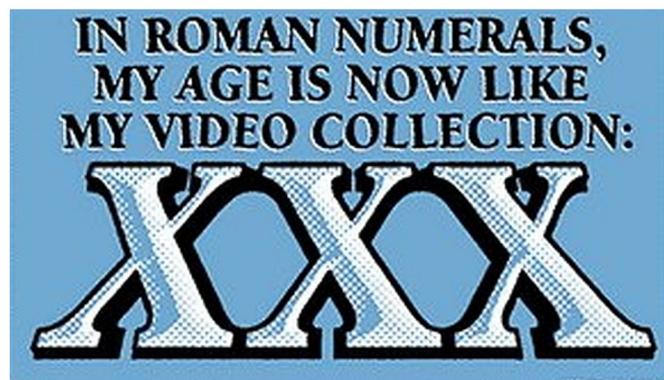


Figure 2. Alkis's profile picture on his 30th birthday (1 March 2011).

Alkis, instead of worrying for leaving his 20s, resting on the double meaning of the symbol XXX, as the number 30 in Roman numerals and as a kind of rating applied to pornographic films, jocularly evokes connotations of hotness and sexiness as well as connotations of being a consumer of porn.⁸

Alkis's birthdays are seen in positive ways: an opportunity to express love and affection (Example 4) and to have fun and to feast (Figure 2). These findings correlate fairly well with those by Stæhr (2015), further supporting the argument that birthday posts on Facebook are a good place to look for identity (co)construction, identification practices and discursive creativity.

Adding past perspective to current states

In discourse management, the past can be reshaped, discovered, rediscovered, remembered, forgotten, and invented by virtue of temporal framing processes (Coupland et al., 1991; Jenkins, 2002). Two essential ingredients of identification across time are 1) consciousness, the “active focusing on a small part of the conscious being’s self-centered model of the surrounding world” (Chafe, 1994, p. 28); and 2) memory, the “capacity to have personal and collective pasts” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 268). This section describes how Alkis makes his consciousness visible and sharable on Facebook through chronological shifting into the past, whereas the next one deals with the overall theme of memory as expressed in Facebook contributions and exchanges.

Weaving present states, activities and events with the past typically involves numerical markers of time past that enable inferential work to age categorization (Coupland et al.,

1991, p. 95). The examples that follow illuminate how music can provide key temporal benchmarks that allow the users to intermingle the past with the present.

In posting Madonna's⁹ *Hung Up* and alluding to the song's lyric "Time goes by so slowly", Alkis — realising that 7 years have elapsed since the particular song's release — commented:

Example 5: "SEVEN years already"

ΕΦΤΑ χρόνια κιόλας... Time DOES NOT go by so slowly!!!

It's been SEVEN years already... Time DOES NOT go by so slowly!!!

4 April 2012 at 12:33 · Like · 1

In Example 6, posted twelve minutes later, he voices a similar surprise as regards Madonna's song "Music" this time.

Example 6: "nearly 12 years have passed since this?!!!"

Alkis

4 April 2012 at 12:45

Η πιστεύει κανείς πως έχουν περάσει σχεδόν 12 χρόνια από αυτό;;!!!

Or does anyone believe that nearly 12 years have passed since this?!!!"

[The song "Music" by Madonna is embedded.]

2 people like this

At a later point in time, when Alkis uploaded "You Are My Sunshine", covered by Anne Murray, a friend responded to him with a reggae version of the same song performed by

Papa Winnie.¹⁰ Example 7 is Alkis's follow up comment in which he frames his past entertainment experience after being prompted by his Facebook contact.

Example 7: “in the 90’s”

Η κλασική εκτέλεση! Ερε χορό που έχω ρίξει στα 90's με αυτό :)

The classic version! Re¹¹ how much have I danced to this in the 90's :)

16 May 2012 at 13:25 · Like · 1

An intriguing commonality in the examples quoted above is the element of unexpectedness as Alkis becomes conscious of the amount of time elapsing. His surprise is realized via multiple interrobangs (?!?!), multiple exclamation marks (!!!!), capitalization (SEVEN, DOES NOT), pragmatic markers that signal remarkable piece of information (*re*), and exclamative structures (*How much have I danced*). Recognizing the passage of time and framing particular life stages, such as rejoicing in adolescence (Example 7), in the present are tasks being informed and triggered by particular music tracks.

Recalling the past

It has been argued that reminiscence talk can renew senses of identity and belonging that individuals have jointly experienced in the past (Buchanan & Middleton, 1995). This issue is addressed in the following three posts by Alkis.

Example 8: “From a period with very beautiful memories...”

Alkis

4 April 2012 at 23:53

Δύο πολύ ξεχωριστές φωνές σε ένα πολύ όμορφο τραγούδι...

Two very special voices in a very beautiful song...

[The song “Sous Le Vent” (Downwind) by the Canadian singers Garou and Céline Dion is embedded.]

[Alkis comments underneath his post:]

Από μια περίοδο με πολύ όμορφες αναμνήσεις...

From a period with very beautiful memories...

[He tags names of 5 friends.]

Example 9: “flashback”

Alkis

18 December 2011 at 11:36

Τώρα, ΓΙΑΤΙ μου ήρθε αυτό το κομμάτι όταν είδα τον καιρό που έχει έξω... Τι να πω...

Πλάκα είχε αυτό το flashback πάντως!!

Now, WHY did I remember this song when I saw the weather outside... What can I say... This flashback was fun anyway!!

[The song “Blue Da Ba Dee” by the Italian dance group Eiffel 65 is embedded.]

5 people like this

[Alkis comments underneath his post:]

Χορό που είχαμε ρίξει τότε...

(εποχή πανεπιστημίου για όσους -κάνουν πως- δεν θυμούνται!)

How much we had danced then...

(university era for those who -pretend that they - don't remember!)

18 December 2011 at 11:37 · Like · 3

Example 10: “I had forgotten”

Alkis

2 April 2012 at 20:41

Ένα κομμάτι που είχα ξεχάσει πόσο μου αρέσει!

Thanx [όνομα φίλης]!

A track that I had forgotten how much I like!

Thanx [name of female friend]!

[The song “Golden Brown” by the English punk rock group The Stranglers is embedded.]

8 people like this

To begin with, Alkis does not use the word *past* (*παρελθόν* or *παλιά* in Greek) to refer to the past. In its place, we encounter the items *period* (Example 8), *then* (Example 9) and *university era* (Example 9). Buchanan and Middleton (1995) reason that such kind of terms “constitute discontinuities between past and present, in ways that the term ‘the

past' does not" (p. 480). Appeals to memory are expressed by means of phrases like *very beautiful memories* (Example 8) and *this flashback was fun* (Example 9) as well as cognitive verbs of reminiscence: *those who don't remember* (Example 9) and *I had forgotten* (Example 10). Collective pasts are mobilized by Facebook's facility of tagging particular names of contacts (Example 8) and the inclusive pronoun *we* (*we had danced*) (Example 9). As becomes manifest in Example 8, common past does not have to be precisely specified in terms of dates (compare to Examples 5, 6 and 7) or phases (e.g. student years as in Example 9). We do not know exactly to which period Alkis is referring, yet his five tagged 'in the know' recipients have got his message retrieving the respective memories. This evocation of and summoning to past experiences could be conceptualized as a resource for constructing a collective identity in the present. I will return to this point in the conclusion.

More often than not, memories are bound to specific places. Boden and Bielby (1986) have powerfully argued that "places are full of memory" and their invocation in discourse "can achieve immediate interactional currency through related memories of public people or events" (p. 77). The example below is a paragon of how time and place can be mutually "constructed, contested, negotiated and/or re-set" (Georgakopoulou, 2003, p. 420) in the course of providing comments.

Example 11: “this is a wall of memories”

Alkis

13 January 2013 at 00:24

If no one reads my wall, this should be a short experiment. If you read this, leave one word on how we met. Only one word, then copy this to your wall so I can leave a word for you. Please don't add your word and then not bother to copy...you'll spoil the fun.

7 people like this

1. **FBU1** [female]: ένα ονομα μία ιστορία: ΟΠΕ! :p
one name a whole history: HEPO! :p
13 January 2013 at 00:29 · Like · 2

2. **FBU2** [female]: Pappas!!
13 January 2013 at 00:30 · Like · 1

3. **FBU3** [female]: χαχαχα... Η κα FBU1 έχει δικιο... ΟΠΕ και πάσης
Ελλάδος ;)
hahaha... Ms FBU1 is right... HEPO and all Greece ;)
13 January 2013 at 00:30 · Like · 2

4. **FBU4** [female]: ΑΣΟΕΕ!
AUEB!
13 January 2013 at 00:30 · Like · 1

5. **Alkis**: Όμορφες εποχές! :)
Beautiful times! :)

13 January 2013 at 00:30 · Like · 3

6. Alkis:

ΚΑΙ ο ΟΠΕ ΚΑΙ η ΑΣΟΕΕ!! :D

BOTH HEPO AND AUEB!! :D

13 January 2013 at 00:31 · Like · 4

7. FBU5 [male]:

cosmopolitan!!! :p

13 January 2013 at 00:31 · Like · 2

8. Alkis:

;)

13 January 2013 at 00:31

9. Alkis:

*Cosmo the Gym, not the cocktail [...]

13 January 2013 at 00:32 · Like · 2

10. FBU2:

polu omorfes omws!!!ante pote 8a ta poyme??? [...]

very beautiful indeed!!!come on when shall we meet???

[...]

13 January 2013 at 00:33 · Like · 1

11. Alkis:

Σταμάτα να τρολάρεις στον τοίχο μου - εδώ είναι τοίχος

αναμνήσεων, όχι agenda :D :-*

Stop trolling on my wall – this is a wall of memories, not

*an agenda :D :-**

13 January 2013 at 00:34

[Another 4 comments with puns on a Greek song]

12. FBU6 [female]:

Αμαρυλλίδα

Amaryllis

13 January 2013 at 00:42 · Like · 1

13. Alkis:

ΕΔΩ παει και το γνωστό άσμα, “θέλω να γυρίσω στα παλιά, εδώ και τώρα”!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

THERE goes the well-known song “I want to go back to the old times, right now”!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

13 January 2013 at 00:43 · Like · 1

14. FBU6:

Εντελως ομως...

Absolutely...

13 January 2013 at 00:43

15. Alkis:

:-D

13 January 2013 at 00:44 · Like · 1

16. FBU7 [female]:

MSM#ΟΠΙΑ#

MSM#AUEB#

13 January 2013 at 00:49 · Like · 1

17. FBU8 [female]:

αλκη εχεις αποτρελαθει!!

alkis you have gone totally mad!!

13 January 2013 at 08:09 · Like · 1

18. FBU9 [female]:

Ελαφακιαααα!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Little deeeer!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

13 January 2013 at 10:12 · Like · 1

- 19. FBU10 [male]:** ΟΠΕ
HEPO
13 January 2013 at 10:33 · Like · 1
- 20. Alkis:** FBU8 είναι η έλλειψή σου που με απο-τρέλλανε! :-P
FBU8 it's your absence that has driven me totally mad!
:-P
13 January 2013 at 12:09
- 21. FBU11 [male]:** Kreontas-show
13 January 2013 at 13:29 · Like · 2
- 22. Alkis:** Χμμμ...
Με τέτοιες απαντήσεις, μια η Αμαρυλλίδα, μια τα ελάφια, μια ο Κρέοντας, θα αρχίσει να πλέκεται ένα πέπλο μυστηρίου γύρω από το όνομά μου! Χαχα
Hmmm...
With such answers, Amaryllis on the one hand, deer, on the other, Kreontas, a veil of mystery will start being folded around my name! Haha
13 January 2013 at 13:33 · Like · 1
- 23. FBU12 [female]:** ΟΠΕ ΟΛΕ!!!
HEPO OLÉ!!!
13 January 2013 at 22:07 · Like · 1
- 24. FBU13 [female]:** Αεροδρόμιο :)

Airport :)

13 January 2013 at 22:35 · Like · 1

25. Alkis:

:-* + :-* , για τις δυο από πάνω φίλες μου! ;)

:-* + :-* , *for my two friends above!* ;)

13 January 2013 at 22:35 · Like · 1

[Another 4 comments with puns on a Greek song]

26. FBU14 [female]:

Πανεπιστήμιο (αλλά πώς;).

University (but how?).

14 January 2013 at 01:00 · Like · 1

27. Alkis:

Δεν θυμάσαι ή μου κάνεις κουίζ; :)

Don't you remember or are you quizzing me? :)

14 January 2013 at 01:01

28. FBU14:

Δεν θυμάμαι. :) Εσύ θυμάσαι;

I don't remember. :) Do you remember?

14 January 2013 at 01:24

29. Alkis:

Σίγουρα στο Μέγαρο! :)

Surely at Megaron! :)

14 January 2013 at 01:24

30. FBU14:

Είναι μετρημένες στα δάκτυλα (του ενός χεριού) οι φορές που θυμάμαι πώς γνώρισα τους φίλους μου. Εδώ σε θέλω, τώρα... Στο Μέγαρο ή στον Αρίωνα;

In very rare occasions do I remember how I met my friends. Beat that, now... Megaron or Arion?

14 January 2013 at 01:25

31. Alkis:

Τώρα κόλλησα! Χαχα

I'm stuck now! Haha

14 January 2013 at 01:26

32. FBU14 [female]:

Και ενώ δεν θυμάμαι πώς γνωριστήκαμε, θυμάμαι ότι το δωμάτιό σου στον Αρίωνα ήταν στον τρίτο όροφο και, κατά πάσα πιθανότητα, ήταν το 322.

And although I don't remember how we met, I remember that your room in Arion was on the third floor and, in all likelihood, it was number 322.

14 January 2013 at 01:27

33. Alkis:

Κι εγώ έτσι νομίζω!! Χαχαχα

I think so!! Hahaha

14 January 2013 at 01:30 · Like · 1

[Another three comments between Alkis and FBU14 on whether the room was 321 or 322.]

Alkis posts a chain message, that is, a message which is passed from user to user through social media with a view to being noticed, liked, commented on, and shared anew.

Although these messages are prepackaged, extensively copied and pasted and, sometimes, considered annoying by Facebook audiences (Livingstone, 2008), here Alkis and his friends reformulate this kind of status update in a number of ways. On the one hand, with the exception of proper names, all of the participants provide their comments in Greek even though Alkis's status update is written in English. On the other hand, most of them answer where they met Alkis not how, as also pointed out by FBU14 in comment 26 (*but how?*). What is more, contrary to what the initial status asks, they use more than one word while Alkis constantly intervenes in the interaction. By stretching the possibilities of chain messaging affordances to their own ends, the participants make meaning and shape their identities probably in ways the first creator of the message had not even thought of.

Within the thread, three types of collective past identities are simultaneously recalled and activated, principally through proper names of social places (van Dijk, 2009): professional, educational, and recreational. Commencing with professional pasts, four friends (comments 1, 3, 19 and 23) refer to *HEPO*, the Hellenic Foreign Trade Board, where they used to work with Alkis. With regard to educational pasts, Alkis's former MSM (Master in Services Management) fellow students mention *AUEB* (Athens University of Economics and Business) (comments 4 and 16). FBU14, on the other hand, in comment 26, appeals to their common undergraduate studies elucidated by Alkis via mentioning *Megara Kapodistria* and *Arion*. *Megara Kapodistria* (Kapodistrias Mansion) is a historical building in Corfu where courses of the Department of Foreign Languages, Translation and Interpreting of the Ionian University are taught whereas *Arion* is the name of students' residencies. Recreational pasts include meetings at the gym

(*Cosmopolitan* in comment 7), live music venues (*Amaryllis* in comment 12 and *Kreontas-show* in comment 21) and the airport (comment 24). The references to *Pappas* (comment 2) and *little deer* (comment 18) remain opaque as they can be unpacked only by friends who share the same background.

Such articulations of place and time in Facebook interactions corroborate “the salience of identities of friendship, familiarity and sharedness” (Georgakopoulou, 2003, p. 425). Here we witness that the participants embrace Facebook and the affordance of commenting to display and enhance their connectedness and closeness (cf. Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). The collaborative construction of *a wall of memories*, as Alkis very successfully puts it in comment 11, is achieved by:

- **requests for ratification:** *but how?* (comment 26), *Don't you remember* (comment 27), *Do you remember?* (comment 28);
- **ratification:** *Ms FBUI is right* (comment 3), *;* (comment 8), *very beautiful indeed!!!* (comment 10), *Absolutely* (comment 14), *:-* + :-**, *for my two friends above!* (comment 25), *surely at Megaron! ;)* (comment 29), *I think so!!* (comment 33);
- **elaboration:** *I remember that your room in Arion was on the third floor and, in all likelihood, it was number 322* (comment 32);
- **allusion:** *the well-known song “I want to go back to the old times, right now”!!!!!!!!!!!!* (comment 13);¹²
- **pun:** *HEPO and all Greece* (comment 3). The user here plays with the title given to Greek Orthodox Archbishops, i.e. *Archbishop of Athens and All Greece*, to underline the significance of HEPO;

- **positive evaluation:** *a whole history* (comment 1), *Beautiful times!* (comment 5), *OLÉ* (Spanish expression of excitement; comment 23).

Throughout the thread, different users give rise to different memories providing thus different angles to Alkis's biography on the basis of what they have shared with him. To that end, different processes are at play:

- **reinterpretation of the present because of the past:** *alkis you have gone totally mad!!* (comment 17), *With such answers ... a veil of mystery will start being folded around my name!* (comment 22);
- **nostalgia:** *very beautiful indeed!!! come on when shall we meet???* (comment 10);
- **filling gaps:** *And although I don't remember how we met, I remember that...* (comment 32).

This rich extract showcases two vital issues. First, it attests to the enhanced reflexivity that characterizes social media (Stæhr, 2015), given that it is unusual to ask a question like *Where did we meet?* in such a large group face-to-face interaction. Second, it dismisses the tendency of Facebook "to concertina time into a relentless fixation with the present" (Miller, 2011, p. 191). Previous scholarship (Page, 2010; Georgakopoulou, 2013) has explored how "recency is prized over retrospection" (Page, 2010, p. 440) in Facebook posts, for example via announcing and sharing breaking news. The analysis of the previous exchange has gone some way towards showing the vitality of reminiscing in social media identity construction (see also Georgalou, 2015). Revitalising the past in the now together with people from earlier parts of one's life, even through fragmented, one-

worded comments (e.g. AUEB), turns out to be a valuable resource for situating and re-seeing the self in both personal and collective history as well as for cultivating and enforcing relationships.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on data from Alkis, a Greek Facebook user, and adapting Coupland and colleagues' (1991) taxonomy of age identity-marking, the current chapter documented and interpreted a multitude of different ways in which Facebook participants construct time as well as construct themselves and others in time. As to the senses of time (Evans, 2005), Alkis, together with his Facebook friends, constructed time as duration (e.g. maintaining same song preferences), moment (e.g. reminiscing about being fellow students), event (e.g. birthdays), agentive (e.g. recognizing aging), and measurement-system (e.g. using numerical markers of time). Being involved in activities such as uploading profile pictures, sharing songs, copying lyrics, exchanging comments, and tagging, the participants in the data at hand:

- evaluated and expressed humorous attitudes towards age (Examples 1, 2, 4; Figure 2).
- appealed to shared experiences, recollected memories and indulged in nostalgia (Examples 3, 8, 9, 11);
- recalled past tastes and activities (Examples 7, 9, 10);
- generated collective past and present identities (Examples 8, 11);
- recognized the passage of time (Examples 5, 6);

- marked milestones (Figure 2).

Albeit partly idiosyncratic and individualistic, the findings from Alkis's case study help us to gain a more solid understanding of (time and age) identity construction, social media and their intersection. To start with, the analysis shows that time and age identity on Facebook is an interactive and collaborative task, concurring in this way with previous research in different settings including everyday conversations, TV interviews and reality shows (e.g. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Nikander, 2002; Poullos, 2011). On Facebook, time and age identities are projected, credited, challenged, endorsed, negotiated, and collaboratively constructed in front of a viewing audience consisting of friends and acquaintances from different slices of one's life, different shared pasts and presents, and different kinds of shared knowledge. Through the use of temporality the poster and their audience can display and enhance their mutual ties. Facebook interaction is, hence, not just about staying connected here and now via the medium. It is about staying connected via indications of shared experiences, feelings, activities, ideas, values, things, events and situations that were there in the past, but are also given prominence now through Facebook.

The findings substantiate the suggestion that identity is shaped through processes of identification (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). In most of the examples, we saw that Alkis identified himself primarily with music. In addition to indicating individual dispositions, and facilitating in attaining and maintaining certain states of feeling, music can be used for retrieving memories and therefore "remembering/constructing who one is" (DeNora, 2000, p. 63). In accord with my observations, Alkis sometimes opted for posting music

that brought to his memory particular events and incidents, like a students' party, constructing in this manner either an individualized or a collective time and age identity. At other times, he posted music for the sake of it as was the case with the *Moonlighting* music theme (Example 3). Yet, this functioned as a fuel to recycle memories and awaken past tastes amongst members of his audience, conducing to an unintentional, on Alkis's part, crafting of a collective time and age identity as he just shared and evaluated a song he liked; he did not construct any collectives – this was done in the comments by his friends. In this fashion, Facebook, owing to its facility of music video sharing, becomes a befitting platform to remember and remind, more than other social media technologies, mainly on account of its members' pre-existing ties, shared experiences and background knowledge (cf. the effect would not be the same on Twitter, for example, in which users do not necessarily know who is 'following' them). So, for some circles of friends on Facebook music can function as a shared value, as a sphere of shared experience with which they can evoke and make salient their connectedness then and now. For other circles of friends, some other cultural product (e.g. literature, films, TV shows, advertisements, memes) or form of activity may have similar functions as music has for Alkis and his friends. Whichever the case, within social media activity, such identifications with cultural elements constitute powerful indices of affiliation, belonging, commonality, alignment, and groupness.

In the public debates and discourses, Facebook, like most of social media, is often criticized (see Spilioti, 2015) for being superficial and light-hearted incubating users' angst to look attractive and show that they lead an interesting, enviable life. Alkis's case, however, convincingly indicates that Facebook can be a place of connection, nostalgia

and remembering good times, and shared experiences and tastes. The types of time and age reference reported in this chapter had a central, reuniting, function on Facebook: they invited participation, which in turn enhanced sociality and solidified relationships amongst friends that have known each other from the past and perhaps (nowadays) ‘meet’ more regularly on Facebook rather than offline.

I close this chapter with an interview quote (translated from Greek) from Alkis, who underlines the role of Facebook as a (co-authored) digital memory bank.

Suffice it to say how much I smile and laugh while reading old comments of mine or posts and replies by my friends respectively... [...] it’s very interesting what ‘written story’ we create with Facebook.

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NOTES

1. Rebetiko is an urban Greek folk music genre which appeared at the end of the 19th century. Rebetiko lyrics refer to the experiences of marginalized people (e.g. crime,

drink, drugs, poverty, prostitution and violence). Rebetiko is mainly played with long necked bowl-lute, plucked string instruments (bouzouki and baglamas).

2. Lyrics: Gerasimos Tsakalos; music: Vassilis Tsitsanis; singer: Marika Ninou. The song was released in 1953. Alkis stretches “now” in an attempt to imitate Ninou’s way of singing.

3. The dimension of age-related experiences of illness and decline was not applicable to my dataset. For practical reasons of space, the dimension of recognizing change could not be included in this chapter; however, it is discussed elsewhere (Georgalou, 2014).

4. The terms ‘Wall’ and ‘Timeline’ are used interchangeably in the chapter as my informants themselves did not distinguish between the two in both their postings and interviews.

5. Lately, Facebook has emphasized memories quite heavily in the form of notifications through the ‘On This Day’ feature. However, the content of the notification is not visible to everyone unless the user decides to share it on their Timeline. Note also that not all users have activated the particular feature.

6. Italics are used for English translations of the data. The acronym FBU is used for Alkis’s Facebook friends and stands for Facebook User. Different Facebook participants are enumerated for ease of reference (e.g. FBU1, FBU2, FBU3...). All textual data are rendered intact including the use of Greeklis, i.e. a romanized version of the Greek alphabet, stress omissions (in Greek), spelling and typos, multiple punctuation, and absence of/double spacing between words.

7. Jennifer Lopez is an American, of Puerto Rican descent, pop and R&B (rhythm and blues) singer, actress, dancer, fashion designer, and producer. Lady Gaga is an American, of Italian descent, electronic pop singer, songwriter, and actress.

8. The disclosure of age is considered a somewhat taboo topic in the Western world at least and mostly for women (Coupland, Coupland & Giles, 1991; Poullos, 2012). Further work is needed to establish whether such kind of jocularity is a recurrent feature vis-à-vis age disclosure on Facebook (e.g. as a means for mitigating age-related sensitivity).
9. Madonna is an American singer, songwriter, dancer, actress, and businesswoman, often referred to as the “Queen of Pop”.
10. Anne Murray is a Canadian pop, country and soft rock singer. Papa Winnie is a reggae musician from St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean.
11. *Re* is a very common interjection in Greek used to address someone, attract their attention, add emphasis, express astonishment, mark friendly disagreement or hurl an insult.
12. Lyric from the Greek rap song “Θέλω να γυρίσω” (I want to go back) written by Nikos Vourliotis and released in 1999.

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