From the family portrait to the profile picture. Uses of photography in the Facebook social network

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Abstract
[ES] Introducción: Este articulo realiza un estudio de 200 perfiles de Facebook de personas adultas con la finalidad de conocer cuáles son las fotografías más utilizadas para la conformación de la imagen del perfil y qué herramientas utilizan los usuarios que ya han dejado atrás la adolescencia para reforzar su identidad en esta red social. **Metodología**: Las fotografías seleccionadas se analizan a través de un análisis de contenido cualitativo desde el punto de vista compositivo, descriptivo y tecnológico. **Resultados y conclusiones**: Los resultados muestran como las fotografías analizadas, que son utilizadas para la presentación pública a través de Facebook, tienen una función comunicativa y de auto representación del propio usuario. La mayor parte de ellas conservan cierta formalidad y presentan a la persona en una esfera pública a la vez que muestran como los usuarios dejan de definirse a través del vínculo con instituciones tradicionales para hacerlo a través de su individualidad y las aficiones personales.
[EN] Introduction: This paper performs a study of 200 Facebook adult profiles in order to know what are the pictures used the most to constitute the profile's image and what tools are used by users that left adolescence behind to reinforce their identity in that social network. **Methodology**: Pictures selected are analyzed through a qualitative content analysis from the compositive, descriptive and technological perspective. **Results and conclusions**: The results show how pictures analyzed, which are used for the public introduction through Facebook, have a communicative function as well as self-representation of the user. Most of them have a certain formality and introduce the person into a public sphere at the same time they show how users stop defining themselves through the bond with traditional institutions to do it through their individuality and personal hobbies instead.

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1. Introduction

The personal use of photographs started to consolidate in our country from the middle of the XX century, thanks to the domestic cameras of small format and easy use. The image of oneself were mainly family portraits, that were organized in photo albums and observed by friends and relatives (Visa, 2013). In the last years, the number of personal pictures that we take and distribute has grown exponentially, due to digitization and subsequent popularization of cameras incorporated in mobile devices. Thus, there is the possibility to take several pictures without any added cost, that could be viewed instantly and that can be shared with people outside the private environment. Now, photographs are more personal than ever and show the self, performing all kinds of activities. At the same time, the emergence of social networks made easier for us to rehearse different strategies for self-introduction, our relationships with others and our activities. As Castells (2001) says, Internet in general and social network places in particular are useful to perform and unfold particular ways of collective and individual identity.

This paper is focused in knowing what are the photographs used the most to constitute the profile image of the Facebook social network and what are its basic features. We have chosen this social network because it is the one with more registered users (2000 million on June 2017) and because its purpose is not only visual as other platforms such as Instagram, Flikr or Pinterest, but the communication with others as well. We have also discarded those platforms where the purpose is to create a new personality or to be appealing before others with an intention beyond the strictly communicative, such as dating websites or those where users can constitute a self that is completely distanced from their quotidian reality. In the beginning of the digital era, it was usual that users connected to websites like *Second Life* or others mentioned by Sherry Turkle (1997) where *"anonymity gives people the opportunity to express multiple and often unexplored aspects of the self, play with their identity and try new ones."* (Turckle, 1997:19).

More recent studies about information and communication technologies (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Kemp, 2017) show how in the last years they have turned into one of the most important communication and leisure tools worldwide and how social networks have become popular among users as a way to interact and connect with one another. Del Moral, (2005) and Caldevilla (2010) stablished four main purposes we currently pursue by attach to them: keeping friendships, creation of new friendships, entertainment and internal management of business organizations. As mentioned by Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths (2017), individuals visit social networks to carry out multiple activities, being entertainment, online gaming, socializing, communicating and sharing pictures some of the most preferred.

Therefore, we understand that the purpose of inserting images in the Facebook social network does not pursue the objective of creating new identities far from the real one, because it is rather used mostly by users that already know in real life and also want to communicate through Internet.

The foundational idea of Facebook was to create an online community of United States' university students. As his name indicates, the original idea comes from the books edited in the past in universities to share basic information of all students studying in the same class. The page was created on 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, and little by little was opened to the rest of users, allowing to add people we want as friends, send them public or private messages and share links, pictures and videos. Currently, the only requirement to access is being older than 13 years old and have an email address.

Every user has a certain freedom when it comes to creating their profile, because he or she can choose the personal data shared and the type of pictures uploaded on the net. One of the basic elements for creating the profile is to give a name and upload a picture, with which the first step to create our identity on Facebook is done, although afterwards it will be forged and re-built through the pictures we upload, from the friends we have and from the pages we subscribe to. Like Cardon (2008) planned, digital identity is a co-production where the strategy of the platform and users' tactics cross. In fact, publications posted by Facebook users require both a technical manipulation of the interface as well as a social activity of permanent exchange with other members of the network.

Therefore, currently we reinvent ourselves before others and assume an active role in the conformation of our own identity. From the last third of the XX century, coinciding with many changes of the society and a progressive "decommunitarization" (Capdevila, 2010) of frameworks that were experienced as communitarian until then, a need to confirm the customized identity of individuals is evidenced. In the study 'The Social Uses of Personal Photography', in 2004, the researcher Nancy van House described four basic uses of personal images: (1) memoristic, narrative and identitarian, photographs help us build stories of our lives and to constitute an idea of identity and collectivity; (2) to maintain social relationships, photographs reinforce links between generations and collectives; (3) self-representation, photographs allows to show ourselves just as we want to be perceived by others; (4) self-expression, photographs reflect the author's perspective, and show their aesthetic and creative conception. If back on the XX century, at the level of basic users, the memoristic use predominated, currently the fact of laying foundations of social relationships and self-representation constitute the most popular use. Winston (2013) mentions how mobile phones with cameras and social networks have increased the ability of photographs to communicate and build an identity. We no longer make pictures of what we want to recall, but what we want to convey instead, generally about us. The camera has turned its lens 180º and often both photographer and photographed have become the same person. The first photographs looked for representing the world surrounding us, look through the window. Now, we aim to represent ourselves, singularize us before others. The easiness with which current technology allows making perform photographs of the self (the so-called "selfies") changed the perception we currently have about these kind of pictures. As Gómez Cruz and Helen Thornham (2015) say, selfies must be understood as a social and cultural phenomenon, beyond a representational image. Thus, through the setting, taking pictures, choosing them, sharing them and the generation of comments and replies generated in other users from one's own image, is rather significant in the construction of the subject.

Facebook, like any other social networks, allows the possibility to change the profile picture often. As Berger says, "the demands of the modern vision are incompatible with the singularity of the point of

view" (Mosquera, 2011: 139). We no longer define only through the stereotype of an identity card picture, which made us all even. Now we have many more options to represent ourselves. The researcher María Gil Posa believes that "*we build our online identity by using traits that comprise our multiple off-line identities; we make fiction within a context to supposed "reality"* (Gil Posa, 2010) and that, despise the similarities with reality, we are creating a character. In fact, the creation of a selfie is always a narrative art, both on social networks as well as in face to face interactions and always represent a character when we are before an auditorium, despite how small. Goffmann published in 1959 *La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana*, a book that analyzes social interactions, considering people as actors, under a dramaturgical focus. The idea that every person assumes one or different roles in every interaction, depending on the image wanted to be shown to others, is well illustrated in photo albums and now on social networks, where a specific version of ourselves is offered, attentive about a staring public. Goffmann also indicates how our behavior changes depending on whether we are in the called stage –front area or in the backstage- back area. In the front area, which is the one we perform on public spaces, we show ourselves complying with the rules of propriety and formality; and differently, the back region is a place where we do not represent any role and lower our guard.

The possibility of offering one or multiple version of one self didn't exist in traditional societies with simple institutional programs, where the identity of every person was clear and permanent for everyone (Berger and Luckmann, 1988). The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1997:98) defined with these words this novelty that emerged from the fact that the person has a unique character and special possibilities, non-existent in the pre-modern culture: "Back in the medieval Europe, lineage, gender, social status and other decisive attributes for identity were relatively fixed. Through the different life stages, changes would occur; but said changes would be conducted by institutionalized processes and the role of the individual in them was relatively passive."

In this study we will observe what is the way of self-representation in the Facebook social network used most in the analyzed group and how the photographic and technological tools we currently have at our disposal, are used to reproduce our identity.

2. Methodology and objective

The objective of this study is to describe the compositive, descriptive and technological features observed in profile pictures selected by a sample of users of the Facebook social network to represent themselves before others, in order to see what kind of recreation about their own identity has been performed.

The following are the initial hypotheses:

(1) Usage of profile picture by users is basically communicative and also of the self-representation and the creation of their own identity, more than the memoristic or self-expressive use.

(2) Profile pictures leave behind the formality of photograph portraits and are spontaneous and made in private settings, that will be part of what Goffman calls "backstage".

(3) People stop defining themselves through institutions such as family, religion or work to self-represent themselves in a diverse manner mostly through their own individuality and their interests and hobbies.

The methodological strategy used is virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), that allows a detailed study of the uses of profile pictures in the Facebook social network. For this, we have qualitatively analyzed 200 profile pictures of Facebook users. To do this, we analyzed the first 200 friends, in alphabetical order, of a 38 years old male user of the Province of Lleida, in Catalonia. Almost half of profiles corresponded to male individuals (103) and the other half female (97). The option of choosing adult age range people as initial profile allows us to study users who mostly have ended adolescence and therefore the creation of the own identity regarding work and family is more consolidated than in previous age ranges. Besides, many are users born at the end of the seventies of the XX century, which positions us before a sample that had made their first photographs with analogic technology, but who have quickly integrated in digital technology and use it in a massive manner.

The election of this sample follows the tail of those used in previous studies about photograph usages. The United States anthropologist Richard Chalfen (1987) in his book 'Snapshot versions of life', studied what he called the "Kodak culture", by examining 200 collections of personal photographs, and he identified three functions of photographs: documentation, memory support and assistance in being part of a culture. The Colombian Armando Silva, on his part, analyzed 100 family albums in 1998 from the triple cultural, visual and communicative dimension. Also other more recent studies, such as Basile's (2014) are focused on a similar sample, in this case, 299 Facebook profiles for the qualitative analysis of personal pictures that teenagers of popular sectors of the City of Buenos Aires produce and publish on the Facebook platform. And currently, Barry (2017) chose a sample of 128 Instagram users to analyze the use of selfies on this social network.

Pictures have been analyzed following compositive, descriptive and technological criteria. Compositively speaking, we have taken notes on data regarding the nature of the image shown (either photographic or not), the type of camera shot, orientation and perspective. Regarding descriptive criteria, we have included gender of the profile's person, the place where the photograph has been taken, environment (indoors or outdoors and public or private), the possible setting, the type of people or objects in the image, presence of institutions and the orientation of the glance. Finally, the technological criteria consider the color of the image, possible defects and the presence of photo editing or non-photographic elements. This classification is focused in the one used in previous studies of the same author (Visa, 2012) and also follows the line of international studies focused on the analysis of digital photographs, like the case of the project performed by Rueda and Giraldo (2016). In the latter, the images are classified based on the RTE model, where the representative is analyzed (what appears in the image), the treatment (whether the intention of presenting the image is natural or artificial, that is whether there are footprints of intervention or setting), and framing (referred to the amount of information provided by the image). In this study we will also consider this classification when it comes to detail results, although the aim has been to open the study to other elements mentioned.

3. Results
3.1 Compositive analysis

Compositively speaking, we took note of the data connected to the nature of the image shown (photographic or not), the type of plane, orientation and point of view.

The type of image presents the most as profile picture is the photograph (169), followed by far by illustrations or drawings (26) or, to a lesser extent, default Facebook images for those users who do not upload any picture nor image to their profile (5)

Regarding the type of photograph, the most common one is the portrait (100) and the room portrait (55). To differentiate between the portrait and the room portrait we based on the fact that in this last one the context gains more relevance besides the person. This one is still the center of the picture, but there is enough air to clearly see where the picture has been taken, hence strengthening the setting. Therefore, we observe that, like in other studies such as Rueda's (2016) or Zúñiga's (2013), where there were analyzed up to 7200 pictures from a wide origin, most of analyzed pictures represent the human figure.

In the following table we can see this proportion:

Table 1. Image Representative

Representative	Total
User	142
Artistic Image	14
Popular Character	11
Political Revindication	6
Facebook default picture	5
Group	5
Domestic animal	4
Drawing representing user	4
Object	4
Landscape	3
User's son	2
Total general	200

Authors' own creation.

The type of place used the most is the close-up (61), followed by a long shot (43) and middle shot (40). Regarding the angle, the most used angle is the normal angle, in 169 occasions, and secondly high angle shots (14). We only found 7 low angle shots, an angle traditionally considered as unfavorable for portraits. Profile portraits are the most distant psychologically speaking, and in this study we didn't find more than 5. In general, these have a commemorative or advertisement function and are used in public documents, seals and coins but not as a sample of our own identity. Therefore, we see how most people do not hide their face from the photograph's composition, because the majority are willing to be recognized easily.

3.2 Descriptive analysis

Regarding descriptive criteria, we have taken note of the number of people present in the image, the location where the photograph has been made, the space (interior or exterior and public or private), the possible setting, the type of people or objects present in the image, the presence of institutions and the direction of the glance.

The number of people in the profile picture is usually one, as observed on Table 1. Only in 5 occasions there appears a group of people, which can belong to the family or friends circle. In a study in 2008, a researcher of the California University, S. Zhao said that one of the main purposes of Facebook users was to project an image of oneself as socially desirable, a fact that explains a certain number of group images in the photographs present on social networks. Anyways, user's images are the ones that currently gain more ground, mostly outside adolescent groups. And in this analysis, only twice there appeared the sons in the profile picture, although surely is the sample was enclosed to a different group of users and the rest of pictures shared in the platform, results could vary.

The profiles where their person does not appear still have, however, the purpose of identity reconstruction, because either way specific characteristics outstand, even though they are not physical. They might convey that the person feels love for nature, or for a kind of art. These are images, like Mosquera says, that 'seem to separate the soul from the body, as if the person, thus represented, was no longer prisoner inside his or her own body nor inside a historical framework' (Mosquera, 2011:77). 14 users show images belonging to works of art or products of teh cultural industry, 11 to popular characters in the field of culture and music, 6 posts of political reivindication, 4 show domestic animals, 4 show more objects such as a photography camera or a basket full of mushrooms and three show a landscape as profile image. If personal pictures on social networks are more individual than ever, focused on the person; a considerable ammount of profile images and photographs shared in them are also used as a representation of the self despite showing settings or objects initially disassociated from oneself. More than ever, we also represent ourselves through what we like. The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo defines it using the concept of demaking and explains how "due to a sort of perversion of internal logics, the world of measurable and manipulable objects by technical science (the world of the real, according to metaphysics), has become the world of merchandise, images, the phantasmagorical world of media." What we like defines us: what we eat, the music we listen, where we like to go, the things we collect, to what we dedicate our leisure time, it says a lot about us.

The location where photographs were made, as observed on Table 2 is not defined in 56 occasions, because the plane doesn't let to see the context. In the remaining pictures, the space that appears the most is the street (29) or the inside of a house (24). Given the case the locations where the photograph was made could be seen, most places are public (113) and outdoors (97).

Table 2. Locations where the picture was made.

LOCATION	Total
Not defined	56
Street	29
House	24
Mountain	11
Monument	6
Beach	6
Restaurant	6

Authors' own creation.

By observing these current pictures and comparing them with those of family albums from the middle of the XX century, we also perceive a change in the most present institutions, that have always been useful to organize one's own biography, because they ranked a series of realities, making them

intelligible. Where before the church, the school, the town could be seen; now there is in almost a unique way, the house and the self. Only in 7 occasions we can conclude that the photographs show the user in his labor sphere and three in the family sphere. The presence of photographs belonging to social rites such as marriage or baptism is very small, only once there is a picture of a marriage on the day of their wedding.

Likewise, the presence of locations such as monuments, mountain, the sea or a restaurant informs us there are many people using holiday pictures as profile image. These have always had the function of showing others the "I have been here", notifying before others the personal adventure. Now, holiday places, beyond being visualized in long shot pictures posing before a monument, diversify into a collection of objects and spaces shared in detail shots and in real time, partly through other online platforms.

Regarding the setting, most people appear posing (134). Anyways, the way of posing has moved from the excess of formalism typical for the analogical photography, where there was no room for improvisation nor the relaxed gesture to a greater spontaneity. Users tend to look at the camera (107), and in 61 occasions they look outside the field or appear with their eyes closed.

Regarding picturesque or original activities, we find a person that appears looking at the television, another one that simulates fighting, another one that makes a picture hiding with his or her camera and another one waving. But this originality is not usual. Love manifestations are not abundant in this analyzed sample, mainly because there are few users who appear accompanied in their profile picture.

3.3 Technological analysis

Finally, the technological criteria consider the color of image, the possible defects and the presence of photo editing or non-photographic elements.

Most of pictures are in color (171). And from those that are black and white, we understand that only one is originally like that because it shows an old photograph, while the others have been modified with a later editing where the chromatic information has been erased from the image.

Beyond these color photo editing, no evident modifications are appreciated in pictures, although it is true that none of them have defects. Only two photographs have a possible defect: that one of them is unfocused and that in the other one the person appears cut. However, surely these defects are wanted and expressly aimed for by the author, as a way to mask his own image or to give a touch of originality. The digital photograph allows the possibility to observe the image while making it, a fact that makes that defective photographs could be repeated. This fact generates a lack of defects on images.

Also, as Winston (2013) observed, it is not common to see people photo-editing their Facebook pictures. The construction of identity is obtained more in relation to the selection among the multiple pictures we now have from ourselves than from photo-editing.

4. Discussion and conclusions

We commented on the introduction that the election of a profile picture in the Facebook social network is not based in the construction of a new identity, but instead in potentiating those virtues or parts of us we are more interested on highlighting. Therefore, we can conclude by describing what elements

have been potentiated the most in the re-creation (or reinforcement) of identity and not specifically in its construction.

The conclusions of the compositive analysis show us how the type of picture used the most is portrait, being the closeup, followed by the long shot, the most usual camera shot. Thus, information conveyed by profile images is the physical description of the person, who appears without performing any activity and without a clear context, therefore, although the compositive style is different from traditional identity cards' pictures, in a way, the function that is developed is the same.

The conclusions of descriptive data evidence that in general the owners of a profile appear alone in photographs, without anyone accompanying them. Despite this, there are some users, scarce, who appear accompanied by other family members, therefore rebuilding their identity by adopting a family role as parents or couple.

There is no specific space that appears as a favorite location to take pictures, most show a neutral or indefinite background. They are mainly photographs of people, and images are focused in them.

Regarding conclusions of technological data, we see how most of images were not altered or edited. They are practically all in color and without evident defects. This fact shows us how in the studied case, most users have not manipulated their pictures with an artistic purpose.

Thus, from mentioned hypothesis, the first one is clearly met, because the role of these photographs is clearly communicative and of self-representation. We find scarce examples of the use of photography with memoristic purpose, and very few where the user expresses in a plastic manner.

Regarding the second hypothesis, which indicated that profile pictures leave the formality of photography portraits behind and are spontaneous and taken in private settings, is met only partly. Although it is true that digital photography allows a greater spontaneity and making pictures in any place and situation, in the profile images analyzed what predominates is the more or less formal portrait. Likewise, in most of them an increase of images taken in the private field cannot be appreciated. Thus, although in other platforms dedicated to illustrating the daily routine a greater lack of shyness can be seen, profile images in the sample analyzed maintain formality and introduce the person in a public facet or what could assimilate to the stage described by Erving Goffmann.

The third hypothesis, in which we sensed that people could stop defining themselves through institutions such as family, religion or work to self-represent in a diverse manner instead mostly through individuality and their interests and hobbies, is complied with in this sample. Family albums have always been linked to leisure, because in the beginning the camera was only used in specific moments of our lives, being the holidays the most represented as well as those where rituals linked to institutions were celebrated. With the digital technology, we can make many pictures of the most trivial moments, not linked to any specific activity. Likewise, the reconstruction of identity can be done through several elements beyond traditional institutions, for instance from objects, characters belonging to popular culture with which we identify or through showing the political, sport or artistic hobbies of each one.

Therefore, the image of our identity that we offer through profile pictures on social networks, although it can have many features of our real identity, it is created and transformed at user's will. Although, as this article concludes, users analyzed in this study do not recreate themselves too evidently. Most

pictures show the person in a neutral background, without the support from people or objects defining them. With future studies, we expect to be able to complement the information shown here with other significant variables in the construction of identity on social networks, and specifically in Facebook, like the type of publications, pictures usually shared, comments and likes these generate and other contents that define the user.

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