

1. Title of the project

Front or back: Self-presentation and facial expressions in digital media

2. Coördinators

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3. Project summary

Photographs of faces (selfies and regular portraits) are an important means of communication on digital media. These are often photographs of oneself, alone or in the company of others, either taken by others (a portrait) or by oneself (a so-called selfie). These photos are used to consciously present oneself on online profiles (e.g., you use your best shot on an online dating profile, and your most professional looking picture on LinkedIn), but are also often spontaneously posted on Facebook or Instagram, or are sent around via WhatsApp or SnapChat. This project aims to study the communicative function of these portraits, in particular in the form of selfies, and aims to combine insights from facial expression research (Goudbeek), digital ethnography (Varis) and social media (Schouten). While this is a new project, it builds upon the current project by Varis and Schouten on self-representation and attractiveness on Tinder. The aim of this project is to study the communicative functions and appreciation of photos of faces (selfies and portraits) in different online contexts.

This question is addressed in three separate projects. In the first project, we will collect a large corpus of photographs of faces from online sources (with Instagram being the online resource of choice) and analyzing them with tools drawn from several disciplines (facial expression analysis, perception tests, qualitative analysis, automated extraction of meta-information). The data collection is an important part of the project, and will be carried out in a very structured, semi-automatic, manner. This way, a large, and well-structured corpus will be collected containing information about (a) facial expressions, (b) contextual information (e.g., number of people in photo, setting, apparel, body type), (c) photographic information (e.g., selfie or portrait, size, quality, camera), and (d) meta-information derived from the photo file and web site (e.g., the number of likes and reactions).

In the second project, we will analyze the communicative functions of these photos. The expressions from the online data collection effort will be analyzed with manual and automatic codings common in facial expression research, in perception studies investigating the possibly different communicative functions of the expressions in the photographs and by detailed qualitative analyzes investigating the different roles these photographs play in different online cultures. In these analyses, the ethnographic context (e.g., the profile or the means to frame the individual photos with text or emoticons) of the expressions is taken into account.

In the third project, we will investigate the extent to which different facial expressions and other photographic characteristics of photos of self affect the appreciation of these photos. To do so, we use the corpus collected in the first study. For each of these photos, we code facial expression, photographic characteristics, context information and meta-information and relate this to the number of likes and reactions that each photo receives. This way, we are able to analyze the role that different facial expressions and other photographic characteristics play in the assessment and appreciation of a photo.

The results of this project will inform theories of online self-presentation, both from the perspective of social media studies as well as from a digital ethnography point of view, and will extend findings

from facial expression research to online contexts. These results will be communicated in one or more journal papers and conference proceedings.

4. Project timeline

The project will run from approximately (the end of) January 2016 till (the beginning of) December 2016.

Table 1. Project Timeline.

| Task | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Start project | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Theory development | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Corpus development | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Photo collection | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Content Analysis | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Progress report | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Communicative functions | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interviews | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Survey | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Photo Appreciation | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Corpus Analysis | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Paper writing | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Presentation symposium | | | | | | | | | | | |
| End project | | | | | | | | | | | |

5. Deliverables

The project will result in a joint publication by the two coordinators and the two trainees as well as a conference presentation. Specifically, the deliverables are as follows:

- ✓ Presentation of the project results at the symposium that is to be organized as part of the Research Traineeships Program in December 2016.
- ✓ Submission of a full paper to the *Annual Conference of the International Communication Association* conference. Deadline: November 2016.
- ✓ Submission of a paper to an academic journal. Possible outlets are: 'Communication Research', 'New Media & Society' and 'Journal of Nonverbal Behavior'. Deadline: December 2016.

6. Research trainee profile

While not special skills are required, some basic knowledge about the technical possibilities of acquiring photos from digital media would be beneficial for at least one of the student assistants. In principle, every type of student can apply (Ba, Ma, ReMa), be it that the student is motivated and shows clear academic interest in the research topic. Students will gain experience in large scale data collection and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of facial expressions.

Applicants should send a resume and motivation letter to the first project coordinator. In the motivation letter, they should clearly indicate their interest in the topic of the traineeship as well as the contribution they think they can make.