Visual Communication and Self-presentation on the Facebook Social Network and the Pedagogic Respects of the Phenomenon

Theses of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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Structure of the doctoral dissertation

**Introduction**

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- The publicness of the self
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**Research phase no. 1**
Method: data collection with online questionnaire, data analysis. Sampling: partially random, on basis of easily approachable subjects (students, colleagues, friends), partially by snowball sampling, and partially based on targeted contacts.

**Research phase no. 2**
Method: quantitative and qualitative analysis of the captured pictorial contents in the public visual communication on the Facebook profiles of users who consented to this in the questionnaire

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**Summary**
Answering the research questions articulated in the hypotheses. Proceeds, limitations and future opportunities of the research.

**SELF-IMAG(E)ination and LIKENesses – visual education projects**
Significance and timeliness of the topic
The success as well as the explosive spread and development of the Internet, and in particular Web 2.0, can be explained – beyond technological and practical aspects – with its social nature and possibilities, as, by building on the basic motives of human nature, it satisfies our social needs and our desire to self-expression. This is particularly true since the appearance of social media and, even more, of social networks (boyd, Ellison, 2007).
The most significant, largest social network also at present, and also having the biggest impact, Facebook currently counts more than one billion registered users; and, in addition to its social and communication functions, with its daily upload of 300 million pictures it is the biggest collection of pictures as well (Facebook, 2015).

After W. J. Thomas Mitchell (1992), we can talk about a pictorial turn since the nineties (by referring to the flow of visual information broadcasted by the media, the dominance of visuality, the new set of tools, and the new directions of scientific thinking that are formed along visual paradigms). Since then, amongst the information communication and technological developments of the past decades, in the new media contents we can clearly see the further growth of the role and appearance of visualisation, as well as the dominance of pictures, motion pictures and the visuality defining our world and identity. The overwhelming visualisation that dominates social interactions and the endless flow of pictorial information form the everyday environment of young people, basically influencing their attitudes, forming their taste, and also providing space and forum for their creativity.

Due to the ever more intensive media consumption and the spread of digitalisation, the visual language has become a generally used, mandatory language that got more appreciated and its knowledge and use indispensable, strengthening the need for developing visual competences and the role and responsibility of visual education and skill development.

This new media phenomenon and social scene contains both opportunities and risks, and, although it is not at all easy to draw the line between them, our pedagogic responsibility in this respect is to improve consciousness. The research provides a theoretical and empiric base for this by getting to know and analysing the social and communicational procedures taking place in the online social space, and by exploring the positive and negative effects thereof; while through peeking into the pictorial world determining the visual consumption and culture of young people, it may set a direction and define tasks for visual education.
Theoretical framework
The research was focused on the visual aspects of the new communicational phenomenon as well as on the strategies and imagery of visual self-representation, and its theoretical foundations were laid in three aspects: communication theory, identity theory and visual theory. All three theoretical chapters are closed with teaching and educational aspects of the changes presented.

The chapter titled We are part of the network gives an overview of the characteristics of the World Wide Web, which provides the technological background for Facebook, and that of communication on the Internet, along with their most important development phases in terms of social media and social networks (hypertext, World Wide Web, Web 2.0), highlighting – as a result of the Web 2.0 revolution – the birth of the genuine possibilities of interactivity, social content provision and many-to-many communication, and the significance of their effects.

The various theories and models of communication consider different aspects of communication as their central question. The significant interactive potentials of social networks, which realise an extremely complex organisation of communication opportunities, are embodied in the many possibilities of mutual connections and feedbacks; while their high participative potential is realised through active participation, accessibility, availability and the possibility of cooperation. The continuous online presence, togetherness and communication amplify the ritual and phatic aspects of communication, along with its contents aimed at the continuous maintenance of connection, and its socio-emotional functions. In the description of communication on social networks, the network theoretic approach became prominent around the millennium, as the online communities, connection networks provide a vivid example for networking and for the observation of the network model and its key features – ‘small world’ concept, scale-free networks, mutual embeddedness and ‘weak ties’ concept –, making true McLuhan’s “global village” (1964) or the “chain links” in Karinthy’s fantasy (1929). A realisation worth highlighting is the importance weak linkages play in crisis situations as well as in the maintenance, renewal and strengthening of the network and also of social networks by way of utilising the new information gained from distant connections and by realising the extended relational capital (Granovetter, 1973, Csermely, 2005, Csermely et al., 2009).

The new world of communication changes our way of thinking as well as the methods and customs how we obtain information, read and learn. The new pedagogic approach and learning theory that was born from the interdisciplinary intersection of network research, information technology
and pedagogy, connectivism (network based learning, Siemens, 2005) interprets knowledge as a network, and emphasises the role of connections and the community, and, at the same time, the possibility of customised and individual ways of learning in the learning process. The paradigm shift in communication and, in relation to that, in the way of thinking basically affects the world of education and the roles of the school, the teacher and the student. It was in this relation that we examined the effect the use of social networks bearing the marks of the connectivist approach, in particular Facebook, has on education, along with the possibilities and attempts of integrating them in the process of teaching and learning, and the methods of utilisation realised so far. The case studies reviewed highlighted the significance of source sharing, collaborative learning and knowledge building, peer support and peer assessment (Kárpáti et al., 2012; Kárpáti, Papp 2013).

As a result of community content provision ensured by Web 2.0 both the users’ attitude and social media have changed, and so the everyday users of Facebook became content creators and publishers of messages and also I-messages from passive receivers. This directly leads to the personalisation of online communication and a new kind of publicness of social networks. The chapter The publicness of the self summarises the concepts and interpretations relevant from the aspect of the deeper understanding of Facebook-presence, -interaction and identity communication, as well as the theories relating to the I-system, personal and social identity and how these are displayed. Accordingly, the main emphases of the overview lie on the symbolic interactionist approaches, having their focus on interaction and the social product nature of identity, the thesis of Goffman (1959), analysing the strategies of making impressions and presenting the self, the narrative interpretations of the self as it is construed from the stories processed during the interactions and the representation of the self, as well as the postmodern theories articulating the dissolution of the “narrative order” and the Self’s integrative nature, and the multiplication and fragmentation of identity. In today’s information society, the mediatisation of the Self is accompanied by the r/evolution of identity. With the rearrangement of the relations between the physical and spiritual being, and the consciousness and physical reality of people, identity becomes more varied, complex and problematic, in which a countless combination of and compromise between online and offline identities (real selves, true selves, hidden self, virtual selves, false self) may come into existence.

By exposing it to continuous reflections, Facebook embeds the individual in the network of its connections, amplifying the role of the expectations of and feedbacks from the social environment, and that of continuous interaction
with others, in the process of shaping and communication of the identity. The Facebook identity is virtual, as it is presented in the online medium of Facebook. It is real in the sense that in the “anchored” (Zhao et al., 2008), named system of connections of the offline to online (i.e. built on real acquaintances) social network it is highly bound to actual relations. At the same time, it cannot be considered identical with the offline self, as, within certain boundaries, Facebook’s online medium also creates the possibility to “stretch the truth a bit” (Yurchisin et al., 2005) when forming and idealising the identity, presenting a hoped-for possible self of the individual that is better positioned in the community and is socially more desirable (“hoped-for possible selves”, “socially desirable” – Yurchisin et al., 2005). The hoped-for possible self presented on Facebook is, accordingly, not real, but it might be true, as, eliminating the obstructive powers operating in reality and bringing the hidden layers of the self into the surface may result in the identity unfolding more fully (Zhao et al., 2008). At the same time, the operation of desired and expected identity constructions that are formed in the pressure of continuous comparison, may lead to self-esteem and personality development problems (narcissistic, anxious, dependent, depressive), and the extreme retreat of the traditional forms of communication may be followed by isolation and a self-image and self-knowledge that becomes distorted in lack of reflections and a social mirror.

The changes in the process of socialisation and identity forming (“DIY biography” – Ulrich Beck; “autonomous socialisation”, “patchwork identities” – Preuss-Lausitz, 1997), and the valueless pluralism and individualism of mediatised postmodernity lacking authority and taking the place of the values, norms, believes and convictions that were traditionally handed over in the family and schools, shook the foundations of the institution of schools as well as the world of teaching and education. In the meanwhile, it is exactly the same changes that extremely increase the role and responsibility of institutionalised education. The concepts of educational theory born to solve the postmodern educational paradox, the strategy of value articulation (Mihály, 2001), the pluralist school and the negotiated education built on the “decide and explain!” principle (Preuss-Lausitz, 1997) emphasise the teacher’s function assisting value socialisation and the forming of identity, which requires the development of self-knowledge and social competences, and the teacher’s moderator and facilitative role, instead of value transmission and judgement making.

In communication on social networks, the representation of identity and the strategies of making impressions and presenting the self are dominated by pictures and motion pictures. The development in information communication, broadband Internet and the Web 2.0 technology, as well as
the availability and quick spread of digital cameras, video cameras, photo and video capable mobile and smartphones that are of high quality but still easy to use, brought the expansion and dominance of pictorial and video information, replacing the previous static and text contents on the World Wide Web with user-created multimedia contents. The third, image theoretic chapter of the theoretic background, to be in the picture, processes that phases of the changes in pictures, visuality, relations to pictures, picture creation and use that are relevant in terms of visual communication taking place on Facebook, along with the changes in functions of personal photography, and the “practice” and “theory” of the democratisation, digitalisation and dematerialisation of pictures. The analysing overview is interpreting the paradigm shifting effect of the pictorial turn and the post-photographic era (Mitchell, 1992) or photography after photography (Manovich, 1995), the reality/representation problem of pictures, and is attempting to place everyday mediatisation into a broader context by reflecting to the key momenta of the relating discussions of picture theory and photo theory (Bourdieu, Barthes, Sontag, Benjamin, Baudrillard, Flusser, Chalfen).

With digitalisation and the new communication technologies, pictures are accompanied by new characteristics and new picture types, changing the concept of pictures and resulting in an astonishing flow of pictures in visual communication, where the boundaries between original and copy, picture and raw material, processing and manipulation, creator and user have become blurred by now. The visual contents that are mostly created and published by anonymous users and then, developing a life of their own, flood the World Wide Web, are often recycled, transformed, manipulated pictures, remixes and memes, new and typically humorous forms of opinion forming and expression, which create “a new kind of popular, democratic ’plebeian’ publicity” and thus belong to the phenomenon of mediatised folklore (Glózer, 2013).

Through the massive amount of picture sharing, Facebook has become the biggest collection of pictures on the World Wide Web. The photos displayed in the personal publicity of the social network and its medium that is better connected to reality, can also be interpreted as the late modern embodiments of traditional family photo albums or visit card collections that were popular in the 19th century. They contain the individual’s network of connections, a visual catalogue of their private and public relations, and, as tools for personal and collective memory, communication, identity expression and forming, they basically fulfil the social functions of traditional photography, only they do so on the new scene of social communication, to a different extent and in varied manners. The practice of shooting and using photos is becoming more personal and individual; each person disposes over his or her
uploads and shares, as does over the online projection of his or her self-picture, where the emphasis is shifted towards the individual from the community and towards individual representation from family representation. The publicity of the self extends to a broader scope of relations – mostly within the age group – outside the family, creating peculiar new interpretations and compromises of the overlapping concepts of intimacy and publicity. In the medium of the social network the communication function of pictures is dominant, making the message more concise and concrete in the current context of the momentary interaction, the ritual, phatic, social and emotional content of which, aimed at maintaining the connection, often supersedes its informative value.

The virtual meeting points (Dahlgren 2010, 187) of Facebook profile photos and the pictures uploaded to albums evoke a visually activated and amplified feeling of togetherness that can also be captured in the concepts of “presence-in-absence” (Villi, Stocchetti, 2011, 106), presence and “synchronous gaze” (Villi, Stocchetti, 2011, 108). By way of mobile communication, they create the possibility for mediated closeness and intimacy that is maintained continuously, without physical presence (“full-time intimacy” – Matsuda 2005, 30.).

The new media phenomenon, which is also the most typical picture type on Facebook, namely selfie, fulfils the requirements of keeping continuous contact, providing instant, situation-relevant visual information and exercising controlled self-definition, which – due to its promptness, directness, and its presence that is independent from space and time – is the most typical visual imprint of our times.

By increasingly determining the everyday life of young people, the flood of pictures on the social network is becoming a basic – and, for many, primary – source of information, and the form language source of their visual culture and the base for the visual competences at the same time.

Although the digitalisation and the different picture processing and editing programs allow ample space for unfolding creativity – at least in the narrow circle of competent users – the depicting opportunities and picture manipulating automatisms of the social network specific mobile applications, which can be accessed by a growing scope of users and are easy to use, produce a massive amount of schematic pictorial representations. In the instant culture focusing on sharing the moment, the issues of conscious visual expression and picture composition are overshadowed, the same way as critical comments are rarely made in the confidence net of Facebook communities. This leads to a reproduction of visual patterns which also means “the reproduction of visual competences (or the lack thereof)” (Csiszár, 2013). All these increase the role and responsibility of visual education and skills development, where the most important task is renewal.
in terms of attitudes and contents, adjusted to the views and competence needs of the “new visual era” (Kárpáti, 2013), by integrating the new media, visual language expression tools, new social creative forms, forums and scenes into visual development.

By way of providing an insight into the pictorial world determining the visual consumption and culture of young people, the empiric study of Facebook may set the directions and tasks for visual education.

**Objectives, hypotheses, research method and sample**

The objective of the research is to examine and create a typology of Facebook’s visual contents, study and reveal the picture using and picture viewing habits, motivations, preferences, visual self-presentation strategies and portraying methods of Facebook users, that is, to study and interpret the visual communication that takes place on the social network.

The research was carried out in two phases, by using two different but complementary examination methods. In the first phase, by reasons of both contents and methodology, a questionnaire was used that formed the base for picture analysis and aimed at getting to know the picture using habits and practices of Facebook users.

Then, the picture analysis in the second phase of the research examined the visual contents captured in the public visual communication on the Facebook profiles of the respondents who consented thereto in the questionnaire, with particular respect to any detectable differences according to gender and age, language area and culture, or qualification in visual and other arts, and any common patterns that can be established according to these criteria. Picture analysis, on the one hand, is suitable for verifying and toning the responses given in the self-assessment questionnaire, and, on the other hand, by setting up a picture typology and presenting the typical and stereotypical elements and portraying conventions of pictorial self-representation it offers an insight, from several points of view, into the phenomena of the visual communication on the new social scene.

Sampling took place partially randomly, on basis of easily approachable subjects (students, colleagues, friends), partially by snowball sampling, and partially based on targeted contacts. The methodology of research was data collection by way of online questionnaire and the evaluation of the results, as well as picture analysis using semantic and iconographic-iconological methods.
Hypotheses

Hypothesis no. 1:
A Facebook iconography can be established. The visual contents on Facebook can be sorted according to a typology, into types and categories that can be defined and differentiated, and which characterise the pictorial communication on the social network and validly describe the visually displayed characters of the groups of Facebook users. Typical picture types change according to gender and/or age (the picture using and viewing habits, motivations and preferences differ in the case of women and men and the respective age groups; they upload, share and view pictures in different volumes and with different contents on Facebook).

Sub-hypothesis
The social network is a tool and scene first of all for everyday communication and social interactions. The general opinion on Facebook – which considers the social network as an entertainment tool and a tool to spend one’s free time pleasantly, drawing a distinct line between Facebook and the field of schools and learning – is also shown in the Facebook picture material, namely in the marginality of how schools and learning is visually represented.

Hypothesis no. 2:
The way how women and men are represented on Facebook photos complies with the social expectations of the age groups and their stereotypes regarding female and male roles.

Hypothesis no. 3:
The depiction of women and men on the photos uploaded to Facebook follow the way how women and men are represented and conventionally depicted in professional mass media, as well as the symbolic contents and stereotypes conveyed in such depiction conventions.

Questionnaire on the practice of using pictures on Facebook
Online data capturing took place between July and December 2013; the questionnaire was completed by 290 respondents, 119 men and 171 women, typically by members of the younger generation (15 to 22 years), mostly students. Question groups in the questionnaire explore the picture using and picture viewing habits, motivations, preferences, visual self-presentation strategies and portraying conventions of Facebook users, and aim to reveal the differences according to gender and age as expressed in the research hypothesis, and further, the assumed differences according to visual and art qualifications.
Hypothesis:

The picture using and picture viewing habits, motivations, preferences of Facebook users change according to gender, age and qualification (women and men, the different age groups, and those who have participated in visual/art education and those who have not upload, share and view pictures in different volumes and with different contents on Facebook).

As regards the practice of using pictures on Facebook, basically three sub-hypotheses were laid down:

a) As the users’ age increases, their use of the social site typically becomes more conscious and more targeted, and this also shows in photo making habits.

b) The difference between men and women can be observed in the openness of Facebook usage practices and also in activity: women are more open and more active in using Facebook.

c) Facebook users who have participated or are currently taking part in visual/arts education, are characterised by a more conscious identity building strategy and attempts to self-expression, and this also shows in their practice of sharing pictures.

The questionnaire survey confirmed the offline to online tendency established in the majority of previous Facebook researches (Lampe et al., 2006; Lampe et al., 2007; Back et al., 2010): both motivation and the Facebook activity aim primarily to maintain the relationships already existing in real life and to extend the communication channels online, overshadowing the opportunities to make new acquaintances. This is related to the medium of Facebook that can be considered realistic and authentic, and to its character that is basically direct, amicable, and mostly positive and supportive.

Users perceive and think of Facebook more or less as a safe environment, and they, too, consider their Facebook presence primarily as a real social scene with authentic and real connections. Nearly three fourth of the respondents did not experience any negative effects during or in consequence of his or her Facebook activity, and the majority of those asked receive typically positive feedbacks in connection with what they share.

As regards conscious use, the research did not reveal any significant differences either between age groups or genders.

Users spend the significant part (the second biggest part after chatting) of their time on Facebook with viewing and commenting on others’ pictures and with uploading and sharing pictures; more than 60 percent of them uploads to and shares pictures on their profile at least on a monthly basis, and the websites regularly followed through Facebook – mostly picture and video sharing sites, webzines – are also dominated by visualisation.
For those participating in the survey, the main motivation and reason behind picture sharing is to document shared experiences. Users mostly participate and communicate within the Facebook community in their role as a friend; they say that they mostly share and view photos on Facebook in connection with friendship, pictures capturing friends, their time together and the experiences they share with one another.

The results of the survey only partially supported the assumed differences in picture use according to gender and age. By age groups, the users between 19 and 22 years have the biggest number of pictures on their Facebook profiles. With the increase of age, a certain process of individualisation can be observed on basis of picture use on Facebook, during which the self-contained, independent individual is becoming the focus point. This is also shown in the selection of pictures posted on Facebook: in the case of elder users (above 19) their own decisions play a lot bigger part when choosing their profile picture than in the case of younger people, whose decisions are determined also by external aspects (the opinion of friends and family members) in a bigger proportion.

Women’s Facebook profiles contain a lot more pictures and they upload and share pictures and videos significantly more often than men, and a bigger part of their time on Facebook is made up by updating their profile picture, arranging the photos in their albums and by viewing the pictures of others, than in the case of men. They participate in the Facebook community more openly: there are a lot more users who registered under a fake name among men than women (11 vs 1%). This difference is also confirmed by cluster analysis: women are overrepresented in the group of those who share their experiences and express themselves, while more men are passive and withdrawn than women.

The motivations behind sharing pictures are also different in the case of women and men. While those uploading pictures to show status symbols and material goods are present in a bigger proportion among men, for women, what mostly matter are reasons of emotional motivation. On basis of the questionnaire survey, a significant difference in this respect can be established only with regard to romantic relationships (while 41 percent of women likes to view pictures of others’ relationships, this is true only for 24 percent of men), and that women tend to ask for and take into account the opinion of others when posting their pictures more than men do.

**Picture analysis**
For the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the captured pictorial contents of the public visual communication on the profiles of users who consented to this in the questionnaire, 199 picture corpuses were available, comprising the
pictures, profile pictures and cover pictures from the Facebook profiles of 72 men and 127 women, as well as their pictures shared on their timeline, along with the image contents of other photo albums, that is, a visual material of altogether 5622 items from 199 Facebook users.

**Facebook iconography, picture typology**

In the first part of the analysis, the examination aimed at sorting the visual material into types and groups by way of analysing the characteristics of the pictures available, and it examined the differences that could be observed in the sample of pictures, with particular attention to differences according to gender and age, visual and art qualifications, and language and cultural differences, along with any common patterns that could be established according to these criteria.

Hypothesis no. 1: A Facebook iconography can be established. The visual contents on Facebook can be sorted according to a typology, into types and categories that can be defined and differentiated, and which characterise the pictorial communication on the social network and validly describe the visually displayed characters of the groups of Facebook users. Typical picture types change according to gender and/or age (the picture using and viewing habits, motivations and preferences differ in the case of women and men and the respective age groups; they upload, share and view pictures in different volumes and with different contents on Facebook).

On basis of the picture material examined, by using the analysation frameworks by Richard Chalfen (Snapshot versions of life, 1987) and Roland Barthes (Le message photographique, 1961) it can be established that Facebook users upload to and share on the social network pictures that can be sorted to characteristic types and categories regarding their topic, form, function, and the scope of those making and those displayed on the photos.

The general impression formed as a result of the analysation of pictures reveals a world in the community medium of the social network that is positive, friendly, full of love, radiates happiness and joy, and is free from worries. This is expressed first of all by the central topic of Facebook picture patterns, namely the depiction of close friendships, but the same is expressed by the idyllic photo topics about love and bonds, the relating love discussions, as well as by pictures of careless togetherness and unclouded vacations. Apart from a few exceptions, Facebook pictures do not convey negative emotions and experiences. The comments made on pictures are mostly positive, supportive feedbacks, likes, congratulations and acknowledgements. At other times, these are teases and jokes saturated with
irony and humour, but typically they do not contain offending or aggressive expressions.

Different types of Facebook users (the boyfriend, the girlfriend; the partygoer, social; the hedonist, the popular, entertaining; the animal friendly; the opinion-giver; the idealist; the careerist; the hideaway…) can be named based on their pictures, considering their choices, content and form, topic and photographic situation, quality and quantity. These are not clear categories; especially in the case of profiles with photo albums with a high number of pictures the individual may belong to several types, and their type may change in different periods.

The research confirmed the different usage of pictures by Facebook users according to gender and age as assumed in the hypothesis, and further, the analysis has come to certain findings regarding differences according to language and culture as well as visual and arts qualification.

The most apparent change is a process of individualisation with the increase of age, during which the individual’s Facebook identity and self-presentation goes from social towards individual, and from peer friend relations towards the expression of the self-contained, independent individual. With the growing age, the number of pictures of relationships with friends is becoming less in Facebook users’ self-presentation, and the group pictures, whose number significantly lessens with the increase of the number of years anyway, are rather about family members. Another apparent difference can be noticed in the proportion of self-photos i.e. selfies, which are self-expression tools typically used by younger age groups, and which have become a new and peculiar genre, and a social phenomenon at the same time. Expressing personal presence, the promptness of self-reporting, and the directness and spontaneity of presentation, and in a direct relation with the spread of digitalisation, smartphones and social media, selfies have become visual imprints typical of our age, and they are the most typical iconographic type on the social network. Their primary function is socio-emotional; fulfilling the phatic and ritual function of communication in Facebook’s pictoral messages, they aim to continuously maintain contact and social bond, evoking the feeling of “presence-in-absence” (Villi and Stocchetti, 2011, 106), being there, togetherness and maintained mediatised intimacy (“full-time intimacy” – Matsuda, 2005, 30).

The analysis has revealed differences in the examined picture sample also by gender. Women clearly upload more photos to their profile page than men (almost twice as much in average), and there are more photos of themselves
among their pictures. This difference is smaller as regards the proportion of simple portraits but is more significant when it comes to posing-alone selfies. Men prefer traditional portraits and snapshots, on which they are displayed typically not statically but in the midst of some kind of activity. Uploading a profile picture that hides away their real personality and appearance, and using pictures, signs, symbols, landscapes instead of a real photo, or real but unrecognisable photos, is more typical of men than women. On women’s profile pages, profile photos of couples and groups, as well as profile photos taken while posing in front of the mirror, can be found in a lot bigger proportion than on men’s pages. But it is not only regarding selfies but also group photos that the balance inclines on the side of women. Topics preferred by women are female and male friends, relationship, love, family, pets, holiday, while among the pictures of men there are more about their favourite activities, hobby, sports, movies, music, humorous contents, visual gags, sharing of memes, and the manipulation of their pictures and the use of different picture transforming effects are also more typical of men. A typical difference can be observed in the style of the comments on pictures and in the style of profile pages comprising the profile picture and cover picture; this difference results from the way how men express their emotions as well as from social expectations as regards what is feminine and what is masculine. Comments from the opposite sex are mostly positive, supportive and appreciative in the case of both sex; apparent differences can be observed if we look at comments from friends from the same sex. Comments from women on women’s pictures are also mostly nice, appraising, appreciative and positive, while comments from men on men’s pictures usually contain ironic and humorous observations and funny lines. It occurs on male profile pages, too, that they can be seen with their companion or lover on their profile picture. Also the style of such types of profiles spectacularly differs from the romantic and idyllic style of female profiles. The cover pictures of such profiles showing a man posing with his companion – in an interesting contrast with the loving and intimate mood of the profile picture – radiate power, hardness and masculinity, and sometimes prevent the domination of the emotional and romantic effect with some aggressive, bloody, provocative or humorous content.

In the sample examined, in addition to the 162 Hungarian language profiles there are also 37 profiles in English, with pictures from the Facebook pages of students from England. The collection of English pictures are dominated by selfies of couples and groups, on which people often take on funny poses, make faces at, provocative gestures to, or stick their tongues out at the camera. All in all, the picture material is characterised by cheerful time with friends, party and humour; however, the topic of love and relationships is not
typical at all, and there are only few pictures showing intimate moments or couples posing together or holding each other. The most apparent difference between the Hungarian and English picture material is the colourfulness and multiculturalism of the English sample. The students of mostly English secondary schools and colleges represent several kinds of ethnicities and culture, their ethnic and cultural origin expressly shows on their pictures and in their comments, and the coexistence of different cultures, languages, habits, traditions and religions evokes many pictures, comments and notes that affect the topics of affiliation, tradition, tolerance, equality and freedom. Hungarian speaking pages appear more homogenous in this respect; it is mostly the profiles of folk dancers or folk musicians dealing with the Hungarian folk culture as a hobby or profession that convey information about cultural background, the object culture, clothes and traditions of the Hungarian people, through the pictures.

Of the 199 Facebook users, 36 attend art school, or have graduated from some kind of fine arts or applied arts school, or have participated in other kind of arts education. The analysis revealed differences between the picture materials of those who were more qualified and those who were less qualified in terms of visual culture and arts. The Facebook profiles of “art students” contained more pictures on average, and among them, in a much higher proportion creative visual solutions, own works, artistic creations, more manipulated pictures, transformed with filters and other line and colour effects, requiring the knowledge of picture editing programs and sense of style, as well as reproductions and paraphrases of artworks. It can be traced back to the high level of visual and aesthetic standards, the knowledge of composition and expressing tools, the more conscious picture creation and self-presentation, and sometimes a high level of photographic skills that the genre of selfie is clearly overshadowed by more traditional photographic sets and composition methods.

Within the thematic categorisation of Facebook typology, the research articulated as a sub-hypothesis its assumption regarding the topic of school and learning:

Sub-hypothesis
The social network is a tool and scene first of all for everyday communication and social interactions. The general opinion on Facebook – which considers the social network as an entertainment tool and a tool to spend one’s free time pleasantly, drawing a distinct line between Facebook and the field of schools and learning – also shows in the
Facebook picture material, namely in the marginality of how schools and learning is visually represented.

Pictures that can be correlated with school, school life, the class community or learning make up 3.34 percent of the total picture corpus, meaning 188 pictures in total, comprising 152 pictures uploaded by 19 women (14 to 24 years old) and 36 pictures on the profiles of 7 men (16 to 19 years old). In terms of proportions, women share more pictures in this topic, 8 on average, while men 5.1 pictures on average. From Hungarian profiles, 68 pictures (from 18 user profiles) and from the English pages, 120 pictures (from 8 user profiles) make up this sub-sample, which are pictures of “art and non-art” students in a 20.75% and 79.25% proportion i.e. pictures from Facebook users who have attended some kind of art/visual education and who have not.

Sorting according to themes resulted in seven categories of pictures. The biggest group (49.5%) consists of photos taken during events, excursions and field trips related to school but taking place outside the school. 16.0 percent of the picture collection is connected to the rituals of transition, as they capture the solemn moments of proms, graduations from high school and college. The group photos (10.1%) which are substantially independent from the location and event, are set in a planned or less planned manner, express friendship, bonds, peer affiliation and collective identity. Part of the pictures were taken during classes or school lessons (8.0%). A separate group is made up by photos presenting the results achieved and acknowledgements received in school, photos focusing on awards, prizes, certificates, theses, and other objects of acknowledgement (4.2%), traditional class photos (2.6%) and nostalgic photos recalling primary school years (9.6%).

Indeed, in the world of Facebook that seems cloudless, careless, and focuses on enjoying life, school and learning as topics are not so typical. Pictures that can be correlated with school, school life, the class as a community, and learning, make up 3.34 percent of the total picture material from Facebook, but still, this proportion is higher than the infinitesimal (0.1%) ratio of presenting work.

Presumably, Facebook photos are not suitable sources for a full and authentic description of the real circumstances of education, if for no other reason than at least due to photo situations keeping a distance from school presence and class situations, and taken mostly outside school, and due to the substantially one-sided student point of view. Through their examination, however, the emphases of picture selection become describable, expressing the users’ intentions which mostly aim to share community experiences, memories and
cheerful moments, to strengthen peer relationships, friendships and the feeling of belonging together, and they do so also through the pictures that can be correlated with school.

**Female and male roles, gender stereotypes**
The second part of analysis of the picture material from Facebook aimed to analyse the gender aspects of identity building, presentation and impression making, the visual expression of the set of roles of women and men, and their representations, examining whether the way how Facebook profile photos represent women and men comply with the social expectations of the age groups, and the stereotypes regarding female and male roles.

**Hypothesis no. 2:** The way how women and men are represented on Facebook photos complies with the social expectations of the age groups and their stereotypes regarding female and male roles.

The survey evaluated the current (as of the time of data collection) profile pictures of 191 Facebook users (out of the 199, 8 persons did not upload any profile pictures), along with their former profile pictures (if they had more than one), totalling to 273 pictures of 191 users, comprising 177 profile photos of 124 women and 96 of 67 men, on the basis of how the characteristics and gender markers chosen according to literature, previous researches and stereotype surveys apply to them in terms of the appearance, gestures, posture and look of the person depicted. The characteristics examined were the dependent, emotional, sexy, dreamer, feminine, active, dominant, independent, cool and masculine; markers with surplus meaning based on associations connected to traditional gender roles.

The analysis found that traditional gender stereotypes are followed in terms of all characteristics examined. At the same time, none of the markers were connected to exclusively female or male depictions; representations are more pluralistic, gender stereotypes are presented with less contrasts, not with rigid binary; and, as regards the respective characteristics, in the convergence of percentage ratios of female and male representations they reflect the changes in stereotypic images and depictions of ideal-typical masculinity and femininity that can also be tracked in media representations. This change can be observed in the widening and plurality of roles, which, in the case of female representations, projects into the traditional and still typical female role a more colourful picture of a more independent, purposeful, harder, more active woman stepping forth from the background and who is also more liberated and initiating in the field of sexuality. In the case of male representations, the still-standing concepts of male dominance
and masculinity are mixed with emotions, emotional richness, and the expression of emotions, outlining a type of a man who is more emotional, sensitive and vulnerable.

**Portrayal conventions and media effects**

The third part of analysing the Facebook picture material examined what effect professional mass media has on Facebook pictures; in particular, whether the visual solutions and ways of depiction communicated by the media can be observed on the users’ photos.

Hypothesis no. 3: The depiction of women and men on the photos uploaded to Facebook follow the way how women and men are represented and conventionally depicted in professional mass media, as well as the symbolic contents and stereotypes conveyed in such depiction conventions.

The analysis examined on basis of the dimensions established in Erving Goffman’s Gender Advertisements (1979) study (which examined the depictions of women and men in the picture advertisements of magazines) whether the depiction conventions of the media – which slightly change, are not so rigidly binary but still, are rather stable – appear on pictures in the Facebook picture material where couples, that is, women and men together, are pictured.

The examination covered the Facebook users’ last photographs showing a woman and man together (if the user’s profile contained such a picture), 42 photos altogether; 27 photos from women’s profiles (15 to 29 years old) and 15 photos from men’s profiles (15 to 22 years old).

Goffman’s seven dimensions were: relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, family, infantilisation, the ritualization of subordination and the phenomenon of licensed withdrawal.

The examination of the pictorial expression of one of the seven dimensions, namely that of family (father-daughter or father-son relationship) cannot be considered relevant in the sample, as there is only one photo among the 42 pictures which shows the relationship between parent and child, namely a 16 year old boy with his mother. Therefore, photos displaying women and men together were evaluated in six dimensions. The results partially confirmed the hypothesis: in three dimensions (relative size, feminine touch, ritualization of subordination) from the six, the majority of female and male depictions in the Facebook picture sample have Goffman’s indicators of female subordination on them; in the remaining three dimensions (function ranking, infantilisation, licensed withdrawal), however, Goffman’s findings on media representation were not true for most of the photos. In line with the results of the second
examination, results show the symbolic visual expression of female subordination and the traditional female role; at the same time, the theses by Goffman that were not confirmed suggest a certain approximation between gender roles and the function ranking of men and women, and that the sharing of tasks and roles is becoming more balanced, and female competence characteristics are more recognised.

Summary
The results received through the two research methods (questionnaire survey and picture analysis) are concordant from several aspects, and, on the other hand, they complement and add some tones to the picture of Facebook’s visual contents and users’ picture using habits.

Both the questionnaire survey and picture analysis confirmed the offline to online tendency established in the majority of previous Facebook researches: both motivation and the Facebook activity aim primarily to maintain the relationships already existing in real life and to extend the communication channels online, overshadowing the opportunities to make new acquaintances. This is related to the medium of Facebook that can be considered realistic and authentic, and to its character that is basically direct, amicable, and mostly positive and supportive. When interpreting the general positive picture and Facebook attitude, the limits of the research and examination methods, the given opportunities to see into Facebook profiles as well as the self-certification nature of the questionnaire survey all have to be taken into account.

Users perceive and think of Facebook more or less as a safe environment, and they, too, consider their Facebook presence primarily as a real social scene with authentic and real connections. The two examination methods, however, show a difference between the replies and opinions given to data protection questions and the actual behaviour that could be observed on basis of the contents examined during picture analysis. According to the replies, the pictures, videos and photo albums are mostly visible for friends or the friends of friends, but, in reality, most of them is available for all Facebook users. As regards conscious use, the research did not reveal any significant differences either between age groups or genders. Although users are aware that Facebook’s publicity and the conditions of the digital environment (persistence, possibility for searching, replication, and anonymity) may make their privacy vulnerable, the social profits of Facebook presence override the possible risks and dangers.

The dominance of visualisation in the communication on Facebook can be established with both examination methods – as social networks have become a new scene of social interaction, they have also become a medium for
everyday visual consumption – but the dominance of visuality is also true for
the websites (mainly picture and video sharing sites, webzines) regularly
followed through Facebook.
It can be seen, therefore, that our present-day need for picture-supported
reality and, more importantly, picture-enhanced experiences also shows in the
flood of pictures on Facebook. The main motivation behind picture sharing is
to document shared experiences. The basic function of making photos is to
give emphasis to shared joyful moments and strengthen community feeling,
and, in this respect, the use of pictures on Facebook does not differ
significantly from the previous traditional practice of personal photography.
Photos remain to be tools for communication, recalling memories, expressing
and strengthening affiliation and bonding, and presenting and forming the
identity, only they are used on a new scene of social interaction, to different
extent and in varied manners, and with different emphasis. In Facebook
interactions, it is the communication function of pictures that dominates, and
their use primarily focuses on the present, immediacy and timeliness. The
need for “presence-in-absence”, presence and the feeling of togetherness
amplify the ritual and phatic aspects of communication, along with its
contents aimed at the continuous maintenance of the connection, and its
socio-emotional functions. Emphasis is shifted from family to peer relations,
from the representation of family identity towards personal representation,
and the practice of picture using becomes more individual as well, as the
individual disposes of their own photos, albums and the sharing and traffic of
pictures. This way Facebook photos have a priority function in self-
presentation and in the practice of controlled self-definition. The micro-world
of the Facebook profile organised around the “self” is a tool and also a
certain kind of practice field for identity building and communication, where
users can form their identity constructions from the real, desired, hoped-for
possible and socially expected elements of their personality, and try it out
within acceptable boundaries.

In both approaches, the research has come to the conclusion that the
participants’ self-representation is closely intertwined with friendship and the
expression thereof, and is outlined in the form of friendship bonds, alongside
the basic values of belonging to a community, social popularity and
friendliness, and the continuous – mostly positive – feedbacks and support
from others.
Individual and group selfies, which are the most typical picture types of the
social network, serve to strengthen friendship bonds and the continuous
maintenance of connection. On the one hand, they express the maintained
mediatised intimacy (“full-time intimacy” – Matsuda 2005, 30.) and personal
presence, and, on the other hand, they are tools for continuous self-reporting,
controlled self-definition practice and visual diary entries. Due to their immediacy, directness, spontaneity, and their presence that is independent from space and time, they are visual imprints typical of our age.

The examinations helped to fulfil the basic purpose of the dissertation, namely to reveal and present the characteristics of visual communication on Facebook, sorting the visual contents of the profiles into types, get to know the users’ picture using habits, and their types that can be observed on this basis, with particular attention to differences according to gender and age, language and culture, and qualification in visual and other arts. In addition, the research studied the effects of mass media and how its depicting conventions and symbol system are followed in the visual contents and pictorial messages on Facebook.

To carry out the examinations on a sample with a higher number of elements, and to realise wider, group level and cultural comparative analyses is up to future researches. The use of social media and community networks, which is extending to an even wider scope of generations and is still dynamically spreading, as well as the constant technological renewals, developments, newer and newer applications of Facebook guarantee that carrying on the research is possible and necessary.

The scientific proceeds of the dissertation are partially due to the freshness and timeliness of the topic, as it analyses a new communication and media phenomenon and a significant social problem at the same time that is less processed, especially from visual aspects, and does so with a social-cultural approach, modern social scientific methods, and by using the semantic and iconographic-iconological methods of picture analysis.

The theoretic foundation of the topic is an innovative research approach. The three, communication theoretical, identity theoretical and picture theoretical, aspects of the dissertation, pointing towards its objective, places everyday mediatisation into a broader, interdisciplinary context, and provides an ideal framework for empiric surveys, which focus on the visual aspects of the new communicational phenomenon as well as on the strategies and imagery of visual self-representation.

Including the cultural and social semantics of Facebook pictures into the broadly taken educational and social discourse by way of using the pictorial aspect and source type carries the opportunity for innovation from the aspects of both contents and methodology.

The dissertation has a modern, open and inclusive attitude; it interprets the changes and their pedagogic respects, along with the tasks, opportunities and responsibilities of the necessary renewal of education from the aspect of teaching and learning, in particular visual and art education.
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**Publications related to the topic of the doctoral dissertation**


**Conference presentations**


