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## **SELFIES AND CULTURAL EVENTS: MIXED METHODOLOGIES FOR THE STUDY OF SELFIES IN CONTEXT**

Author #1 Gemma San Cornelio  
Author #1 Open University of Catalonia

Author #2 Antoni Roig  
Author #2 Open University of Catalonia

Author #3 Elisenda Ardèvol  
Author #3 Open University of Catalonia

Author #4 Begonya Enguix  
Author #4 Open University of Catalonia

### **Context and theoretical framework**

Mass events, such as concerts, music festivals, conventions about technology and popular culture, or celebrity-mediated events have become privileged spaces to showcase the exceptionality of a lived experience. And in these contexts, the selfie can be considered one of the better ways of expression of the 'here' and the 'now', as well as a key element when integrated in the everyday personal narratives favoured by social media platforms like Instagram. In this regard, the analysis of selfies in the context of cultural events is part of the ongoing research project "Selfie stories and personal data", funded by the BBVA Foundation (2015-2017), in which the present paper is framed.

In this project, we address the phenomenon of the selfie as part of a personal or a collective narrative (Vivien and Burgess, 2013) in social media sites. From this perspective, we consider the selfie as something more than just an image or a representation (Gómez and Thornham, 2015), adding social and conversational features focused on the fact of being a shared object. Thus, the contextual information of the selfie, as the descriptive caption, the hashtags, the mentions, or the moment in time in which it is made public become essential in the shaping of the personal narrative (Fallon, 2014). The connection between images and narratives has been taken one step

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further through the prominent roles of 'stories' in recent updates in Facebook-owned social media sites like Instagram, Whatsapp or Facebook itself. In this story-intensive environment, characters, time and causality, consubstantial elements of storytelling, become particularly relevant to our frame of analysis. Although narrative analysis is not abundant in the academic approaches to selfies, it is worth mentioning Georgakopolou's approach to selfies as 'small stories', including, among other parameters of analysis, the voices of characters and narrators, in a similar way to our previous work (San Cornelio et al, 2007). As she points out, 'the selfie is shared as a performance and/or responded as a story' (Georgakopolou, 2016, p. 315).

## **Methodological approach**

Thus, considering the previous framework, we have introduced the notion of 'time' as an explicit element in social media analysis that allows us to articulate different methodological perspectives. Unlike other previous projects on selfies with a quantitative approach (Manovich, 2013; Bruno et al, 2014), or other qualitative inquiries (Senft and Baym, 2015), our methodological approach involves a hybrid perspective or 'mixed method' (Markham, 2013). On the one side, we conduct ethnographic fieldwork in order to get a better understanding of different forms of personal narratives and, on the other side, we took a Big Data approach oriented to the analysis of huge datasets. In order to succeed in this aim we have developed our own data extractor, a scraper based on the Instagram API, which has been used for different case studies. Instagram was selected as a focus for some reasons: firstly, it is a platform where selfies are extensively present (as previous studies have proven), secondly, the content shared is mainly self produced (re-posts are not frequent in Instagram, contrary to other social media), which reinforces the idea of personal narratives, and thirdly, because it is the social media site less studied (compared to Twitter, for instance). This entails a methodological challenge in terms of working with the Instagram API (Highfield, T., & Leaver, T. ; 2016).

With the aim of testing our methodology in the field we decided to examine the use of the selfie in mass cultural events -which suggested us a relevant activity in terms of selfie uploads-. Once situated at the event venues, we could conduct interviews and perform participant observation and, at the same time, we could monitor the Instagram activity through the scraper. This simultaneity allows for apprehending both the macro and the micro level and becomes relevant to make sense of the results obtained. Quantitative and qualitative data could then provide a complementary view as well as show the limitations of research.

## **Data and discussion**

Specifically, in this paper we will present some of the results obtained from two events which took place in Barcelona in 2016: the music festival Primavera Sound and the Barcelona Games World convention. They are very different events indeed, which allowed us to compare the performances of fieldwork with Instagram data analysis. Regarding the Primavera Sound event, we collected data from our scraper for 24 hours during the first day of the festival (01/06/2016) monitoring the official tag for the event: #primaverasound2016 and capturing a total of 1.760 posts that formed our sample. On

the other hand, we conducted ethnographic fieldwork during 7 hours, organized in different groups, doing participant observation with a total of 12 interviews. Some of the relevant data of this case is the number of selfies found (8,2% of individual selfies, and 7,2% of group selfies). Consequently, selfie can't be considered as the predominant image, but the stage and surroundings (47,8 % of images depicted the festival facilities) and the tag 'selfie' is barely used. We also analysed the time where most pictures were uploaded, and we found some peaks, but more interestingly, looking in depth into the images we realised that some users continued uploading pictures some days after the event. This suggests legitimation to share the experience through time, since they had already proved that 'they were there'. It was also expressed by our participants in both case studies that taking a selfie was significant for them in terms of capturing and sharing a special moment. Thus, even if, as we have observed, selfies are not so predominant as considered in mainstream media discourses, this is a practice with a qualitative importance.

In our presentation, we will delve into more details and results related to this event, which will be complemented with the work conducted during Barcelona Games World 2016. This is an event related to video games industries and cultures and we reproduced there the same methodology using the data scraper during 24 hours (07/10/2016) monitoring the official tag: #bcngamesworld. We got a smaller sample (719 posts) and also the ethnographic fieldwork (4 hours) was also smaller in scale, performing 3 interviews with younger participants (compared to Primavera Sound). Contrary to what we expected, some of the participants were more reluctant to talk about selfies and social media in general. Nevertheless, the data extracted from the application returned a very similar proportion of selfies (17% including individual and collective selfies). Moreover, we obtained a higher amount of portraits (33,4%) depicting others in the fair facilities: this points to the perception of a very significant experience to be captured and shared.

Regarding the mixed methodological approach, engaging a synchronic research (coincident in time the automatic data extraction and the ethnographic fieldwork) has allowed to detect, for instance, that while the fieldwork in the BCN Games World suggested that selfies and personal images were not as significant, the data extraction showed us just the contrary. Furthermore, fieldwork at primavera sound was extremely useful in terms of contextualizing our quantitative data. Thus, we conclude that the mixed methods approach in a specific timeframe has been useful and can be expanded in further research.

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