



Creation of Digital Persona
:Visual Identity on Facebook through the Screen

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Hyejin Song

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by Hyejin Song

The establishment of the Internet and progression in computer science is connecting people at an alarming rate. Through these online connections an image-sharing culture has emerged. A prominent contributor to this social phenomenon is Facebook. Since Facebook launched its social networks in 2004, the popularity and growth of the platform has been phenomenal. It has become today's dominant source for online social media. Only eight years old, Facebook has changed human behavior by presenting new ways of constructing self-identity, recording personal history, and communicating with other online identities. Visually expressed communication has become a language of its own, with online social networks as its canvas. This thesis analyzes Facebook's effect in regards to screen-based online communication. Issues derived during the process of developing digital identities through Facebook are investigated. Furthermore, this paper relates to how expression of identity, perception of time, and interpersonal relationships are transforming as a consequence of dominantly visual-orientated communication. Finally, the role and influence of omnipresent screens, the delivery mechanisms for online social networks, will be discussed as a social mirror and measured against everyday life patterns, both psychologically and physically.

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Introduction

1.1 General introduction and introductory outline of the problem

The rise of the Internet in the late twentieth century rapidly gains information and understands the world through screens. Even though the knowledge only appeals to the limited senses, which are often merely visual and audio based experiences rather than multi-sensory experiences, the digital way of communication through the Internet becomes an ordinary daily pattern. Two-dimensional visual orientated acquisition of knowledge through screens also becomes an important method to communicate with the world. This innovation in media brings a new way of understanding the world. The visual communication through screens makes the visual comprehension a dominantly demanding experience in regards to the change of human communication from the analogue to digital form. Persistently upgrading our digital space to store more information in the Internet also sets up users not only to share information, but also to express their identity with countless images and construct networks based on a two-dimensional screen platform.

Internet-based applications that allow users communicate through interactive dialogue are now called social media¹. As computing technology quickly develops, social media programs provide enormous digital storage space to save and share countless visual images—mainly photographs and short format videos. The visual record of photographs contains selected memories from the past and potentially can be taken from the present moment. The nostalgic character of photographs that used to bring old memories is slowly disappearing with digital speed. The increasing usage of digital based mediums represents a new environmental condition for the current generation who lives with continuing choices to record and express personal history with digitalized visual documents—mainly photographs². The unlimited archiving capacity along with the rapid

¹ Andreas M. Kaplan, Michael Haenlein, 'Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media' *Business Horizons*, 2010, (Volume 53, Issue1: p. 59–68)

² JungKwon Chin, *Media Art*, Humanist books, Seoul, 2009, p.127

There is a computing program 'Life log': The objective of the 'Life Log' concept is to be able to trace the 'threads' of an individual's life in terms of events, states, and relationships. This technology is basically able to record individual's whole life.

growth of digital technology brings interesting questions about social media users. We question how the users choose to express their identity and how they want their identity to be saved as eternal data in the digital world. In other words, it is a matter of creating user identity and how that identity will be presented in the high-speed circulation of the digital public realm.

Screen-based social media allows users to reveal their identity through visual images. Facebook, a newly emerged online social networking site that became the most popular social media program in 2011³, is not only a communicative platform for friends, but also a personal visual portfolio, created to show user identity. Each user account on Facebook contains personal information and interests, but the predominant data is visual information: photographs and videos. Facebook's role is to be both a communicative tool between the user—sharing news and information—and an archiving tool for visual documents that includes components of identity, preference, and taste. Archived visual documents (pictures and videos) on Facebook are important components to the users, as it allows them to create their digital personas.

The inevitable flatness of the screen is intensively related to the character of digital online persona. The visual documents on each Facebook account represent an identity of the individual user. The screen functions as a mirror—it reveals and reflects a specific moment in the past. Yet the significant character of the digital mirror is that it does not only reflect the object but also has the exceptional capacity to transform the original image. The synthetic power of digital image always involves the possibility of manipulation and is deeply related to the human fantasy of changing reality. Human's imagination actualizes in the digital world.

The concept of media as an extension of human faculty introduced by Marshall McLuhan, is meeting its time in our enhanced digital era. McLuhan famous quote, “We

³ [HTTP://WWW.EBIZMBA.COM/ARTICLES/SOCIAL-NETWORKING-WEBSITES](http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites)

become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shapes us.⁴” is very applicable in describing the sudden tendency of overwhelming digital power.

While McLuhan primarily dealt with the concept of hardware as medium itself, Jean Baudrillard, focused on software—the content inside the physical medium. Baudrillard’s concept of ‘simulacrum⁵’ assumes a similar metaphor to McLuhan’s logic about media power⁶. The continuously floating images—a simulation of reality, crated by diverse media—replace actual reality and as the simulation becomes more realistic as we move into a state of hyper-reality⁷. Considering our everyday hyper usage of digital media, the ideas of Baudrillard and McLuhan no longer seem so radical.

New media leads to a different ways of cognitively formulating the world, and innovation of digital media continues to expand human’s perception of reality⁸. The rapidly rising status of Facebook reflects a new paradigm in the twenty first century. A single interface design changes the pattern of daily life for 845million active users⁹. The intangible digital power gathers an enormous number of people and lets them share personal data through the network.

1.2 Questions, research goals, hypotheses and limitations

The point of departure of this thesis started with questions on why Facebook users are willing to upload their personal visual information and how the visual evidence of selecting moments from the past influences the concept of time. Also, what is considered during the process of developing an online visual identity?

⁴ McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media- The Extension of Man*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964, p.9

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, ‘Simulations’ in *continental aesthetics romanticism to postmodernism*, Kearney& Rasmussen (ed), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.411, p.415

⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media- The Extension of Man*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964, p.56-57

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, ‘Simulations’ in *continental aesthetics romanticism to postmodernism*, Kearney& Rasmussen (ed.), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.424 - 428

⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media- The Extension of Man*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964, p.3-6

⁹ [HTTP://NEWSROOM.FB.COM/CONTENT/DEFAULT.ASPX?NEWSAREAID=22](http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?newsareaID=22)

The goal of this thesis is to research the phenomena of digital social media and its impact in creating the digital persona. It explores how self-representation is progressing and evolving with the current digital toolbox. This thesis further aims to answer how viewing two-dimensional visual information through screens affects our perception and understanding of the world through a re-conceptualization of time and the impermanence of digital identity. A case study of Facebook, the dominant social media platform today, will examine relevant media aesthetic theories to understand how the new trend of screen-mediated communication applies to the expression of visual persona in the digital form.

This paper takes as a fact that people's exposure to the screen via computers, mobile phones, tablets, and TVs is continuously increasing in our daily life. Therefore, living in these enhanced online circumstances, the chance of using Facebook is also gradually increasing. It is not only a tool of global communication but also it has the same function as cloud computing that has an unlimited digital archiving space¹⁰.

It can be hypothesized that the popularity of social media platforms will only grow in the near future. As a result, our ways of engaging with screens will continue to evolve, and with it, our way of communicating with each other. Furthermore, increasing screen-time in everyday life will continuously bring the two-dimensional perspective to the reality and changes our manner to be more self-centered.

This paper is limited to examples pulled from Facebook and therefore doesn't consider information from other social media sources. Furthermore, the character of screen in this thesis is considered only as a two-dimensional medium. The objects of this thesis research are limited to the visual materials on Facebook, which are personally archived photographs and videos.

¹⁰ http://www.enotes.com/topic/Cloud_computing

1.3 Earlier research and relevance of the work

As social media with its surging digital power becomes a significantly rising concept with progressing digital technology, the academic study and research of digital culture is a growing field. Social media is a rapidly growing genre of communication, and active research is happening, especially in the study of social science. Yet most research on social media, including Facebook, primarily deals with business marketing and commercial aspects in regards to the new behaviors of active users because of the tremendous amount of data¹¹. Research on the changing social behavior between the offline and online world is another popular approach¹². In academia, the theme of virtual identity through utilization of digital culture is a broader concept compared to this thesis topic, but also an increasingly important issue that is mostly approached within a psychological and social science context¹³.

While researching and preparing this thesis, I found that most pre-existing articles and research approached to the topic of identity on Facebook mainly from social and economic perspectives. They do so by focusing on the user content in the network, rather than the mechanisms involved in the creation of identity¹⁴. There are two considerable theses that deal with the topic of identity construction through Facebook. One is “Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in anchored Relationships¹⁵” and the other is “Social Networking Sites in General and Facebook in Particular: A world between commodification and Representation¹⁶”.

The first thesis analyzes how Facebook users construct identity within the transparent Facebook network environment. The thesis is published by the department of sociology from Temple University and researches users’ online social behaviors through

¹¹ Paul Adams, *Grouped*, Pearson Education, 2012, p.11, 129

¹² *Ibid*, p.42, 145-149

¹³ *Studies*, 4, 455–460. Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson. Wood, A., & Smith, M. (2005). Online communication: Linking technology, identity & culture.

¹⁴ Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, Jason Martin, ‘*Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships*’, 2012,

<http://www.sciencedirect.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/science/article/pii/S0747563208000204>

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ Jules Bonnot de la Bande, ‘Social Networking Sites in general and Facebook in particular: A World Between Commodification and Representation’, <http://www.notbored.org/facebook.html>

Facebook. It also focuses on the function of Facebook profile pictures as the users' representative identity regarding how the pictures attract to the opposite sex.

The second thesis carries a more critical voice about a cultural change through the Facebook phenomenon. It stresses that the individual user of the program becomes commoditized as they contribute their personal data to the system.

Comparing these two theses, my research approaches the Facebook phenomenon from a different angle. This thesis is focused on the expression of visual identity through the Facebook system related to visual culture studies and media-aesthetic theory. Given the current state of research on the ramification of social media, this thesis will put more stress on the creation of a digitalized visual persona through the online social network of Facebook.

This thesis is relevant for its unique multi-faceted approach: incorporating theories regarding media aesthetic, concepts of time, mass culture, and self-expression. It goes beyond analyzing how Facebook users express and build up their identity in the digital context to better understand how it changes conventional self-projection and brings forth a new paradigm for the current digital culture. Conclusions from this thesis could help better understand the emerging desire of constructing identity through Facebook, as well as increase attention to the screen's effect in visual culture.

1.4 Method, outlines, and theories

The methodology of this thesis is predominantly an analysis of the mechanism of Facebook and derived issues from using the social network. Relevant media aesthetic theories related to the theme of this thesis, which focus on digital visual identity, will be juxtaposed to examine the topics of each chapter. This thesis is a qualitative approach to the new media phenomena of Facebook. Visual examples for this thesis include:

pictures from my Facebook friends, advertising posters of “KONY2012”¹⁷, and plastic surgery images from clinics in South Korea. The thesis also includes interviews of my friends who use Facebook in different levels of activity.

A chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the thesis looks as follow:

1. Why Facebook: Chapter one starts by exploring the recent historical change of communication emerging with the birth of the screen, and how visual language is centered in our digital culture. The fast growth of Facebook has accelerated visual based communication and the tendency to enhance visual language naturally in bringing a new culture code. Vilem Flusser’s theory of ‘the linearity of writing’ will be applied to explain the nonlinearity of visual language in our overwhelming image culture¹⁸. Chapter one also analyzes the unique characteristics of Facebook in determining which attractions have led it to become the most popular social network. This section further focuses on the archiving of users’ visual documents and how recording history is changing with the trend of online social media particularly Facebook.

2. Digital Identity: Chapter two deals with the theme of creating digital identity through adding visual data to Facebook’s network. It discusses the characteristics of online identity from an individual user’s perspective. Multiple aspects of online persona, in terms of the digital environment, are core to the topic, specifically: the not anonymous environment of Facebook culture. This relates to the easily editable online identity found in Walter Benjamin’s early insight of the cinema montage technique, and will be juxtaposed to explain how images build up the visual identity on Facebook¹⁹. In addition, it goes beyond the analysis of external aspects of Facebook, and delves into new perspectives about cognition of time and space, including McLuhan’s description of time’s duration, through the active use of the program.

¹⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>

¹⁸ Vilem Flusser, *Writings*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 127

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’ in *continental aesthetics romanticism to postmodernism*, Kearney& Rasmussen (ed.), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.172

3. Pervasive Camera Eye: Chapter three analyses the social aspects of the uncontrollable desire to possess image through mass consumption of cameras. This chapter also explains the prevailed peeping culture through screen-mediated communication. Furthermore, it describes how the tendency to have self-conscious eyes challenges individuals to have a reinforced objective view towards themselves. Chapter three will critically examine the changing social phenomena within the new digital visual language.

4. Screen Culture: Chapter four focuses on the ontology of the screen as a medium between online visual content and the image consumer. This chapter will discuss both the external and internal functions of the screen and how the inevitable flatness of the screen affects the way of understanding and digesting visual information. It also analyzes how screen-based communication has brought forth narcissistic behavior for the active screen users. In this last chapter, Foucault's 'Panopticism²⁰' will be mainly juxtaposed to explain the new social control through screen dividing individuals in contemporary digital culture.

1.5 Current statistics about Facebook²¹

- 845 million monthly active users at the end of December 2011.
- Approximately 80% of our monthly active users are outside the U.S. and Canada.
- 483 million daily active users on average in December 2011.
- More than 425 million monthly active users who used Facebook mobile products in December 2011.
- Facebook is available in more than 70 languages.

²⁰ Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the prison*, Trans. A. Sheridan, 1979, New York: Vintage Books. p.200

²¹ Facebook : Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.
<http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22>

1. Why Facebook

1.1 Text to Image

The history of media shows how human communication has changed alongside the information revolutions. Since the invention of paper and printmaking we have come to live in a time where concepts exist within an increasingly text-based culture. Since then, text has been the main medium of expression to respond to the dynamic historical events up until the emergence of electronic media. Prior to the availability and popularity of electronic media, expression with images was predominantly used and shared between visually talented artists. Yet after the invention of television, visual information has started to position itself at the center of our private space. Subsequently, digital technology with visual information has continuously transformed to become closer to the human body. This evolutionary shift from print to television and other digital forms of communication has not only depended on endowing machines with symbolic functions, but also on granting machines with gradual processes of creating cultural subject out of human beings²².

Today, with the enhanced screen culture of laptops and mobile phones, we are able to access online communication systems anytime we want. The new cultural phenomenon of ubiquitous screen media motivates images to have a superior position than text, especially compared to the predominant text-writing culture before the invention of the screen. This significant transformation from a culture based on writing to a culture based on images opens up a new chapter for communication of hyper-visual language.

A recent short film, “KONY 2012²³”, which is precipitately shared on the Internet, is a great example to demonstrate how the current hyper visual language works through user-based new media. Within months, more than eighty-eight million people viewed the video through Facebook and Youtube, proving that a well made visual message can

²² Margaret Morse, *Virtualities, Television, Media art, and Cyberculture*, Indiana university press, 1998, p.6

²³ ‘Kony2012’, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>

ignite a global movement within a hyper visual language culture²⁴. This short film documents the brutal crimes of the head of the Lord’s Resistance Army(LRA), a Ugandan guerrilla group, Joseph Kony, in Uganda. Kony has been accused by government entitles of ordering the abduction of children to become child-sex slaves and child soilders²⁵. The documentary shows how Kony cruelly uses children to maintain his power. As a solution, unseen of his crime becomes visible and further it asks global viewers to spread the film in order to publicize his crime. “KONY 2012” hoped that people worldwide would not only concern themselves about the current situation in Uganda, but even further, actively participation in generating a solution to the conflict. The film asked people to post a poster of Kony’s face, which was made by the film production team, on street walls with the hopes of starting a mass movement. Concerned Facebook users were encouraged to post this film on their Facebook Wall to show that they cared about the issue. When I saw the posters of Kony’s face everywhere in Amsterdam, I could see how people had become seriously invested with the issue and were willing to participate in order to solve this problem rather than just consuming the film itself. As the poster of Kony’s face becomes an iconic image in locations like Amsterdam and elsewhere, the symbol of the image represents his immoral acts, what is going on in Uganda, and how a cultural and geographic outsider can help the situation.



Figure 1. Kony2012 Poster

Facebook users predominantly express their identities implicitly rather than explicitly; they ‘show rather than tell’ and stress group and consumer identities over personally

²⁴ *Ibid*, ‘Kony2012’, the film published in march 5th in 2012

²⁵ International Criminal Court (14 October 2005). *Warrant of Arrest unsealed against five LRA Commanders*. Retrieved 2 June 2009.

narrated ones²⁶. Image is universal language. Visual recognition that happens at a glance with image information allows users to leave a linearly expressed writing form of communication. Flusser's comparison between writing and images is as different as 'lines and surface'²⁷. Linear codes of written text demand progressive reception. However photographs, as technically produced images, stimulate a nonlinear structure of reading²⁸. The temporal reading of photographs, which happens instantaneously, is not performed as a linear progression. The image culture after the invention of the camera liberates the linear way of textual constructing and understanding. Written text produces in the reader a directed feeling of going somewhere through the words, while with images this feeling disappears with subjective diverse interpretations.

The associative and non-sequential logic²⁹ in an image makes instead created new visual stimuli. Due to the eye-catching stimulation of images, which is a great advantage compared to text, it gains quick and immediate attention from the viewers. The change from textual expression to pictorial expression also connotes that a conceptual and abstract perception by individual understanding of text shifts towards directly expressed visualization. Images are straightly illustrated expressions to both creator and viewer.

The nonlinear composition of images has become a popular expression with digital technology in our contemporary era. The digital media evolution from television, to personal computers to mobile phones has gradually accelerated images to float screen by screen. Unlike text, the nonlinearity of images easily decomposes and reconstructs the visual contents through the media of the screen. A digitalized image on the screen is equivalent to an intangible vapor. The infinite lightness and free-conceptual expression of images emancipates a suppressed unconsciousness from the predominant text culture of the last few centuries.

²⁶ Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, Jason Martin, *Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships*, 2012, <http://www.sciencedirect.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/science/article/pii/S0747563208000204>

²⁷ Vilem Flusser, *Into the universe of technical images*, the university of Minnesota Press, 2011, p.xvii

²⁸ Ibid, p. xvi

²⁹ Jeremy G. Butler, 'The internet and the world wide Web' in *The new media book*, British film institute, 2002, p.41; In 1963, Ted Nelson coined the terms 'hypertext' and 'hypermedia' to refer to this associative linking between the words and image in 'Project Xanadu History'; <www.Xanadu.net/History>

Today, the nonlinearity and chronological-free composition of images becomes a natural attraction of creating visual identities in digital-screen culture. Facebook, as the largest online social platform at present, encourages the digital image-based culture within its own uniquely advantageous character. The insight of Walter Benjamin about the ‘discontinuity of cinema’³⁰ that brought a significant transformation against the traditional perception about time and space is even more applicable to the creation of visual identity with social media programs today. The progression of images from analogue photography to cinema and digitalized visual information on the Internet generates the surviving ontology of the image through diverse mediums³¹. A stereotypical example of a surviving ontology is the image of Marilyn Monroe’s face and pose. Still representing a classic iconic sex symbol, the image of Monroe reflects the power of visual language to perpetually survive through diverse media.

The famous quote by Louis Sullivan, ‘form follows function’³², indicates that function is a fundamental element to the design of objects. The emerging new functions made possibly by the Facebook system threw open the door to push the limits of social boundaries in the offline world. Furthermore, the design of the Facebook program actively manifests an undiscovered human enthusiasm for creating a persona in cyber world. The function of archiving an immense amount of visual images to construct a person never existed before the birth of Facebook. Function follows need and need satisfies unsolved desire.

In the perspective of media utopian discourse, the imaginary products that cooperate with human desire activate along with the qualitative change in our everyday life. They actualize human demands, for example, security, comfort, and convenience; unlimited and unconstrained mobility; entertainment on demand; unrestricted and instantaneous access to information and communication regardless of our physical location and

³⁰ Walter Benjamin, ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’ in *continental aesthetics romanticism to postmodernism*, Kearney & Rasmussen (ed.), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.172, 174

³¹ Mitchell, W.J.T., *What do pictures want*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2005, p.92

³² Louis H Sullivan, ‘Form Follows Function’, *Autobiography of an Idea*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications. 2009

barriers of language³³. On the other hand, the dystopian view concerns the power of advancing media technology in terms of the mechanism of subject constitution. As media technology grows the position of subject, the user, slowly becomes a part - rather than a controller - of technology³⁴. These two conflicting perspectives have questioned the pursuit of humanism in a nonstop newer circumstance with continuously upgrading technological capacity.

Regarding these two different angles of looking at the role of technology, it is valuable to consider a given condition through Facebook with 'cognitive mapping'³⁵. Self-reflected 'cognitive mapping' tries relocating our position to understand where we are within an ambiguously vast structure of continuously innovating digital technology, as it compares the ideological process of cognitive mapping to a physical process of locating oneself geographically³⁶. Absorbing visual contents through an extensive network on Facebook is like exploring immeasurable architecture. At the home page of the individual user's Facebook account, nonstop news and feeds by friends are updating continuously. Click after a click links to an innumerable amount of information and this enormous amount of knowledge through sight leads the user to gain continual indirect experiences of the world.

1.2 Uniqueness of Facebook

These are some of Facebook's features:

1. Immediacy and improvisation
2. Unlimited storage space for personal data
3. A collection of data originating from both offline and online contexts
4. Vital sharing culture between creators and viewers of visual information

³³ D.N. Rodowick, *Reading the figural, or, philosophy after the new media*, Duke University Press, 2001, p.205

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.53-54,

³⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, 1991, p.51

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.51-52

5. Advertising personal states and conditions
6. Active circulation of personal information

The most remarkable aspect of Facebook is the hyper-sharing culture of content that the user creates or outsources depending on their personal preference. Entertainment value is not only measured by the passive consumption disposition but also by the way in which users consciously activates directly impact a developing narrative³⁷. This newly emerging spectatorship explains why a social media sphere rapidly grows today. The network in the Facebook program is a mixture of offline and online relationships. Some relationships in Facebook might not translate into meaningful relationships in an offline world. Nevertheless, the fast circulation of shared information within a consistently growing online social network renders geographic distance irrelevant, as long as the user can access the site. If Facebook is considered the most popular online communication program between domestic and international friends, what is the remarkable difference of using Facebook compared to preexisting communicative programs?

Facebook allows users to share their most recent interests amongst connected friends within the online open space, which is called Facebook's Wall Post. The behavior of posting attractive information is automatically announced within a group of friends. In other words, the subjective interests of individuals are effortlessly brought to the public's attention through a simple click of the mouse. Diverse reactions are unconsciously expected as if it is similar to a public news report. Unlike one-to-one communication, it does not require a direct response, rather targets an anonymous group of unspecified individuals. Therefore, the communication on Facebook is characterized by a quantitative rather than qualitative nature.

In addition, the function of adding friends through the program offers the opportunity to gradually expanding social relationships. In other words, Facebook friends openly share information between diverse offline relationships such as family, relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and career-based networks. This type of offline-rooted online

³⁷ Dan Harries, 'Watching the internet' in *The new media book*, British film institute, 2002, p.172

relationships is called “anchored relationships³⁸”. An online relationship can be anchored offline in a number of ways. The primary kind of relationship on Facebook, however, simplifies the complexity of anchored relationships into an all-encompassing category called Facebook friends. Facebook allows users to have control over their information and over who can see it. Even though the privacy control function allows users to choose a certain type of sharing through the visibility rule of the program, the uploaded images immediately become publicized pictures among a group of friends on Facebook.

Various images or characters that associate with the diverse roles of individuals in real life integrate into one new identity on Facebook because the individual’s personal data is shared within a boundless relationship. The merged and opened anchored relationships in the Facebook system show two conflicting user behaviors. One is that they are completely willing to expose their private life. The other behavior shows a strict filtering and amount of control over what personal information is displayed. In brief, the visual contents on Facebook construct a different persona which depends on how much they want to share, or not, of their private details.

The growing narrative identity in the Facebook system represents our generation’s remarkable technical support for archiving countless visual images. The digital capacity to build a cyber identity and narrative through Facebook now sets up a new history of recording and archiving for personal visual documents. Furthermore, the visual narration of photographs on Facebook contains an editing function, which can be revised anytime. The visual self-representation on Facebook portrays an easily editable identity. The user’s narrative identity can therefore always evolve through the consistent uploading of visual information. This system of persistent metamorphosing empowers online identity through Facebook to have it’s own narrative life. On the other hand, the life of an online Facebook persona is a parasitic creation, which only exists inside the

³⁸ Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, Jason Martin, *Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships*, 2012.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/science/article/pii/S0747563208000204>

program. The autonomy of the identity, therefore, assumes an impermanence that might be erased by Facebook authorities one day.

1.3 Archive for visual preference

Facebook users have multiple roles. They are consumer, sharers, and creators of visual content that circulate throughout the program. The shared information that implicates personal data through personal interests, preference, style, and facts are usually composed of visual forms, mainly photographs and short films, which often link to Youtube. The selected visual materials that are continuously uploaded on each Facebook account slowly build into their own visual identities within the program. In other words, a visual identity on Facebook is created by each user's subjective preferences. Photographs in personal accounts on Facebook are mostly recorded reality from daily life. The behavior of taking and uploading pictures signifies illogical but intentional choices of what to record for a personal history. On Facebook, the spontaneous selections of chosen images from everyday life cumulatively construct its own visual narrative.

The enormous amount of archiving space on Facebook enables the users to construct their visually expressed identity through the program. "Timeline"³⁹, the recently changed system on Facebook, explicitly stimulates the users to build up their narrative stories of daily life. This new system organizes users personal history and visual documents time sequentially. "Timeline" is designed to display users numbers of friends, photos, and events per

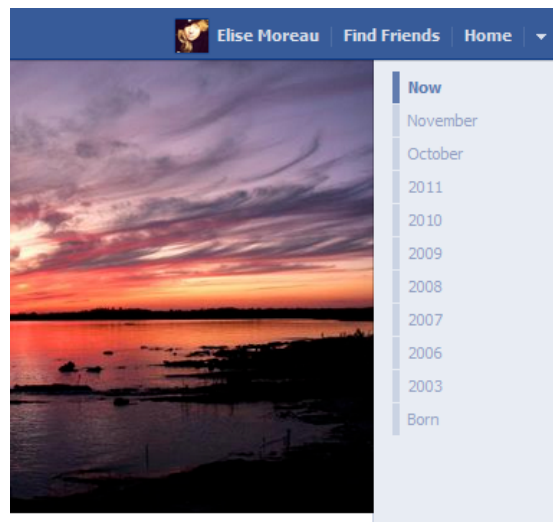


Figure 2. Facebook Timeline Design

³⁹ <http://www.facebook.com/about/timeline>

year, challenging the user to take an active role in the program. Having a higher number of friends and showing a larger amount of attractive photos within the visible timeline seems to represent a dynamic and interesting offline life. Hence, the users are psychologically more encouraged to upload their attractive personal photos.

Facebook as a social media platform has multiple functions. Among its plurality of uses two roles are most important for users: Facebook external role as a communication tool between Facebook friends and Facebook's internal role as an archive tool for numerous visual documents that reveals user's identities. Facebook's external and internal roles create the capacity to construct digital personas. The latter especially helps to attract a commercial usage of enormous amounts of visual data displayed on Facebook. While the original purpose of the collection of personal data was to expand the online network, user's datasets have become an unavoidable valuable resource for commercial interests. Over time, it seems as if the purpose of personal data being used for genuine networking has given way to the unconsciously exposed to commercial interests.

The archived visual documents on Facebook illustrate a visual autobiographical memory reviewing one's own past. Autobiographical memory plays an important role in the construction of personal identity. An article of 'Memory sensitivity in autobiographical memory' explains how people construct presence with evaluated memories.

People's current self-views are influenced by what they remember about their personal past and people's reconstructed evaluations of memories, and the point of view of their recollections have implications for how the past effects the present. Personal autobiographical memory is functionally and structurally related to the use of cultural myths and social narratives, and the relative emphasis put on the self in various cultural and social contexts influences the form and function of autobiographical memory and the need to develop a uniquely personal life narrative in those contexts⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Cesare Cornoldi, Rossana De Beni and Tore Helstrup, 'Memory sensitivity in autobiographical memory', in *Everyday memory*, (ed) Svein Magnussen and Tore Helstrup, Psychology Press, 2007, p.184

The above explanation of autobiographical memory outlines why we often see only good looking and happy atmosphere pictures in our friend's Facebook photo albums. On Facebook, personal pictures seem to represent user identity where users filter personal images to only show what they perceive to be positive self-expression.

However, the visual documents on Facebook are not entirely users' own photographic records from their offline lives. Instead, it also includes already publicized visual works, for instance, short films from Youtube and Vimeo, visual advertisements, visual forms of artwork and photographs by others. The selection of visual materials that are made by both self and others construct together a narrative character in each account. The purposeful selection of preferred images represent a visual indication of an identity.

A Facebook user takes a picture with a camera of whatever they want to record and then they upload selected photographs to share with friends within their own account. Once the selected visual image appears on the wall of Facebook it becomes an opened image online. Digitally saved visual records, which are only alive on the screen, are no longer passive objects like printed photographs. The digital image is always open to being transformed or manipulated through someone's retouching; therefore, it lives a life of its own. The picture posted on Facebook's wall also implies the sharing ownership of the image through the function of 'tagging'⁴¹ that circulates photographs dynamically within the program.

The digital photo album inside the program differs considerably from the traditional way of archiving visual records of photographic prints. A printed photograph is a permanently fixed document. The print therefore belongs to a specific time in the past. In contrast, the photo album in Facebook is constructed with digital pictures. Once the photograph has transformed into a digital version it is pixilated and the pixels easily replicate and even synthesize the image on any screen. Consequently, the digitalized image becomes like a living creature. Even though the visual documents are excerpts

⁴¹ <http://www.facebook.com/about/tagging/>

from the past it starts to have a new life in different contexts once it enters into cyberspace. Morse explains electronic archiving culture as follows,

Ultimately, as the matrix of electronic culture, banks of data have the potential to take on the value of the symbolic system itself, much as a library is the storehouse of culture in print, and the archive of visual and aural mechanical and electronic recordings amount to our cultural memory. However, this memory is activated, not as information, but as images that seem to virtually share a temporal and spatial realm and interact with the human beings that are engaged with and in them⁴².

Posted photographs on Facebook's wall are automatically archived as a part of the visual story of the individual. The visual narration with nonstop uploading of photographs builds up a unit of an online character through the program. Saved photographic fragments of the past are archived as digitalized data in Facebook. The filtered past moments immediately obtain a character of the present once it has been archived album due to the fact that it could easily be seen anytime. In short, the past moment starts to have a new life once it transforms into pixelated data.

2. Digital identity through Facebook

2.1 Tele-presence

Obtaining long existence has been a core aspiration throughout human history. Humans have continuously shown the desire to record their existence, for example through Egyptian wall drawings, paintings of portraits, early camera usage and now with digital technology. The recorded history of human's presence is parallel to the expression of a desire for a prolonged existence. The behavior of the remaining physical evidence represents human's fantasy for immortality. The demonstration of the desire for an

⁴² Margaret Morse, *Virtualities, Television, media art, and Cyberculture*, Indiana university press, 1998, p.4

eternal existence has revealed itself through different mediums. Three principal transformations through recorded history happened on the wall, then on paper, and now on the screen.

Now, more than any other time in history, our current high-speed digital technology has brought the greatest capacity to express and actualize the eagerness for an eternal life. Space and time are no longer obstacles for a continuous presence within digital technology. The philosophical topic of proving ‘being here’ for an imperishable presence has been converted into the motto of ‘being here and there’ at the same time. The freedom of space and time through a digital capacity facilitates multiple presences. As long as there is a screen, now, we are able to exist here and there simultaneously. Once the visual images have entered into cyberspace, it is hard for them to die. Even if the owner wants to erase the image it is not easy to ensure that it is completely deleted from the cyber world. It might survive through someone else’s action of copy and saving the image beforehand.

Regarding the perpetual life of digitalized images in the online world, Facebook interprets natural human desires with a contemporary sense. It demonstrates a modern tendency that we no longer pursue a permanent existence with one qualitatively-depicted image but it helps to activate multiple presences through various times and spaces through screens. The archived visual images through Facebook represent the user’s presence not only of being here in front of the user but also being there on another’s screen as well. These multiple appearances cause users to reproduce their image, story, and thus identity.

These multiple presences of an identity through Facebook show tele-presence due to that they have to rely on the technological support of screens. The Oxford English dictionary defines tele-presence as,

The use of virtual reality technology, especially for remote control of machinery or for apparent participation in distant events⁴³.

The identity that is represented with archived visual materials through Facebook is able to appear anytime and anywhere by someone's click. The intangibility of a digital image as an object appears to have unlimited mobility through floating on any screen. The difference between the printed photograph and digital picture is similar to the relationship and nature of water and vapor.

2.2 The montage character of digitalized identity

Identity is generally constructed within a specific timeframe. In essence, creation of identity accompanies a narrative structure. Identity is a central element to the concept of self. The self-concept is the entirety of a person's thoughts and feelings in reference to oneself as an object⁴⁴, and identity is that part of the self "by which we are known to others⁴⁵". The construction of an identity is therefore a publically related procedure that combines both the announcement of the identity to others and the recognition of the claimed identity by others.

Fashion for example, could be embraced as an academic field because it is not only about decorative supplements or simple functional outfits, but also it embodies specific cultures and reveals a certain identity through garment. The fashion that usually happens on the surface of a body is capable of showing the identity of an individual. The identities exposed through fashion reveals the unconsciously and consciously collected tastes of individuals. An interesting element of why fashion could become an important subject to the urbanite relates to the speedy lifestyles of cities. The unique characteristics of fashion are capable of portraying an identity and preferences to others even with only a short glimpse. The identity of individuals through fashion is now able

⁴³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/telepresence?q=telepresence>

⁴⁴ M. Rosenberg, *Conceiving the self*, Robert E. Krieger, Malabar, FL, 1986, p.2,

⁴⁵ D.L. Altheide, *Identity and the definition of the situation in a mass-mediated context* *Symbolic Interaction*, 2000, p. 1–27

to be apart from the human body and becomes an independent entity through the online world, as it borrows the power of digital. The independent and disembodied online persona supports the theory of McLuhan's 'extension of ourselves' as every medium and every technology⁴⁶. Due to the online persona building up continuously its own character, it is not as simple as a partial extension of the body, like the concept of a moving tool by McLuhan⁴⁷, but also it includes an internal critical ability as it steadily evolves. The selected photographs in each Facebook account builds the archive of a visual history.

The emergence of the Internet has changed the traditional conditions associated with identity production. Due to the corporeal body's detachment from social encounters in the online environment, individuals are able to interact with one another on the Internet in fully disembodied text mode, which reveals filtered physical characteristics by their choices⁴⁸. In this online environment of disembodied encounters, people are able to hide their undesirable physical features and recreate themselves through the production of new identities.

The eye of the camera in films has brought diverse angles of changing standpoints to the viewer, which was made to overcome the limit of audience's fixed eye in traditional theaters. The camera montage effect in filmmaking in the early film industry enabled a new perception of time and space. Benjamin's foresight and dramatic expansion of the perception of time and space with the early stage of new media's ability, particularly, through 'montage techniques' in films is applicable to the current digital phenomena concerning how Facebook is used⁴⁹. Regarding Benjamin's explanation of the film's new potentiality that art lefts from the realm of the 'beautiful semblance', which had been taken to be the only sphere where art could thrive, even goes further in the context of creating a narration with digital medium⁵⁰. A digital persona on Facebook is

⁴⁶ McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.7

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.67-68

⁴⁸ Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, Jason Martin, 'Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships', viewed March 5 2012,

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' in *continental aesthetics romanticism to postmodernism*, Kearney& Rasmussen (ed.), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.172

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

constructed with edited and recollected personal images. Just as a whole film is formulated with a montage of numerous short film cuts, identity on Facebook is composed with fragmented photographs, which are taken in different times and spaces. The easily editable montage effect made possible by the digital medium creates an open character as it continuously builds up a living story. A discontinued and fragmented reality by retouched editing in film techniques actively reproduces the same inclination of ‘nonlinear narration’⁵¹, found on Facebook. The aggregate of visual fragments found on Facebook is the result of a montaged reality through the user’s selection.

The montage character of Facebook’s visual language is relevant to the editing manner of time and space. It signifies the expansion and contraction of the time, as if it edits the time just like the simple function of copy and paste in computer programs. The elements of the montage, photographs on Facebook, continuously modify their own visual identity. Even though the montage effect in films is edited reality the narration still has a start and end point. On the contrary, a digital identity on Facebook has no clear start and end point in its visual narration. Production of identity through Facebook is similar to the creation of an ongoing autobiography. For active users, the self-montage identity on Facebook becomes a ‘hyper-realistic-self’⁵² because the created persona appears more frequently between users than number of actual encounters in offline reality.

2.3 Nonymity and virtuality

One important aspect of the magnificent success of Facebook compared to the pre-existing social network programs relates to the informatively transparent network environment within the program. Before Facebook, online networking used to be based on pseudonym culture, which encourages users to build their online identities with fake names and totally artificial features. Facebook enables users to present themselves in multiple ways. Users can display pictures in their online albums, describe their personal

⁵¹ Vilem Flusser, *Into the universe of technical images*, the university of Minnesota Press, 2011, p. xvi

⁵² I brought the concept of Baudrillard’s ‘hyperrealim’ and combined with ubiquitous appearance of digital identity. Jean Baudrillard, ‘Simulations’ in *continental aesthetics romanticism to postmodernism*, Kearney & Rasmussen (ed.), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.424, p.425

interests and hobbies, and list their friends and social networks. There is also a communication function on Facebook that allows users to interact with one another through comments and messages. The ability of Facebook users to use their real names and display personal profiles helps to construct a network of friends who users actually know in an offline world. This setting seems to parallel conditions of an offline-networking pattern. One additional reason for Facebook's popularity concerns users abilities to restrict the sharing of information within their network. In Facebook, users share information with only directly connected friends or friends of friends. This constraint reduces the potential connection with strangers and the online circumstance eventually puts forward the same situation of offline social networking⁵³.

Even though communication through Facebook relies on the electronic flow in cyberspace instead of actual vocal waves through the air, it satisfies human's natural desire to connect with others. The old Greek word, 'Homo Dictyous' (combined Greek word of homo and dicty, which means net), network human, invokes the human natures desire to live with others⁵⁴. Due to the gaining of another's attraction we often consider the other's interest and happiness⁵⁵. In other words, we often want the same desire of others with whom we are connected. Given that humans often consider others interests and happiness as a means to gain another person attraction, we often tend to gravitate towards similar desires to those with whom we are connected.

This social psychological human nature is easily found on Facebook. The function of tagging a friend's name inside a picture shows how much concern we have for another's interest and opinion. For example, one of my friends has kept tagging me in pictures that she presumes I would like. When I looked at her Facebook page I saw that some of the pictures that she posted to me could be seen as representing her interests or in other people's minds as well.

⁵³ Nicholas A. Chritakis and James H Fowler, *Connected*, Korean edition, Gimm-Young Publishers, Seoul, 2010, p.441

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.341

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.341

On the other hand, the creation of a visual identity through Facebook is a filtered identity. Unlike offline encounters, the users are able to present their identity consisting of information regarding only what they want to show online. Even though the program mimics the same offline environmental conditions, as users keep their real name, the virtuality of cyberspace proffers fairly attractive options to select preferred features. A thesis, ‘identity construction on Facebook’, explains how users take advantages online condition,

They may seek to hide or de-emphasize the part of their selves they regard as socially undesirable, such as shyness, overweight, or stuttering. It is certainly true that people engage in such activities in nonymous face-to-face situations as well, but the emergent nonymous Facebook environment provides users with new leverage for selective self-presentation⁵⁶.

Understanding socially unwelcome characteristics while elevating alluring attributes constructs a desirable identity. The ‘nonymous⁵⁷’ environment, the opposite setting of an anonymous condition, based on the anchored relationship of Facebook users tries to avoid an extremely transformed identity. This counterfeit identity is usually found in a totally virtual circumstance such as the Second Life online game. Yet Facebook users still create disembodied identities. Therefore, users filter their offline reality and select only preferable features to represent themselves online. One of my interviews said,

“When I look at my friends Facebook pictures continuously I sometimes feel relatively melancholic. Everyone seems so happy, cool, and good looking in the pictures. It is nice to see good moments of my friends life but from some point I start to compare myself to their happy moment”

The combination of a transparently nonymous identity that is based an offline character, with active online networking supports a new cultural phenomenon, called

⁵⁶ Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, Jason Martin, ‘Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships’, viewed March 5 2012, <http://www.sciencedirect.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/science/article/pii/S0747563208000204>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

‘hyper-connection⁵⁸’. The increased usage of mobile phones, the Internet, and diverse social media programs have automatically brought the overwhelming connection through the online format of social interaction. Erich Fromm explains a human nature in his book of *The Art of Loving*,

The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity, because the panic of complete isolation can be overcome only by such a radical withdrawal from the world outside that the feeling of separation disappears - because the world outside, from which one is separated, has disappeared⁵⁹.

This fundamental human need to not to be alone but to be connected with others seems to be easily achieved in the online environment. The increasing popularity of using online social programs tells of an excessively connected contemporary phenomenon. The new trend of hyper-connection through Facebook also partially satisfies this human need of avoiding aloneness by being connected. The new trend towards hyper-connection through online network reflects an advanced connecting culture that is different from traditional family orientated collectivism. It is a more interest-focused-community. This reflects a human nature that we want to be linked with people who have the same desire to share interesting and useful information.

2.4 Expansion and contraction of time

In online networking through Facebook, the freedom from the constraints of geographical distance and difference in time generates a new concept of time. Time is a subjective matter. Recorded images insinuate a particular moment thus reminds of a particular time. Each archived photograph in the online album implies a specific past moment. Through Facebook, the reincarnation of the past moments is no longer

⁵⁸ Nicholas A. Christakis and James H Fowler, *Connected*, Korean edition, Gimm-Young Publishers, 2010, p.414

⁵⁹ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, Harper & Row, New York, 1956, p.9

allocated to a corner of indistinctive memory like a rare reminiscence with few photographs in a tangible album. Once the visual image from the past is uploaded online as photographic data it starts to have a new life. It is not only belongs to the past, but influences the present time as it lives with a vital digital capacity. The easy at which we can access the growing personal histories that are composed of images from past moments, recorded in photographs or in videos, allows for the time within the memories to becomes more condensed and does not evaporating. Ironically, the survived digital images gradually build a present identity for individuals in the online world. In that sense, building relationships and knowing someone through Facebook has created a tendency that users engage more with friend's past times rather than being physically together at the present. During the process of accessing and watching friend's visual histories, individual friends on Facebook become like characters in a novel or a movie because they continuously come with narrative sequence.

Due to developing capacity, countless images of the past can be stored in an online photo album that is always accessible. As we become surrounded and exposed to the reminiscence through past images, the time of the past is energized in the present. Because the visual evidence is always present, the memory seems to never disappear. This stretches cognizance regarding our understanding of time. Because the fragments from the past are expanded and shrunk time, the concept of time becomes more condensed. McLuhan explains the comprehension of time as:

From our division of time into uniform, visualizable units comes our sense of duration and our impatience when we cannot endure the delay between events...duration begins with the division of time.⁶⁰

The visible past delivers more memories. The remaining evidence consists of fragmented forms of time, such as photographs or short videos, but the segregated documents help to provoke neglected recollections. As a result the boundary of the present and the past overlaps and becomes more ambivalent in the user's mind. Now,

⁶⁰McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media- The Extension of Man*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964, p.145-146

Facebook users can visit friend's past events through the photo album. One of my interviewers said,

“I am not so active user to catch up my friends post everyday but when I see interesting photos I try to comment on it, even though the picture is posted a while ago. And also when I look at my friend's old pictures, which shows earlier time than I met her, I feel like I've known her for a longer time than we actually have known ”

On Facebook, when someone comments about a picture a message is displayed to the owner including tagged people in the picture. Due to the automatic nature of the message when users comment, the tagged user is likely to look at the image more often. The storage of personal memory with visible images in the Timeline structure of photo albums on Facebook contributes towards a sequential ordering of memories. Denser visual evidence with a number of photographs seems to condense time for users as the photographs carry personal episodes that happened at different times.

3. Pervasive camera eye

3.1 Why a camera on the mobile phone

Today, most mobile phones have a built-in camera regardless of the needs of the user for this function. Under this circumstance, as we always carry a camera in our mobile phones, we are able to record and possess visual images whenever and wherever we want. Sontag says that consuming images through photography brings a fantasy of possessing the real things found in the photo or viewfinder⁶¹. The possession of visual records aims to display and circulate the objectified images. In other words, the behavior of taking pictures intends to show the images to one-self and to others at a later point. The habit of taking pictures often causes us to embody a more observational attitude towards daily events similar to the paparazzi rather than participating or experiencing the moment.

⁶¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (New York), 1977, p.163-164

This ubiquitous dissemination and consumption of cameras has brought a new social pattern that is less similar to ‘big brother’⁶² but rather more similar to small brothers watching one another. The general increase of individually owned cameras explains that the mainstream power of perspective, which used to be controlled by the broadcasting industry, becomes scattered with assorted visual productions produced by the public. Examples are Youtube videos, short films and photographs on Facebook and personal blogs. In regards to this media power change, Facebook is emerging as television for current young generations. If we look at the camera from a viewpoint of power, the dominant authority shifts towards individuals. The prevalent usage of the camera reveals diverse voices. Haveman describes Sontag’s influential paper *On Photography* to stress the dual functions of the camera in society as:

The camera defines reality in the two ways essential to the working of an advanced industrial society; as a spectacle for the masses and as an object of surveillance for rulers. The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself. The narrowing of free political choice to free economic consumption requires the unlimited production and consumption of images.⁶³

As we have a social trend moving towards the mass consumption of cameras, the surveillance-role of the camera regarding Sontag’s explanation above seems to happen between the masses themselves rather than by the rulers.

3.2 Photographic experience

⁶² *Big Brother* is a reality television franchise where a group of people lives together in a large house, isolated from the outside world. They are continuously watched by television cameras., <http://www.tv.com/shows/big-brother/>

⁶³ Mariette Haveman, ‘Truth and lies’ in *The Image Society, Essays On Visual Culture*, 2002, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, p.47-48

In regards to Benjamin, ‘camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses’⁶⁴. The camera enables us to capture things that are not accustomed to being seen by the human eye. The mass consumption of cameras by the public encourages the continuous discovery of ‘unconscious optics’. The visual expansion through prevailing photographic reproduction however not only helps us to share visualized facts but also distorts facts. Haveman explains a characteristic of photographs,

Photos are subject to generic and more specific forms of distortion. That begins already with their form; usually relatively small, flat and rectangular, they display a strange tendency to tidy up reality, simplify it, arrange it more clearly and, sometimes in an utterly misplaced and heart-rending fashion, make it into something pretty⁶⁵.

The behavior of picture taking is delivered with a subjective manner because the focal point and angle within photographs are subjectively decided even though the medium of the camera itself as a mechanical object.

The recent news on CNN that Facebook bought “Instagram” for a billion dollars⁶⁶ even accentuates the phenomenon of filtering and distorting reality through the application. “Instagram” is a free photo sharing program launched in October 2010 that allows users to take a photo, apply a digital filter to it, and then share it on a variety of social networking services including Instagram’s own⁶⁷. Due to Instagram’s distinctive square-shaped feature, similar to that of an instant Polaroid image, and various choices of color tone enables amateur photographers to take professional-like photos⁶⁸. This easily manageable application, mainly for iPhone users, causes any pictures with this program

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’ in *continental aesthetics romanticism to postmodernism*, Kearney & Rasmussen (ed.), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.175

⁶⁵ Mariette Haveman, ‘Truth and lies’ in *The Image Society, Essays On Visual Culture*, 2002, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, p.50

⁶⁶ <http://news.blogs.cnn.com/2012/04/10/overheard-on-cnn-com-facebooks-1-billion-instagram-buy-shocks-readers-users/?iref=allsearch>

⁶⁷ <http://www.businessinsider.com/instagram-2010-11>

⁶⁸ <http://blog.instagram.com/>

to become pretty and artistic images. Developing photographic technology continuously replaces the professional's expertise so it becomes easily usable for the public.



Figure 3. *Instagram Photo Examples*

Unlike reality, the saturated color tone and aesthetically controlled focus with the Instagram-effect brings a different feeling. It is not realistic. It shows manipulated and retouched facts. If violent images, for example, war or terrorism photos, are taken with this Instagram camera setting it would look more like aesthetically embellished violence rather than a straightforward brutal image. Besides, the vintage photographic effect also easily manipulates the sense of time inside the image. The nostalgic aura of vintage photographs is now skillfully mimicked with this program function. So, the time within these technically transformed images becomes not clear. The easy usage of making artistic-looking pictures through the Instagram application in mobile phones enhances the expressive use of photography as the images circulate swiftly on Facebook. This creative and artistic-looking photographic trend shows a similar pattern to what happened during the visual medium transformation from paintings to photography. The change in role of paintings after the emergence of photography as it started to focus on emotional and imaginative expression rather than realistic depiction of the world is related to this contemporary new direction in photography. As Instagram's popularity proves, the technology of the photography field is continuously evolving to cooperate with human imagination.

3.3 Peeping culture

Günther Anders earlier pointed out that an inbuilt voyeurism within the media with philosophical observations on radio and television in his essay of “The World as Phantom and Matrix”⁶⁹. After the emergence of television the world is perceivable as it positioned itself in an exhibitionist way and we are transformed into eavesdroppers and peeping Toms in front of the screen⁷⁰. This peeping phenomenon by screens is even more amplified and becomes a common occurrence in the Internet generation. Our personal life is surrounded by an increasing number of cameras and screens. It reflects the current tendency towards a way of life that is gradually more mediated through screens. As our life becomes more engaged with screens, our behaviors unconsciously become similar to that of actors or actresses in front of the camera. The thesis: “Identity construction on Facebook” describes how Facebook users express their identity while considering how others will perceive them.

The visual self – projected via the inclusion of large numbers of peer photographs – can be thought of as the “self as social actor.” It is as if the user is saying, “Watch me and know me by my friends.” By “showing without telling,” Facebook users sought to make certain implicit identity claims aimed at generating desired impressions on their viewers especially in terms of the depth and extent of their social ties⁷¹.

I have seen that most of my East-Asian friends frequently self-pose in front of cameras or mobile phones for good pictures when they go to visually excellent places such as luxurious restaurants, nice hotels, touristic areas, and interesting cultural spots. Then, soon after, the pictures are uploaded on Facebook to display the event for their friends.

⁶⁹ Günther Anders, ‘The World as Phantom and Matrix’, <http://themassornament.com/2011/07/the-world-as-phantom-and-as-matrix-1956/> in the chapter IV

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, Jason Martin, ‘*Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships*’, viewed March 5 2012, <http://www.sciencedirect.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/science/article/pii/S0747563208000204>

A thesis called “Identity construction on Facebook” describes the Facebook’s sharing culture of personal photos as,

“Users did not indiscriminately leave everything open for everybody to peek at, for 21 of the 63 users in our sample blocked the public from viewing the more private photo albums in other parts of their Facebook accounts, so the decision to let the public view their profile photos and wall posts was not entirely haphazard. While some created walls of privacy for themselves and friends, most users were happy to let the public see a wide range of photos depicting themselves in the context of their friends, mostly smiling, having fun or expressing affection for one another⁷²”

This publicizing of photos through Facebook implies an expressive desire to exhibit and sharing personal experiences. The action of taking pictures intends to look at the taken images once again. A great pose in front of the camera usually comes after lots of experiences of playing with the camera. The pretty pose represents the consciousness of the other’s eye including the person taking the photo. This self-conscious attitude tells how people today use visual language in a narcissistic manner.

In addition, a big difference between Facebook friends and those found offline is that the number of friends on Facebook keeps rising. It includes not only direct friends but also friends of friends who may have never met before in person. Due to easy access to the friend’s Facebook account that displays a detailed personal history, users are able to observe the relationship between Facebook friends more thoroughly than offline relations. This technical system of accumulating friends on Facebook makes users keep informing on the detailed daily news about friends who might have been forgotten about or lost contact with if they had met in an offline social network. The offline network

⁷² Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, Jason Martin, *Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships*,
<http://www.sciencedirect.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/science/article/pii/S0747563208000204>

often stays only when they develop relationships in person⁷³. One of my friends said that one regular thing she does in the morning is checking Facebook. She explains,

“I don’t watch television anymore but I check my friends’ updates on Facebook, usually before I go to work and before I go to bed. It became my regular daily habit. The updated news are from my friends or someone who I care about. I often find they are interesting and useful because many of my Facebook friends have similar interests like me.”

Facebook is a collective and has a delivery-based method for displaying diverse contents of pop culture productions like Youtube videos, online games, news updates and so on. Adorno said that the (popular) culture industry causes consumers to have mechanical, automatic reactions due to its own character of repetition and ubiquitous existence in the creation of a self-image⁷⁴. He also says that the cultural industry on the whole through those characteristics helps the masses to escape and deny the daily drudgery of their existence⁷⁵. Therefore, Adorno metaphorically describes the role of the popular culture industry as ecstasy for society. However, the industry surrounding contemporary media culture seems to demand a slightly different role of the public. An ambiguous boundary between offline and online worlds is formed as our life is gradually more attached to the online world. In this way, Facebook works like caffeine in society rather than the drug ecstasy. It accelerates the speed of sharing and circulating information. The Facebook system motivates the users to participate and circulate contents rather than just passive consumption. In this circumstance, users are demanded to be hyperactive within several roles. Today, users in the online world no longer have a passive position. Instead they become more active participants to reposition and circulate the contents on Facebook’s pop-cultural platform. Along with this tendency, the culture industry perpetually leads its own life and lets its audience participate actively.

⁷³ Nicholas A. Chritakis and James H Fowler, *Connected*, Korean edition, Gimm-Young Publishers, 2010, p.417

⁷⁴ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, 1997, p.147

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.141-142

4. Screen culture

4.1 *Mirror and filter of society*

The contemporary desire for creating an alternative world has brought forth an actively screen-mediated form of communication with the world. A proliferation of this screen culture is now routinely associated with projections about the coming into being of a new order of simulated reality⁷⁶. In many ways, all screens are becoming, more or less, new media outlets as we conceptualize their uses in new and different ways. Screens are becoming a loci of an assortment of media activities and experiences, particularly in the way that the screen becomes an activity center, where both space and time are transformed.⁷⁷

Not surprisingly, one of the central modes encouraged by Internet usage is viewing through the screen. As we communicate, the screen increasingly becomes like a mirror of society. Dan Harries combines the dual manners of a spectator who views contents in the Internet and uses new media with computer-oriented activity as ‘viewsing’- the experiencing of media in a manner that effectively integrates the activities of both viewing and using⁷⁸. His concept of ‘viewers’ is integrated idea of active image consumer through all types of screen, includes TV, computer and cinema.

The flat and rectangle form of the camera viewfinder is equal to the format of screens. As if a photographer filters images through the camera angle, our manner in front of screens selects and pick up information from the exterior world. Screens mediate a connection between the self and others. However, unlike the real experience, informing knowledge through screens lays a sensory bias⁷⁹. The prevalent communication through

⁷⁶ Kevin Robins, *Into The Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p.3

⁷⁷ Dan Harries, ‘Watching the internet’ in *The new media book*, British film institute, 2002, p.171

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.17, p.22

⁷⁹ Kevin Robins, *Into The Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p. 29

screens naturally brought an overwhelming audio-visual focused culture. As a result, this new communicative tendency produces a distorted lack of sensory balance.

4.2 Self-reflective narcissism and introverted voice

Through the process of constructing an online identity through Facebook, users consistently discipline themselves to have a self-critical view as they look at a number of represented images through pictures of themselves. This self-reflective attitude involves an external-social-perspective as if we look at ourselves with a social eye⁸⁰. Therefore, the process of constructing online identity through Facebook insinuates certain narcissism. An article called 'Facebook; A World Between Commodification and Representation', related to the topic of narcissism on Facebook explains,

It is indeed a properly spectacular dimension that governs these [on-line] practices, and the first thing that one remarks about Facebook is the manner in which each person presents himself, devotes himself to being seen, as if the becoming-image of the individual was completed and one could no longer expect anything of the social relations that derive from it. This begins with the declaration of his mood for the day in a word. But – and this is a sign of complete reification – each profiler speaks of himself in the third person. On X's page one can read: "Today X is cheerful."⁸¹

The expression of the user's narcissistic manner in Facebook culture shows how they look at themselves in the third person. Facebook users meet the world not directly but through the technological utilization. They put themselves in a distance and the distanced self constructs online identity as if users build up an online avatar. The user's announcement of their daily state, which includes emotions and events, seems to treat themselves like celebrities. In a deeper level, this behavior might reveal a hint of a

⁸⁰ Walter J. Ong, *The presence of the word: Some prolegomena for cultural and religious history*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1967, p.17

⁸¹ Jules Bonnot de la Bande, 'Social Networking Sites in general and Facebook in particular: A World Between Commodification and Representation', <http://www.notbored.org/facebook.html>

desire to be popular or well known in the group of community. This physiological approach might link to why active Facebook users are willing to expose their privacy.

Another extreme example of this narcissism through screen culture shows itself in the popularity of plastic surgery in South Korea. The use of plastic surgery is much more prevalent in South Korea compared to other countries. When I visited Seoul in 2011, I saw a growing number of posters in nearly all subway stations and inside subway cars advertising plastic surgery services. One of the reasons of this trend relates to the hyper-screen-culture forms of communication in South Korea. Due to daily life, the masses in South Korea are highly exposed to communicative forms involving the screen. This includes TV, mobile phones, personal computers, even LCD advertising screens on the streets and subway. Intentionally showing of celebrities on the uncountable screens automatically propagandizes a standardized form of beauty. Due to their function for transporting Seoul's residents to and from work, the subway stations are one of the busiest places in the city. In this congested environment, people are surrounded by others in an enclosed space, especially inside the subway car itself. As if reflecting the social characteristics of this location, the beautifully changed faces on the posters provoke a feeling of insecurity in the minds of subway riders during their daily commute. The strategic location of these posters reveals a marketing technique aimed to

take advantage of people in close visual contact with one another yet in an interpersonally anonymous setting. Through this tendency, the hyper screen culture slowly leads to a vanishing individuality. This happens because people are trying to conform their facial appearance towards a predetermined visual standard



Figure 4. *Screen subway advertisement for a plastic surgery clinic in Seoul, 2011*

for how they should appear to others and themselves. This seeking to visually conform

serves as a reflection on the homogeneous nature of individuality within South Korean culture on the whole.

This South Korean visual phenomenon also links to the visually oriented screen culture through Facebook. I found plenty of profile pictures on Facebook that reminded me of the plastic surgery posters. There is a particularly popular face pose and camera angles in these photos. These photos are often of a face with large eyes. The camera angle is usually from above the face that makes the eyes seem larger than they really are. Also the people look up with cute expressions, wide-open eyes, and small but puckered lips displaying a slightly angled view.



Figure 5. *Example of 'Cute Face Pose'*

In addition, screen-based communication has brought forth a culture of introverted voice. This is similar to a phenomenon that happened after the revolution of large scale printing operations and a literate public, people started to read silently with an introverted voice compared to a more extroverted culture of being read to. Unlike direct communication, screen-mediated communication gives information in a more subjective manner. In this circumstance, communication through both visual and textual languages on the screen is relayed to each individual using its own interpretations using the people's own voices.

In general, online social media definitely boosts human communication. The online technology-based online, chatting on Facebook or mobile phones for example, causes our conversations to be shorter, chopped, and fragmented. This new trend of short, text-based communication brings into question the quality of conversation, which is being shared. For example, interpretation of a friend's text with own internal voice is not the same conversation like a conversation in person. This type of communication, which

relays on technical support, is a more self-focused conversation rather than a conversation that carries real verbal chemistry between actual people. Because technically supported communication through the Internet only happens when we are logged in the conversation, it brings an illusion that we can totally control the conversation and get more attention from others.



Figure 6. *Example of Facebook Chat*

4.3 *Peripheral individuals through computerization*

The advantages of a free geographical location enable the users to gain countless information through the screens without physical moving. On the other hand, the visual spectacle unconsciously guides the user to be a docile body in front of the screen. It disciplines users with indirect experiences. This tendency links to ‘Panopticism’ that Foucault talks about concerning each individual’s position in the architectural figure of the Panopticon, “he is seen but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication”⁸². For Foucault, there is no essential nature of self but a subject, his or her body and soul is constructed in relation to power, which represents knowledge in his theory. Foucault, however, demonstrates an ambivalent and neutral position about Panopticism; “a functional mechanism that improves the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come”⁸³. Yoon interprets the power of technology in regards to Foucault’s perspective,

⁸² M Foucault. *Discipline and punish: Birth of prison*. Trans. A Sheridan, Vintage books, New York, 1979, p.200

⁸³ Ibid, p.209

The development of technology does not change power structures, nor does it promote communication among individuals. It only peripheralizes individuals, as in the panopticon. Computerization only advanced visibility and recordability of the supervisor at the top of the tower while segregating and confining the people to peripheral cells in the Panopticon. Computerization provides a tool for efficient surveillance in the Panopticon. Computers store massive amounts of data about individuals, a process never done in the past, and it collect detailed information as well as information that is private⁸⁴.

Yoon's explanation of computerization relates to the structure of Foucault's Panopticism. It might bring interesting arguments to describe the current social phenomena through Facebook. In the Facebook program, users are willing to share private data, which are often personal photographs and a description about personal interests. Even though the sharing of data happens only among friends, Facebook itself collects massive amounts of data about individuals and is making an invasion of privacy less difficult. In this active online sharing culture of valuable personal information, an individual user's data becomes more transparent and they potentially become a 'commodification' of this relationship without having entire control over the data⁸⁵. It is impossible for users to see the whole picture of how their own data is used, for instance, the usage for diverse researches and commercial field.

The systematic structure of 'Panopticism' is also linked to Sontag's interpretation of roles of camera in society. Her perspective on the dual roles of the camera as an entertaining spectacle for the masses and as a ruler's eye for surveillance evokes the Panopticon's intelligent structural design which evokes the efficient and psychological controlling system for rulers⁸⁶. In regards to these dual views of the camera in the context of the Facebook phenomenon, while individual users are captivated and served

⁸⁴ Sunh-Hee Yoon, 'Power Online: A poststructuralist perspective on computer-mediated communication', in *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication*, (ed.) with an introduction by Charles Ess. 1996, State University of New York Press, Albany, p.179

⁸⁵ Jules Bonnot de la Bande, 'Social Networking Sites in general and Facebook in particular: A World Between Commodification and Representation', <http://www.notbored.org/facebook.html>

⁸⁶ Mariette Haveman, 'Truth and lies' in *The Image Society, Essays on Visual Culture*, NAI publishers, Rotterdam, 2002, p.47-48

by the program their uploaded data could be also seen and used by other powers. Furthermore, regarding today's hyperactive culture of image reproduction through digital technology, on Facebook for example, the surveillance-like role of the camera seems to be more implicated inside of the posted images rather than through cameras installed by the rulers. In short, images watch and control each other. A desire for surveillance, whether by self, other, or state, has become linked with a desire for external beauty. This is shown through the previous example of cute face photos in South Korea, which, often would not have been considered to portray physical beauty in the past, yet now are intimately linked with these same conceptions. So, physical beauty and surveillance are speaking to a similar human desire in this context. For example, "please look at me, I am desirable enough to warrant attention from admirers both seen and unseen."

On the other hand, users in the general social media sphere including Facebook are not only passive observers or consumers of the program but are also active producers of the contents. As I mentioned in the earlier chapter, the nonymous relationship on Facebook encourages users to cross over online and offline relationships in order to create and participate in events rather than only being peripheralized by the system.

Conclusion

This thesis started with questions about why people are willing to share their personal pictures/information and what is considered during the process of developing an online visual identity through Facebook. Relating to these questions, two main perspectives of understanding Facebook's users attraction have been discussed throughout the thesis. One is that Facebook started a transparent online networking environment. The other is Facebook's provision of huge digital archiving space for the individual users. Due to these functions users are encouraged to record and save an endless stream of pictures from personal daily events and to share their archived personal pictures within a continuously growing social network. While users are uploading their personal data, mainly photographs and videos, the visual data is gradually creating its own identity that represents the user. The offline-rooted transparent relationships on Facebook cause users to filter photographic evidence from past events to create socially desirable identities.

The potentially nonstop networking environment within Facebook has promoted a hyper visual language between users through its growing global network. Images, as a representation of self, are easy to upload, quick to circulate, and have thus become the dominant form of constructing visual persona in Facebook.

The predominant image based communication also relates to our circumstance of ubiquitously owing screens and cameras. The mergence of cameras and screens in modern day smart phones is facilitating the rapid creation and sharing of online identities though Facebook. As we become attached to cameras and screens our desire to capture images and be captured in them also grows in parallel. The increasing usage of screens and cameras in the process of creating online identity influences the method of archiving personal history. Users naturally filter their life moments as they take pictures and upload the images on Facebook. This archived visible personal history represents users' curated projection of themselves. Since the archived past moments of users can be seen anytime, they represent his or her current identity as projected to other

users. As a result, users share their recorded moments with each other rather than being physically together.

The online communication through screens brings gradually growing narcissistic and self-critical behavior. Unlike a physical person-to-person relationship, screen mediated communication is a more self-controlled form of communication. Screens are everywhere, at the office, public spaces, home, and our pockets they are powerful delivery mechanisms for images and videos. Screen is two-dimensional medium because through screen we are only able to see what is seen on its surface. It depicts filtered and controlled reality. I examined and drew examples from 'popular cute face pictures' and posters of plastic surgery relating to the increasing narcissism in society. Both examples show how we consider the perception of others in regards to the changing standard of socially desired beauty. This is the power of the two-dimensional screen because its flat surface shows what it only wants to display and as a result we are unconsciously convinced with what we have consistently seen.

Visuality is an emerging popular word in many contexts to explain a tendency towards hyperactive-image viewing and creation. The fast and direct communicative capacity of images gradually correlates with our speedy lives and with a continuously growing online world. There are many advantages of digital-oriented communication, but also hidden weaknesses and limits when compared to the real human chemistry that happens through physical encounters.

The twenty first century is an era of images. In the current digital generation images have become a new language. Users construct a disembodied online identity through Facebook within this new visual language. Visual expression is therefore a new voice for self-representation. But as users become more active in online social programs such as Facebook, they become physically more segregated from individuals in society. In other words, as we want to be more connected with others through an online medium, our physical position has to be isolated in front of a screen. This is a modern irony. Erich Fromm mentions in his writing of *The Art of Loving*, 'the deepest need of man is

the conquest of his separateness⁸⁷. Advancing communication technology achieves the desire to overcome aloneness in an attempt to isolate the human body through screens. We want to be connected with others. Today's popular social motto of having a great network encourages the number of Facebook users to grow. The dynamic online visual culture through Facebook generates the illusion that we can be connected whenever we want, despite not having to leave the screen.

Through the creation of online identities we are witnessing the past become present as visual images are continually shown on endless streams of social media. There is no doubt that the creation of visually attractive self-identity is an enjoyable and amusing process, especially while it widens our personal network. This process however, while entertaining, also demands a docile body captured by screens, and thus separates us from the physical and present world.

⁸⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, Harper & Row, New York, 1956, p.9

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