

## Factors of Selecting Photographic Image as an Instagram's Profile Picture

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### ABSTRACT

Digital photography has become a trending tool in every part of communication in social media. Every photograph contains its meaning and story. This recent study was focusing on profile pictures among Instagram users. Moreover, this study was aiming at investigating the factors of selecting photographic image as an Instagram's profile picture. Therefore, a qualitative research method was applied to find out the accurate factor. The technique of collecting data was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) technique by using Uses & Gratification Theory. The participants of this current study were 10 tertiary students. As a result, the finding reveals that there were 5 factors of selecting photographic image as an Instagram profile picture but the main factor was the image that shows self-portrait and lifestyle status.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

In this digital era, digital photography has become part of peoples live especially youth age between 18 and 21 years old. Digital photography has been seen as among of the medium of communication that involves any photographic images that contains multiple meanings. The meaning created in photographic images is intended to persuade and influence the audiences. Every single piece of photographic images has always intended to deliver message to the audiences (Wan Lokman, 2015). When a photographic image is used, it indirectly creates a meaning to the audiences (Mustaffa Halabi, 2009).

Photography is able to integrate with a lot of practice around the world. For example in the 19th century, portrait was used to capture people faces consisting of men and women. Furthermore, in the East, photography has been used to highlight the social identity of people who practice the certain lifestyle (Fukuoka, 2011). According to Gu (2015), the history in China, photography was used to capture natural view.

People are using the new media to meet their various needs, including for satisfaction and enjoyment. Today's technological advances have made audiences more inclined to take pictures and further engage in social media. Additionally, every photo taken will be used as profile picture.

Technology advancement in photography has created an interest among the audience to produce a single image known as 'selfie', which is taking self-portrait image using front camera (Bruno et al. 2014). There

was also a research that looking into the meaning of any photographic images showed in social media. According to Ferrara et al. (2014), research focus on photographic applications such as Instagram is most on its fancy and human behavior dynamics and network structure, temporal patterning and timescales and more theoretical dimensions of use in relation to contemporary notions of personal photography (Champion, 2012). Most of this research focuses on Instagram usage or its technical dimensions contexts, rather than the specific visual meanings of the images.

According to Ingledew (2015), photography has the power to touch and evoke emotion. However, will audiences be impressed when they are presented with any photographic images and how photographic images affect individual?

### *1.2 Digitalization Era of Photography*

The digital development of photography has changed over the past few years. In the analog era, photography was used for one's personal life only, and photography was for private purposes only. According to Sontag (1973) the function of photography as a tool for shaping identity and meaning in communication is the primary purpose of the individual to capture the image and this is also supported by (Barthes 1977) when he argued that photography gives the audience the right meaning of memory specific images.

As can be seen today, the younger generation uses digital photography as a means of communicating more closely. Digitalization has made it possible for people to use digital photography with high frequency involving life patterns, cultural sharing and experiences. Van Dijck (2008) explains that this situation can be traced back to the late 1960s through the 1970s. However, technology at the time limited the photographic image to be shared.

Digital photography is one of the transformations of photography that previously focused solely on individual photography and transformed into shared photography. Each audience feels that the resulting photography image needs to be shared with the rest of the audience in order to reflect their life, culture, social and sharing experiences.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Digitalization Era of Photography*

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### *2.2 Instagram*

It is undeniable that the use of social media has now made an impact on people's lives. For example, sharing any form of media content on social media has left a mental and emotional impact on users. However, there are still few studies examining the effects of social media use on the formation of community culture. Sharing the image of photography using social media is a new trend now days. One of the most applications is Instagram. Zappavigna (2016) states that at least 20 billion photographic images have been uploaded to Instagram since it were introduced in 2010. Instagram is a photography-based social application where users can share visuals that give meaning or not to the audience (Chesher, 2012). However, examining the factors of selecting image as a profile picture is very important and interesting to be conducted.

### *2.3 Uses & Gratification Theory*

Uses & Gratification Theory was developed by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974. McQuail (2010) stated that the theory could be traced from the early 1940's when researchers started to do the research regarding

why people in the United States listen to popular radio programmes and why they read newspapers in daily life. Many researchers related to the media & communication area are applying the Uses & Gratification Theory to elaborate, understand, examine and provide the answers to why people use certain media and what advantages and gratifications they get from it. The preliminary assumption of this theory is that mass media is used by people for various reasons and gratifications (Gallion, 2010; Wimmer and Dominick, cited in Asemah 2011).

### 3. Method

This research used qualitative method, which is called as Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Kruger & Casey (2009) explain that focus group interview is a form of qualitative research in which a group of informants are interviewed about their perceptions, their opinions, their beliefs and their attitude to a particular issue or issue. The selected group will be given a topic or issue to discuss and share information and ideas together with the purpose of this issue clearly understood.

The design of this research is as following figure:

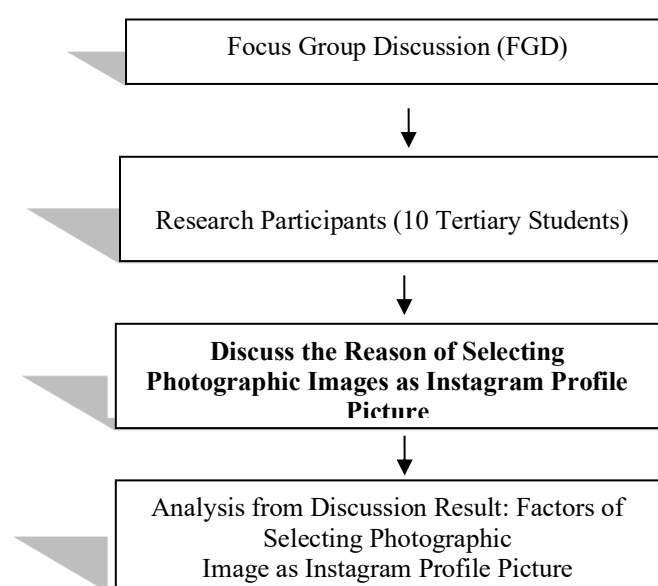


Figure 1. Focus Group Discussion Research Design

#### 3.1 Research Subject

Creswell stated that the sample size for a phenomenological study can be ranged from 1 to 325, but a sample size from 3 to 10 was recommended (Creswell, 2007) in order to find the appropriate informants, chain sampling technique which could identify cases of interest from people who know what case are information-rich was used. Therefore, the researcher selected 10 informants who were active users of Instagram from University College of Yayasan Pahang. The range of their ages is from 19 to 22 years old. The informants are from three common races in Malaysia; Malay (6 students), Chinese (3 Students) and Indian (1 student). In addition, in terms of gender the informants are six (6) females and four (4) males.

#### 3.2 Procedure of Research

##### i. Step One: Preparation

Before collecting data, researchers asked for permission from the Department of Student Affairs, University College of Yayasan Pahang to conduct an interview session with informants, which were students of University College of Yayasan Pahang. This is because the focus group discussion will be conducted at the University College of Yayasan Pahang.

##### ii. Step Two: Data Collection

The data collection process used a focus group discussion method where the researcher acted as a moderator in the group and asked questions to the informants involved. Before conducting a focus group discussion and

data collection processes from the research informants, the moderator first introduced the backgrounds of the study and the title of this study and also informed informants of the length of the interview process. Besides, the researcher also used the tool to record every informant conversation during the focus group discussion process.

The informants were also informed of their rights in this study. The focus group discussion was recorded by using digital recording devices. A total of 10 informants of the focus group discussions were held by the moderator to address the objective of this study. Focus group discussions were approximately 45 minutes in length. Students were informed the topic of the discussion is “Factors of selecting photographic images as their Instagram profile picture”.

### iii. Step Three: Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzes the qualitative data by using descriptive analysis. The data were arranged based on the informants’ opinions (IF 1 to IF 10). From the data, the researchers figured out the factors from the reason stated by the informant on selecting the image as Instagram profile picture and related the reason to the theory.

Describe the procedures for selecting participants, including (a) the sampling method, if a systematic sampling plan was used; (b) the percentage of the sample approached that participated; and (c) the number of participants who selected themselves into the sample. Describe the settings and locations in which the data were collected as well as any agreements and payments made to participants, agreements with the institutional review board, ethical standards met, and safety monitoring procedures.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Majority of informants (100%) admitted that they have Instagram accounts and all Instagram accounts are showing images that were chosen as profile pictures. Several main factors emerged from the focus group discussion with students about the factors of selecting images for Instagram profile pictures. There are 5 main factors that emerge and out of those five factors, two factors are seen as key factors that make students choose an image as Instagram profile picture.

The main key factors in choosing “portrait photographic images” as the profile picture. 5 of the informants stated that by using “portrait photographic images”, the follower will be able to identify who the account user is and why we need to choose the other images while our face is good enough to become a profile picture.

Opinion	Informant
<i>Kalau saya sir, gambar yang tunjuk muka saya la..apa tu, portrait tu..baru lawa</i> (For me, picture that shows my face sir, what is that... The portrait, it is pretty)	IF1
<i>Hmmm..kalau saya pun sama ar sir..macam dia jugak (merujuk Informan 1)</i> (Hmmm, for me is the same as her sir (refer to IF1))	IF4
<i>Tapi saya sama macam dia (menunjukkan kepada IF1), saya lebih suka letak gambar muka kita sendiri. Buat apa letak muka lain.</i> (But mine is the same as her (refer to IF1), I like more to put my face picture, no point put other’s picture)	IF5
<i>Betul-betul. Lagi elok guna gambar muka sendiri (portrait), baru la orang kenal kita.</i> (Agree, it is better to use our own face picture (portrait), so others are able to identify us)	IF10
<i>For me, I rather use image that show my face. I like the “selfie” one. People will recognize you more. Why you need to use other image? Is your account right.</i> (For me, I would rather to use image that shows my own face. I like “selfie”. People will be able to identify you better. Why do you need to put other’s image? It is your own account, isn’t it?)	IF7

This indicates that students felt that the use of their own portraits is more useful than the use of other image as it reflects their self-confidence and has their own identity as stated by informant 7.

The second key factor of selecting photographic image as Instagram profile picture is the image that shows their lifestyles. It reflects their personal life and activities which show their fancy lifestyles (rich and happy).

Opinion	Informant
<i>For me sir, I choose image that tunjuk-tunjuk kaya la, hahaha.</i> (For me sir, I choose image that shows richness, hahaha)	IF3
<i>Bagi saya, akaun Instagram saya guna gambar yang have-have..ntah,hahaha... memang tak tukar pun, dok depan kereta bmw..hehehe</i> (For me, I put image that shows that I have lots of money, whatever,,,hahahaha)	IF6
<i>Sayagunagambar yang nampakpoyo la sikit, heheheh..gambar yang tunjuk-tunjuk kaya..macamsayalepakkatstarbuckske, heheh..saja je</i> (I use picture that shows “poyo” a little bit. Heheheh, the image that shows richness, like I am hanging out at Starbucks, hehehehe, just kidding)	IF8

Basically, from the data, there are 5 factors of choosing photographic image as Instagram profile picture. They are choosing their own portraits photography, lifestyles images, family, hobby and the artist. According to the discussion with the informants, the dominant factor is choosing their own portrait photographic images because all of the 5 informants stated that by using their own portrait images, other Instagram users will be able to identify their real account and also by using that kind of image, it helps to gain trust from other. Furthermore, portrait photographic images boost their confidence level to communicate with others. Other than that, by using the portraits image, it gives the gratification to the students.

According to Li (2005), social media is used by individual/group to satisfy needs including cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, tension release, and medium appeal. For this, Matei (2010) said that social media becomes a fertile research area demonstrating the direct relevance of the Uses & Gratification Theory. The second dominant factor is choosing the image that showing their lifestyle. For example, choosing the image that showing their luxury cars, hand phone and hanging out at Starbucks with friends. The reason is showing off to their followers and for comparing their lifestyle with the others. Third is choosing family images as their Instagram profile pictures because they are thinking that family is everything for them and it is also able to bring back the memories. The fourth is choosing image related to their hobby and the last dominant factor is choosing image related to their idol such as local and foreign public figure.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the finding shows that choosing images as Instagram profile picture is to satisfy and gratify the needs of Instagram users because the five (5) factors are portraits photography, lifestyles images, family, hobby and the artist. The dominant factors are actually lifestyle as the informants tended to use image for self-satisfaction and gratification. Therefore, researcher suggested that future research should be done in bigger number of informant and more detail and complex research methodology so that the result of the study will not limit to self-satisfaction only.

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