

Selfies and Cultural Events: Mixed Methods for the Study of Selfies in Context

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Mass events, such as concerts, music festivals, conventions about technology and popular culture, and celebrity-mediated events, have become privileged spaces to showcase the exceptionality of a lived experience. In these contexts, the selfie can be considered an expression of the here and now as well as a key element when integrated in the everyday personal narratives favored by social media platforms such as Instagram. This article presents an in-depth analysis of selfies in the context of cultural events as part of a project testing a mixed-methods perspective that included both quantitative and ethnographic approaches.

Keywords: selfie, Instagram, storytelling, mixed methods, narrative, identity

Selfies have become a popular subject of study and debate, as reflected in many publications, including the present journal. In the mainstream media, the act of taking selfies is frequently associated with narcissism and superficiality, emphasizing morbid or negative aspects, and even dangerous behaviors related to an obsession with the self and the cult of the body as well as to the abuse of technologies such as mobile devices. Both celebrities and anonymous citizens have been involved in controversies related to this practice: selfies that cause accidents and selfies in burials, in exhibitions, and in the aftermath of terrorist attacks. Selfies at unexpected places are probably the most striking manifestations of the practice, but they are certainly not the only ones; selfies can be performed in a wide variety of situations—from the mundane to the socially significant, as in activist campaigns.

A consolidated definition of a selfie is a self-portrait made with a digital camera (usually embedded in a mobile device) that is usually, though not always, intended to be shared on social networks. When

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holding the camera, a certain type of framing predominates, similar to what was previously called an ego shot (self-shot with a digital camera) but a bit more exaggerated or even distorted because of the short distance between the lens and the subject. Today selfies are part of the contemporary visual culture based on practices facilitated by social networks and digital photography (Gómez-Cruz, 2012).

Academic Approaches to the Research of Selfies

Although the topic is quite recent, it is interesting to observe how research on the selfie phenomenon has evolved. Some studies have been founded on a quantitative methodology in which large data sets are created that collect selfies and analyze the images' formal aspects. This involves, for instance, identifying predominant colors in the pictures and the use of filters (Zarella, 2014) or the connections of selfies to conventions of professional photographic portraiture (Bruno, Gabriele, Bertamini, & Tasso, 2014). An important contribution to this line research is "Selfiecity" (Tifentale & Manovich, 2015), a project directed by Lev Manovich that uses cultural analytic techniques of big data analysis combined with a manual characterization (using the Mechanical Turk procedure). The project analyzed a large set of photographs (120,000 selfies) published on Instagram and located in four cities: Berlin, Moscow, Sao Paulo, and New York. Despite the fact that one of the aims of the project was a reconfiguration of the field of digital humanities (thus exploring new questions and theoretical concepts related to digital culture on a global scale), some of the outcomes published on the project website are of a sociodemographic and descriptive nature.² This approach has been criticized by some scholars, because all the images are detached from their context (of production or publishing) and put in a vast database as isolated objects. According to Elisabeth Losh (2015), the research "perpetuates the stereotype of the independent and autonomous self as isolated media creator and media subject in the cultural imaginary of personal consumer electronics and ignores how people are embedded in complex rhetorical situations" (p. 1649).

The Selfiecity database has nevertheless been useful for scholars interested in exploring the formal aspects of selfies. Bruno, Bertamini, and Protti (2015) analyzed 3,200 selfies and established two selfie-taking styles: "standard" (photograph of the selfie-taker) and "mirror" (photograph of a mirror reflection of the selfie-taker). The authors explain that the standard style reveals a left-cheek bias and the mirror style reveals a right-cheek bias. They argue that side bias in taking selfies might involve psychobiological issues but also the influence of art history—and more specifically, traditional portraiture of the 15th to 19th centuries (Bruno et al., 2015, p. 1). This connection with art history is present in other research on selfies that undertakes classifications based on the history of portraiture in the visual arts. In our view, looking for a remote genealogy of selfies on art and photography to legitimate the practice as a cultural manifestation is inadequate, because it does not consider the social, economic, and political contexts in which such portraits were created when comparing them with selfies. An alternative genealogy for selfies is provided by Gómez and Thornham (2015), who relate selfies with chats and other previous forms of interactive communication rather than with visual communication. In other words, contemplating the formal features of a portrait—that is, the image—without the context does not deepen our understanding of the details of the practice.

² This includes information about age, gender, and facial expression that define such photographs as portraits (such as the inclination of the head or the presence or absence of a smile in the image).

Gunthert (2015) has contributed a cultural history of selfies, relating them to the Polaroid culture and more recent digital photography practices that are produced in conditions comparable to those in which selfies are produced. In any case, from a visual art perspective, the selfie is conceptually connected more to contemporary images that document the private and social lives of artists such as Nan Goldin and Cindy Sherman than to the classic idea of portraiture in visual arts, such as painting, sculpture, or even photography. Moreover, some artists, such as Joan Fontcuberta and Richard Prince, have dealt with the subject of the selfie in their photographic works.³

Some initial research on selfies came from the field of psychology, focusing on issues such as narcissism, as can be observed in Gabriel (2014) and in the work of Twenge and Campbell (2009), who detect high rates of narcissism among teenagers. Narcissism is a feature attributed to selfie-takers in, for example, Halpern, Valenzuela, and Katz (2016), who analyze how taking selfies reinforces narcissistic people and how narcissistic types take more selfies. Nevertheless, it is not clear from the study what happens to subjects who are not narcissists (from a medical point of view) and make intensive use of selfies. A stimulating contribution to the discussion on narcissism in selfies has been posed by Goldberg (2017), who analyzes the original myth of Narcissus from a queer perspective (and its connection with nonnormative forms of gender and sexuality). He provides a radically different viewpoint on the topic, highlighting the capability of narcissism per se as a political potential to break with normativity. He writes:

Insofar as the normal or normative (i.e. the non-queer) requires an interest in and desire for different others, a narcissist/homosexual without desire for the other is essentially a failed subject. This might help to explain why women are so frequently the target of accusations of selfie narcissism. (p. 6)

From a gender standpoint, Anne Burns's (2015) research involves discourse analysis of selfies published in popular media and in the online comments generated by selfies. She concludes that the "selfie is discursively constructed as a gendered practice, which enables it to be devalued through an assumed association with feminine vanity and triviality" (p. 1718). In the examples provided by the author, performing selfies is also considered a depreciation of subjects' own identities, and selfie-takers (mainly young people and women) are blamed for their own objectification. Elisabeth Losh (2015) argues:

A feminist selfie theory might suggest that individuals do not float free in a loose matrix of voluntary social relations. Instead, the selfie as genre serves as a means for disciplining the body, quantifying the self, marking time, and regulating the value of affective labor. (p. 1653)

Losh acknowledges the conflicting interpretations of the meaning of selfies for (especially young) women in a sense that both empowerment and discipline are modalities that are strongly gendered around the selfie. On one hand, the body may be disciplined by particular selfie poses, such as distorting "duck lips"; on the

³ This work is not devoid of controversy, with legal and moral questions and issues of authorship. Prince has been in the spotlight because he organized an exhibition composed entirely of photographs of different authors taken from Instagram without permission.

other hand, it is important to resist overly simple emancipatory narratives that conflate use of a self-documenting technology with self-awareness (p. 1653).

From the perspectives of communication theory and cultural studies, a body of research on the use of selfies for social issues has been produced. The practice of selfies is challenging the widespread idea of selfies as individualistic or narcissistic, emphasizing values and positive aspects. Examples include the #unselfie movement, which became popular in 2014 and suggested taking a selfie related to a social cause, and campaigns such as #meninhijab, which encourages men to support Muslim women by taking a selfie wearing the hijab. These kinds of uses related to selfies have been examined and collected in works such as *Selfie Citizenship*, a volume edited by Adi Kuntsman (2017) that includes case studies on the use of selfies from an activist point of view—that is, a practice that enables acts of citizenship. Another relevant contribution is the Special Section published in 2015 by the *International Journal of Communication* entitled “Selfies,” which includes studies on various aspects of the selfie as cultural artifact and social practice. The section was edited by Theresa Senft and Nancy Baym (2015), pioneering researchers in Internet studies and promoters of a Facebook group of selfie researchers that fosters and consolidates research on selfies. According to the editors, “a selfie is a way of speaking and an object to which actors (both human and nonhuman) respond” (p. 1589). The articles address three aspects of selfies: first, how the selfie can speak about what different cultures value, dismiss, or contest; second, how this expression is configured by factors such as age, race, gender, sexuality, class, power, access, language, faith, nation, and history; and finally, how selfies flow and facilitate debates around meaning, affect, and representation (p. 1589). In addition to the contributions of Burns (2015) and Losh (2015) are works that focus on topics such as the practice of taking selfies in the slums of Brazil (Nemer & Freeman, 2015), the controversy of taking selfies at funerals (Meese, Gibbs, & Kohn, 2015), and nonconventional images of breast-feeding (Boon & Pentney, 2015).

In sum, some of the academic approaches toward and discourses surrounding selfies are divergent (narcissistic vs. socially engaged), and others reveal different angles that are potentially complementary. We maintain that selfies cannot be researched as self-contained objects, detached from other types of practices of publishing and sharing personal content on social media. In other words, selfies on social media and Internet platforms belong to users who produce different types of contents and communications that make sense of them as a whole. We recommend an analysis of selfies in this continuum to understand the role of selfies as a personal story and within a personal narrative. This approach became the goal of the two-year Selfie Stories and Personal Data project, which used Instagram as the main field site.

Selfies as Narratives

Our starting point is the notion that the selfie is part of a personal or a collective narrative (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013) on social media. We consider that selfies are not isolated images; they are communicative objects embedded in personal narratives that circulate in social media. They are more than just images or representations (Gómez & Thornham, 2015), because they include social and conversational features when they are shared in social media. Thus, the contextual information of the selfie (the descriptive caption, the hashtags, the mentions, or the moment in time when it is made public) becomes essential in the shaping of the personal narrative.

The relevant point here is the context, understood in both technological and discursive terms. From our perspective, the meaning of taking a selfie depends on several variables. On the creator's side, it is crucial to consider the moment the image is taken, the position of the subject, the place, the people in the surroundings, who the explicit target audience may be (expressed through mentions and a caption), the connection of a given image to other users' images through hashtags, and, most importantly, the interrelation of different images and posts in the user's profile, suggesting continuity in a sort of personal narrative in progress. Hence, the data that are produced in both the creation and the reception of selfies call necessarily for different, complementary methodological approaches—both quantitative and qualitative.

The framework of narrative and storytelling is well suited for dealing with selfie research since the connection between images and narratives has taken one step further through the prominent roles of "stories" in recent updates to Facebook-owned social media sites such as Instagram and WhatsApp, and even to Facebook itself. In this story-intensive environment, characters, time, and causality—consubstantial elements of storytelling—become particularly relevant to our frame of analysis.

Although narrative analysis is not abundant in academic approaches to selfies, some authors, such as Fallon (2014), have approached selfies in a broader spectrum of images and narrative threads that emerge within and between images conforming to larger narrative streams or feeds. Georgakopoulou's (2016) approach to selfies as "small stories" includes, among other parameters of analysis, the voices of characters and narrators in a similar way to San Cornelio, Ardèvol, and Roig (2007), using classic storytelling analysis. Stressing the importance of comments produced on published selfies as a way of fostering a coproduced storytelling with the audience, Georgakopoulou notes, "the selfie is shared as a performance and/or responded to as a story" (p. 314). Using ethnography and content analysis techniques, Wargo (2017) also considers the narrative angle in analyzing selfies published in Tumblr by adolescents identified as part of the LGBTQ collective.

In a more general view, the contributions of research on narrative related to identity are more prolific. MacIntyre (1984) notes that the human is "essentially a story-telling animal" (p. 216). And storytelling "may be the way through which human beings make sense of their own lives and the lives of others" (McAdams, 1996, p. 295). According to Loseke (2007), narratives create identity at all levels of human social life: at the macro level are stories producing cultural identities; at the meso level, the policy-making process produces narratives of institutional identities; finally, at the micro level are stories producing personal identities, the self-understandings of unique, embodied selves about their selves. These narratives, according to Gergen (1994), "serve as vehicles for rendering ourselves intelligible" (p. 186).

As stated in classic narrative studies, time is one of the key dimensions of the experience of narrative along causality or space. At an individual level, a temporal perspective in researching selfies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of what a certain image published in a specific moment means for a user, as others have argued (Losh, 2015; San Cornelio, 2017). In other words, the context where the selfie is published on Instagram—a profile—configures a personal narrative with a temporal dimension that can be traced.

At a collective level—specifically in digital storytelling or transmedia projects—different notions and layers of time become essential, combining the clock and calendar time of everyday interactions with the condensed event-based time of most narrative cultural products. For example, prime-time event television—whether reality programs, premieres, season finales, or live events—foster real-time interaction and user production, from live-tweeting to Facebook group comments to WhatsApp group interaction, including related memes, gifs, shared amateur show recordings, screen captures, and even audience pictures in front of the TV set. This sort of interaction takes place mostly during the “event time”—in this case, the airing time—but also before and after the show (Schirra, Sun, & Bentley, 2014). This notion of connected experience of a media event through social media is useful for tracking shared personal narratives in extraordinary one-off or exclusive social events, such as music festivals, that are attached to a time and a place.

Thus, the notion of time in the context of narrative and storytelling could be an element to enable different methodological perspectives for conducting our research, as we explain in the next section.

Methodological Approach

We have introduced a few methodological approaches to research on selfies. Some projects employ a quantitative method inspired by big data (Bruno et al., 2014; Hochman & Manovich, 2013), and some qualitative inquiries have been produced in a cultural studies line (Senft & Baym, 2015). Another possible entry point is found in the work of Lobinger and Brantner (2015), which uses the Q method—a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches that involves users’ participation in their own image classification.

Our methodological choice involves a hybrid perspective, or mixed method (Creswell, 2015, and includes the idea of “remix” suggested by Markham (2013). This approach is justified by the need to enrich the quantitative data with qualitative data—in other words, “big data needs thick data” (Wang, 2013), or the complementarity of ethnography and big data (Ford, 2014). On the qualitative side, we conducted ethnographic fieldwork to better understand different forms of personal narratives; on the quantitative side, we took a big data approach oriented to the analysis of huge data sets.

To obtain the quantitative data, a scraper was developed by a programmer with the Selfie Stories project. Since our main focus is Instagram, the official API (application programming interface) was used as the base to develop an application to gather data using different methods of communication between various software components.⁴ We took into account previous research on social media (Vis, 2013), particularly on Instagram, that has also been performed through the API. For instance, Highfield and Leaver (2015, 2016), pioneering the methodological discussion on Instagram research, focus mainly on tags and geolocation information and, more recently, on the visual relationship of text and icons such as emojis.

The result was a piece of software that allows the extraction and storage of information in a server, automating specific queries related to both hashtags and users on Instagram. The scraper was able to obtain

⁴ Our scraper was developed on the Instagram API in 2015; consequently, the metadata related to the “stories” function is not captured.

all the information related with the post (image, hashtag, captions and comments, date and time of uploading, users, likes count, geolocation—if the users have this option activated—and other choices). We performed hashtag-based scrapes for analyzing collective issues, such as the cases presented in this article, and user-based scrapes for individual-level research (previously reaching the user for consent).⁵

To test our methodology in the field, we decided to examine the use of selfies at mass cultural events, which we had identified beforehand as a relevant activity in terms of selfie uploads. Once situated at the event venues, we could conduct interviews, perform participant observation, and monitor the Instagram activity through the scraper. This simultaneity allowed us to capture both macro- and micro-level data and becomes relevant for making sense of the results obtained. Quantitative and qualitative data could provide a complementary and more comprehensive picture, and, at the same time, they may allow us to observe the boundaries and limitations of the research.

Even though our focus is the use of selfies, we decided to use the official tag for the events rather than the selfie tag for two reasons: first, we had already observed that some images are tagged as selfies, but they are not portraits (this could be interpreted as a strategy to reach a wider audience); second, and most interestingly, there are many of what could be defined as conventional—or canonical—selfies that are not tagged as such (Carmean & Morris, 2015). For this phenomenon, we suggest two possible interpretations: the selfie tag is refused or underused for some reason (e.g., because of the narcissistic readings, because it has become too mainstream or normative), or it could be a sign of naturalization of the selfie as a cultural form for personal storytelling by its practitioners—a self-identifying tag is no longer needed because it is seen as too obvious. Moreover, observing the selfies in context decenters them as isolated objects of study and allows for more rich interpretations contextualizing quantitative data with ethnographic field experience. In other words, this research aims to discover the role of selfies in cultural events but also how they are framed in personal narratives.

Data and Discussion

This article presents the results obtained from two events that took place in Barcelona in 2016: the music festival Primavera Sound and the Barcelona Games World convention. Primavera Sound has become a reference in pop music festivals worldwide. The first festival was held in Barcelona in 2001, and its extensive, first-rate, and eclectic lineup attracts a massive—and diverse—audience, currently about 200,000 yearly attendants to two main events in Barcelona and Porto, Portugal. Barcelona Games World is a video game trade show that held its first event in October 2016 with a groundbreaking attendance of more than 120,000 visitors. During the three days of the show, the array of activities included new releases of games, consoles, and game devices from both key players in the sector and independent creators, plus talks, meet and greets, cosplay, live music, food, and dance—making it also a leisure festival.

⁵ This research has been carried out following ethical standards regarding anonymity of subjects. No real names have been used or can be inferred from this article. For the ethnographic fieldwork, an information consent form was delivered to the participants. For the scrapings, we have not included any personal information or metadata that could affect or harm the subjects whose posts are analyzed.

From a conceptual point of view, and connecting with the idea of personal narrative, music and video games are both elements of popular culture that are largely incorporated in people's identity and personal images, so they are expected to be part of our narrative in one way or another. Moreover, these types of mass events are privileged spaces to showcase the exceptionality of a lived experience. In these contexts, the selfie can be a way to express the here and now as well as a key element when integrated in the everyday personal narratives favored by social media platforms such as Instagram.

As a methodological note, it is worth mentioning that the aim of this research was not to undertake a comparative analysis; rather, it was to test the performance of fieldwork with Instagram data analysis in events of a different nature. We decided to start with a consolidated cultural event such as Primavera Sound, where we expected, according to our initial observations, a widespread presence of the selfie practice, allowing us to obtain a relevant amount of data from the API. Subsequently, we chose a smaller and nonconsolidated event, also in a closed space where we could perform observation and where we expected to obtain a smaller amount of data. This approach made it possible for us to assess the scalability of the methodology.

Primavera Sound

For the 2016 music festival in Barcelona, we collected data from our scraper during the first day of the festival (June 1) for 24 hours, monitoring the official tag for the event #primaverasound2016 and capturing a total of 1,760 posts that constituted our sample.

According to our specific query, the scraper returned information related to images, hashtags, captions and comments, date and time of uploading, users, likes count, and so on. The raw data file from the scraper, obtained in JSON (JavaScript object notation) format, was then converted into a spreadsheet, and later, the edited data were transferred into a visualization software to be analyzed using different configurations. Due to the importance of synchronicity with the ethnography, we wanted to obtain a "frozen" picture of what happened during those hours; this is why we did not update the information collected afterward, even if the combined analysis took place some months later. This means that, in both cases, all the information related to image likes, number of posts by users, comments, mentions, and all the metadata captured belongs strictly to the 24-hour data extraction on June 1.

In parallel to the scraper work, we conducted ethnographic fieldwork for seven hours. Different groups performed participant observation and conducted a total of 12 semistructured interviews that involved 30 people of ages ranging from 20 to 40. In the interviews, we asked about attendees' personal attachment to the event, their interest in taking selfies at the event, and their use and perceptions of social media, particularly Instagram. The interviews were conducted in different areas of the festival venue (Parc del Forum) during the resting time or between performances, and they were audio- and videotaped for later analysis.

Once all the data were gathered, the first level of our investigation was a manual categorization of the images by the content displayed. According to our categorization, 8.2% of the images were selfies,

7.3% were group selfies, 20.1% were portraits, 4.1% were images related to merchandising, 47.9% of the images depicted the festival facilities, and 10.1% were other types of images (see Figure 1).⁶

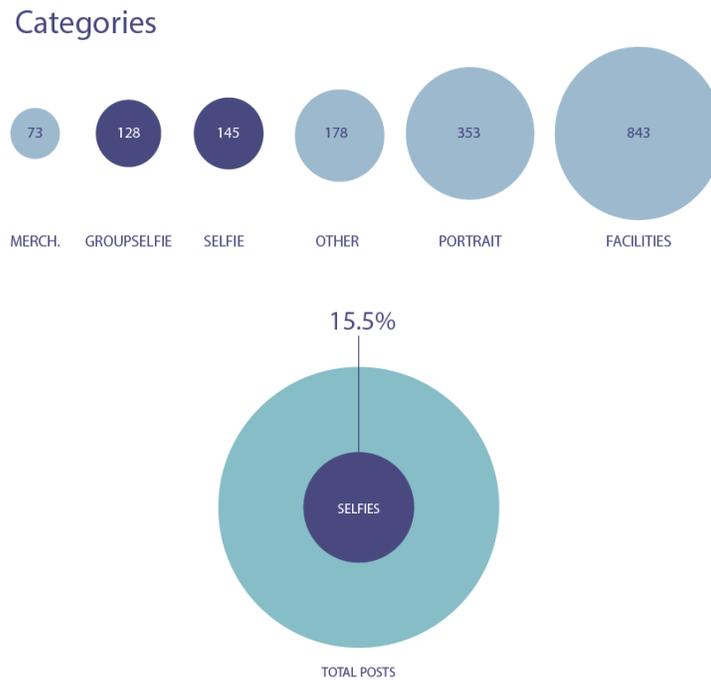


Figure 1. Types of images at Primavera Sound.

Some of the relevant points that emerge from this analysis are the number of selfies (15.5% including both individual and group selfies), which was less than expected based on our observations and interviews. Considering the set and diversity of visual motifs, most of the images are not selfies, but rather are of the stage and surroundings. Similarly, according to the tag cloud that includes hashtags and all the photo captions, the tag "selfie" is rarely used (see Figure 2).

⁶ The selfies category includes pictures of not only the face but also different parts of the body (hands, feet, or objects identifying the Primavera Sound brand) that depicted the presence of the participants at the festival. Forty images (2.3%) were lost in the process of scraping. One explanation could be that they were deleted from the Instagram accounts.

would be egocentric" (male, interview 6). Expressed in different terms, they made a distinction between a kind of "deserved" selfie ("justified selfie," male, interview 6) and the selfies made by "superficial" people in ordinary situations. In other words, the fact of being at the festival justified making a selfie to share with friends, since many of them traveled to Barcelona from other countries to attend. For instance, a participant from Chile said: "If I take a selfie I would like to take advantage from it. We crossed the ocean and that justifies the selfie" (female, interview 2). To capture and share this moment as exceptional becomes almost mandatory.

The distinction of what is ordinary and exceptional becomes relevant when participants compare the festival selfies with other selfies that are of no interest to them, which are considered "showing off"—like "those friends that are in search of an audience" (female, interview 5). This idea connects with the prejudices and moral considerations of the selfie as individualistic or narcissistic, since most of the participants affirmed that they were not expecting to get likes but were just communicating the experience with their close friends and circles. Additionally, in some conversations the idea surfaced that a selfie is often taken when a person is alone or when nobody could take a "good picture" of you.

To obtain a broader perspective on the temporality of images and posts, we examined the times with the most activity in image posting, finding various peaks. Analyzing the time frame corresponding to the first four minutes of the headliner Suede's concert, we observed that most of the uploaded pictures were unrelated to the concert and instead depicted previous moments (even from the day before). In fact, some users continued uploading pictures belonging to that specific time frame even some days afterward. This suggests a legitimation factor granted through the experience, which allowed users to extend their meaningful experience. Put simply, being present at a concert or festival allows a person not only to post images synchronically at the setting but to continue posting after the event using the corresponding hashtag. This is related to the practices of users retouching the images to stylize them for Instagram upload. As some participants stated, they consider Instagram the platform to show "beautiful and stylized images," compared to other platforms that are more ephemeral in terms of sharing images (such as Snapchat) and more related to intimate circles. In this regard, it is common to keep the pictures taken in a specific moment until they are edited and, therefore, ready to be shared.

We were also interested in the users' activity interacting with the images to understand which images are more popular and how the selfie is present within this sample. We identified the users and pictures that had more likes (in these 24 hours), and we realized that the top liked post belonged to a corporate user (a commercial fashion brand that is a festival sponsor). The ranking is followed by a post by a popular designer and film producer who posted a picture of Brett Anderson (of Suede) performing onstage (getting 382 likes) and other well-known users with strong profiles on social media—for instance, a blogger who writes about cultural events, festivals, and low-cost travel and has about 9,000 followers posted an image of some leaflets (82 likes). A straightforward conclusion can be extracted from this finding: the most popular users produce the most liked pictures regardless of the type of content displayed. Common features of these popular users are that they are young people who show trendy and "good lives" in their profiles, so a music festival is an interesting setting to deploy a narrative along with world travel.

We also analyzed the average number of pictures per person uploaded and found that the average number was between one and two. Some users uploaded more than five pictures each, but they are not necessarily coincident with the most liked; in fact, there was only one user who was both very active and liked at the same time, and coincidentally one of his most liked pictures is a selfie. The most active users at Primavera Sound exhibited a variety of stories and settings; an artist uploaded 10 pictures of his drawings, which are not related to the festival at all (he was using the Primavera Sound official hashtag, so we can assume he was trying to reach a wider audience). Another active user in our sample, a surfer from Bristol, had a collection of quality pictures of his lifestyle with artistic value as well.

In sum, regardless of whether images were liked, the practice of selfies is represented in similar proportion in the most active users to that identified in the general sample. But no matter the quantity of selfies, according to our ethnographic work, they are used strategically and consciously in the moments the users consider fit. In this sense, the meaning of selfies according to comments in most of the interviews is related more to "keep and save the moment and event as a memory" than to getting likes (female, interview 5).

Barcelona Games World

To refine our methodology, we tested it at a different event. We wanted to check whether the degrees of synchronicity observed in the Primavera Sound case were present in other types of events.

At the Games World show, we used the data scraper for 24 hours (October 7), monitoring the official tag for the event, #bcngamesworld, in Instagram. We obtained a sample of 719 posts. Additionally, we conducted four hours of ethnographic fieldwork and conducted three interviews with a total of about 10 participants. The participants in this case were slightly younger than those at Primavera Sound, ranging in age from 20 to 35. Participant observation took place inside the pavilions, and interviews were conducted after the inner fair activities, in a food-truck area and before a scheduled party. Our goal was to find a relaxed environment similar to the Primavera Sound event. As a general observation from the fieldwork, only a small number of the fair attendees stayed for the party, and some of the interviewees were reluctant to talk about selfies and about social media in general.

The image categorization process defined six categories (see Figure 3); individual selfies and group selfies were combined into one category, since an initial observation reported the same proportion as in the Primavera Sound case.

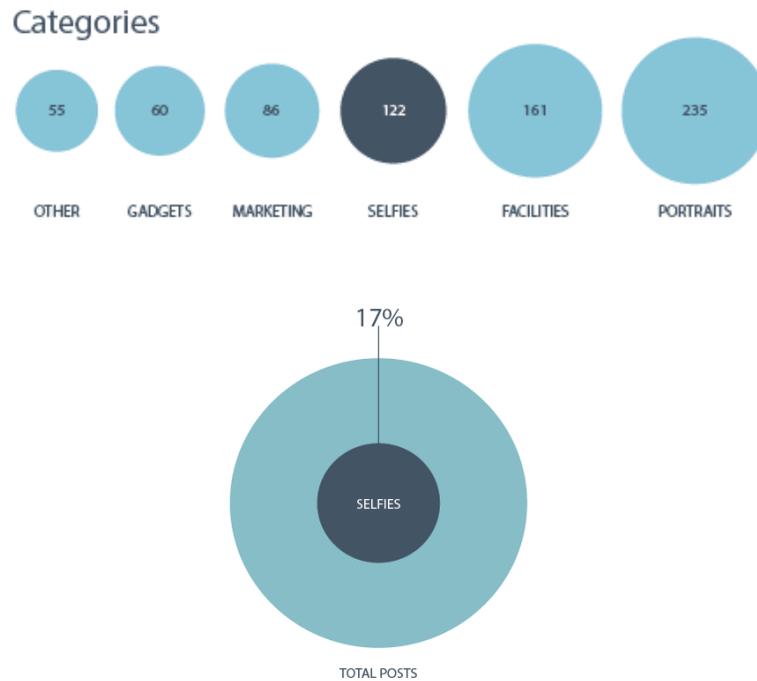


Figure 3. Types of images at Barcelona Games World.

Contrary to our perception during the participant observation, the overall proportion of selfies at Barcelona Games World was quite similar, even slightly higher (17%), than at Primavera Sound, and the number of portraits (32.7%) is undoubtedly higher. This finding is significant in terms of the role of the depiction of personal experience at this event and the interest in sharing it through social network sites. It seems that this event is closely related to the participants' identity (and, consequently, to their own personal narratives) and lived much more as an individual or small-group experience, in contrast to a music festival, where many of the pictures were of the stage and surroundings. At Barcelona Games World, the surroundings and facilities are present, as are gadgets and props, but depictions of people are far more prevalent (49.7% when combining selfies and portraits). Many of the selfies were taken with a selfie stick, so the perspective is more elevated, producing a specific type of image, with wider shots, people looking up the frame, and more of the background in the picture.

We observed participants carrying different types of cameras and gadgets and eager to have their photos taken, especially with celebrities or personalities related to gaming culture. Some of the interviewees were quite averse to talking about selfies and social networking sites. This position was expressed in terms such as: "People who want to tell everything about their lives in social media make me nervous" (female, interview 1), and "I don't have the need to let people know what I'm doing now" (male, interview 1). They explicitly reproduced many negative aspects and common stereotypes about social media and "people who

use social media.” Another participant said: “People who take individual selfies tend to do so in order to show themselves, to project an image, or to tell people, ‘Hey, look where I am,’ to receive others’ acceptance, through likes, they count them. . . . We take group selfies” (male, interview 2).

It is remarkable that the only member of a group that was willing to “confess” to using Instagram was a woman. In a group interview, she laughed after saying: “I used to take a lot of selfies, but . . . I guess that I have grown up and I don’t take that many nowadays” (female, interview 2). This idea resonates with Burns’s (2015) conclusions on how discipline operates on women: since the interviewee grew up, she is more mature and has already “corrected herself” from taking selfies. In contrast, a group of professionals—men involved in music production in the games industry—openly shared their experiences with social media, used in this case as a promotional tool, and they had no problem taking selfies with celebrities around the fair. “I take some personal selfies for my social networks, and, as a professional in the video game industry, I take some group selfies with celebrities for promotional reasons” (male, interview 3). As at the Primavera Sound concert, the exceptionality of the Games World event as well as the preference to share with friends justified the making of a selfie. “I thought of taking a selfie from our stand for a friend who couldn’t be here today” (male 2, interview 3).

As a methodological remark, it is noteworthy that the qualitative part of the research—especially the interviews—led us to expect that social media and selfies would be less present at Barcelona Games World, but the quantitative data indicated just the opposite. This may have happened because the moment we chose to conduct the interviews was not the most suitable (since many participants had already left the convention). Here, the quantitative approach balanced the results, similar to the Primavera Sound case study, where the qualitative approach added nuance to the results of the quantitative approach.

The tag cloud shown in Figure 4 reflects the content in picture captions and reveals further insights.



Figure 4. Tag cloud with the content in captions and comments from Barcelona Games World (frequency ranging from 716 to 10).

Just as at the Primavera Sound event, apart from the official tag, the most repeated topics belong to the event, some key brands, and the city of Barcelona. Among all the words, just one icon, an emoji of a console (that appeared in 15 posts), is present as part of the graphic discourse.

Looking into the most liked images at this event reveals that the most celebrated images belong, respectively, to the account of a football team (80 likes) that was participating in a football game at the venue, and to the official account for the event. Additionally, some particularly liked photos belong to popular users in social media, as was the case at Primavera Sound. In the same vein, a popular YouTuber (with 191,000 subscriptions) whose channel focuses on football has a clear connection with the games related to this sport. His profile also includes a lot of selfies. Finally, among the most liked individual selfies (62 likes) is one belonging to a woman. Her profile, with many selfies, is connected to the manga culture, which in turn associated to the gaming culture.

Among the most active users were commercial brands such as glasses manufacturers, aspiring YouTubers (with fewer followers than the consolidated ones), power gamers, and even some users with private accounts. It is worth noting that one of the most liked pictures of the event is a woman's group selfie (made with a selfie stick) having dinner with some game developers. She has an active Instagram account and is a consolidated YouTuber (with 34,000 subscriptions).

The users (both the more liked and the more active) at Barcelona Games World were more specialized in certain topics that are related explicitly or implicitly with the gaming culture. These users are indeed quite different from those at Primavera Sound (who deployed "good life" and "arty" profiles). The narratives here were more focused and the users were more professionalized in specific topics.

Conclusions and Next Steps

A first level of conclusions can be extracted from a methodological point of view. Our mixed-methods approach was valid in terms of contextualizing the quantitative data with an experience in a time-based context. Both approaches—qualitative and quantitative—complement each other and provide nuance to the results of our analysis. Synchronic research (big data and fieldwork) has allowed us not only to correct technical and methodological problems (for instance, to check whether the scraper returned the data properly in terms of the dates and times of the publication of the images) but also to understand different logics of Instagram use with deeper insights into what constituted meaningful experiences for the users. For instance, it was clear for the participants that taking a selfie in the context of an event is justified by the exceptionality of the moment (for instance, a photo with a musician or games celebrity). The images could be interpreted as a form of testimony that captures a unique moment, as in family albums in the past; but in the case of Instagram, the memories are narrated in real time and enhanced by the act of being shared, liked, and commented on. In other words, the exceptionality of the moment justifies the fact of taking a selfie and sharing it with an audience, which is composed, as our interviewees said, mainly of close friends. Also, as our research suggests, personal stories related to an event are mainly connected to the event time itself, but they can also cover other aspects related to the here and the now, such as the trip or the warm-up to the event. Furthermore, this personal narrative is not necessarily linear or synchronous: some concert pictures may be uploaded days after the event, but the legitimacy factor ("I was there") plays an important

role during the short time span the event can still be considered current. Here, we introduce time as an explicit element in social media analysis, but we would like to expand it in future research as a methodological contribution and in the framework of storytelling.

Despite the many differences between the Primavera Sound and Barcelona Games World events and some differences revealed through our fieldwork in attendees' personal stances toward selfies and social media, we can identify some similarities in the selfies and selfie use.

The interviews provided interesting information about the selfie practice and meaning, pointing to less use of explicit selfie tags. This behavior indicates a consolidation and normalization of the practice of the selfie at a broader level, even if some users are expressing a sort of justification. This could be connected with the discourse of social devaluation of the selfie and moral panics that emerged in specific moments in our conversations.

The decision to use or not use a specific tag is influenced by the purpose of reaching as wide an audience as possible: one of the participants (male 2, interview 3), when asked about the use of the selfie tag, responded that he does not use the selfie tag, but rather uses other tags related to the event. Moreover, he said he used "spontaneous tags" related to the moment and "mainly in English" rather than Spanish or Catalan, which are languages that would reach smaller potential audiences.

Parallel to the research related to cultural events that are the subject of this article, we observed the evolution of the use of the selfie tag in the Instagram application. To ascertain how the selfie tag was being used over the course of the project (2014–2017), we queried regularly the online application Iconosquare (when it was free).⁷ Through this process, we observed that the oscillation in the number of images tagged as selfies during these years is consistent with other data, such as Google Trends, which point to decreasing use of the selfie tag.

This general observation points to a different phase in the social use and perception of selfies that may be correlated with the research on the topic. In other words, this trend might reflect a decreasing interest in the selfie as an isolated practice through a specific tag, but also the consolidation of a practice that is normalized and embedded in other practices in digital culture.

⁷ When we started to search (November 2014), the number of images tagged as selfies was 200 million. This number increased steadily at a pace of 3 million images per week. From July to September 2015, this number slowly decreased to 2.9 million per week. In July 2017, the number of posts with the selfie tag was lower than the number recorded in September 2017. Three weeks later, the number of selfie tags grew at a pace of 1 million per week. As of February 2018, the number of images tagged as selfies was 336,675,600, and it was growing at a pace of less than 1 million (875,000) per week.

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