Facebook Profile Pictures: Yearly Changes in Postings as a Function of Gender and Type of Picture

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Abstract
During the past several years, the Facebook research group (FBRG) at California State University Long Beach (CSULB) has investigated various activities practiced on social media. The present study examines the type of profile pictures an individual posts, and the frequency with which he/she changes that profile picture over a given 12-month period. Data was collected from a convenience sample of 100 subjects (50 men, 50 women) whose profile pictures were sorted into four reliable categories: a) Self in close-up; b) Self in long shot; c) Self with group; d) Other. One major finding shows the most commonly posted profile picture for both genders is Self in a close-up. A second finding is that women change their profile pictures more frequently than men.

Introduction

More than 1.79 billion people use Facebook monthly, and 1.18 billion people use it daily (Facebook statistics, 2016). The study of FB behavior is an excellent vehicle for on-line social science research.

Recently, the FBRG at CSULB developed a 5-category typology of FB behavior (Fiebert, 2013; Fiebert & Yip, 2015), analyzed its stability over time (Stahl & Fiebert, 2013), and compared the way younger and older age cohorts (Luevano, Fiebert & Warren, 2013) fit into the typologies. Another study discerned the way FB birthday greetings vary as a function of gender and relationship status (Fiebert, Tilmont & Warren, 2013). Other studies have determined the "lifespan" of a FB post (Fiebert, Ailee & Yassami, 2014), and have examined FB "likes" as a function of gender, age, relationship status and typology of post (Fiebert, Cole, Farris, Vu & Kasdan, 2015). The group investigated how FB photo sharing was related to online impression management (Dorethy, Fiebert & Warren, 2014).

The present investigation looks at differences between college- age women and men as to the type of FB profile picture they post, and the frequency with which they change said profile pictures within a one-year period.

 Of the few studies that have examined FB profile pictures, the most relevant findings state that extroverted and neurotic subjects upload a significantly larger number of pictures than do others (Eftekhar, Fullwood & Morris, 2014). Narcissism was found to be a factor in the selection of a profile picture in order to enhance attractiveness and positive personality traits (Kapidzic, 2013).

Method

Participants

Five researchers each selected ten males and ten females at random from their pool of active FB friends, thus forming a convenience sample of 100 subjects (50 men, 50 women) with a mean age of 22.57. Forty-four per cent of the subjects were Latino, 33% Caucasian, 18% Asian and 5% African-American. Forty-two per cent of the subjects were in a relationship, 8% were married, 49% were single, and 1% was of unknown status. The single criterion for inclusion in the study was that participants had changed their profile picture at least twice during a twelve-month period.

Procedure

Profile pictures were placed into one of four categories: a) Self in close-up, head and no more than mid-torso; b) Self in long shot, full figure including feet; c) Self with group, individual with one or more other people; d) Other, no portrait, but including any other image, abstract or realistic. The number of times a subject changed his/her profile picture within a twelve-month period was recorded.

Results

The type and number of profile pictures posted were examined separately for male and female subjects. The total number of profile pictures posted by women was 421 of which 171 or

40.62% were Self close-up, 74 or 17.6% were Self long shot, 110 or 26.13% were Self with group, and 66 or 16.68% were Other. The total number of profile pictures posted by men was 259, of which 89 or 34.36% were Self close-up, 71 or 27.41% were Self long shot, 80 or 42.47% were Self with group, and 19 or 7.34% were Other.

Gender differences in change of profile pictures provided significant results: Women (M=8.43, SD=5.70) changed their profile pictures more frequently than men (M=5.18, SD=4.88).

A two-Way ANOVA yielded a highly significant gender difference $F_{(1, 98)} = 12.30$, p=<.001.

Discussion

The sample consisting of mostly young unmarried women changed their profile pictures more frequently than did the sample of young single men. This result suggests that on FB, female subjects are more concerned with their presentation of physical attributes than are males. This may reflect a desire to attract others, as well as to exercise control over one's social presentation of self.

When we compare the types of pictures posted by men and women, women are somewhat more likely than men to post Self close-up and Other. Men are more likely than women to post Self in long shot and Self with group, suggesting that they may be less concerned about exercising strict control over their physical presentation of Self on FB.

One reading of the data suggests that some female subjects may have self-esteem issues in relation to body image, and therefore are more inclined than men to choose Self close-up and Other. These choices allow significantly greater control over self- image than does a full body shot. These results appear consistent with the findings of Kapidzic and Martins (2015) regarding gender differences in Facebook profile picture behavior.

Acknowledgement

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