The flag of France on Facebook: a debate on identity, ideology and globalization

La bandera de Francia en Facebook: un debate en torno a la identidad, la ideología y la globalización

Omar Cerrillo Garnica *
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7941-7583
Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Ecatepec, México

ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media have incorporated into their platforms the use of filters for published images, specifically, for the profile picture. Within Facebook, these image filters have been presented frequently to express support or rejection to some social or political causes. This paper analyzes the case of the French flag filter on Facebook, used the days after the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 2015. Beyond the filter itself, the work analyzes the different reactions that arose inside the network motivated by the use of these images. To carry out this exercise, an image hermeneutic analysis was applied. This method is based on the proposals of Erwin Panofsky in iconography and iconology and aims to review the ideological and identity questions underlying down the use of these filters in the images of networks.

Keywords
Social media; identity; ideology; iconography

RESUMEN

En los años recientes las redes sociales han incorporado a sus plataformas el uso de filtros para las imágenes que se publican, en particular, para las fotos de perfil. Estos filtros de imagen se han presentado con mayor frecuencia en Facebook, con el fin de manifestarse a favor de alguna causa social o política. En este artículo se analiza el caso del filtro con la bandera de Francia, utilizado los días posteriores a los atentados terroristas en París, en noviembre de 2015. Además de reflexionar acerca de lo que representa el filtro, en este trabajo se analizan las distintas reacciones, unas a favor y otras en contra, que surgieron en la red a causa del empleo de estas imágenes. En esta investigación se aplicó un método de análisis hermenéutico de la imagen, basado en las propuestas de Erwin Panofsky en la iconografía e iconología. Con esta metodología se revisaron las prenociones ideológicas y los aspectos identitarios que subyacen en el empleo de estos filtros en las redes sociales.

Palabras clave
Medios sociales; identidad; ideología; iconografía

* PhD in Social and Politic Sciences and Master in Sociology, both diplomas granted by Universidad Iberoamericana; in both occasions he obtained honorable mention. He has been professor of Tecnológico de Monterrey, Universidad Iberoamericana and Universidad Anáhuac. He is specialized on the social analysis of art, music and culture; he had work with subjects as rock's culture in Mexico City, cultural politics during Mexico's Bicentenary, as well as the use of digital networks for politic activism. Also, he has been consultor on the function of social programs of sports and arts in order to reduce violence and crime.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

1

Introduction

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, Facebook launched a filter for profile photographs alluding to the colors of the French flag to show its support to the victims of the attacks. A debate immediately sparked off as to whether it was appropriate to place a filter on the profile photograph. The discussion not only involved the adhesion to the French victims but also the Western interventionism, the colonization, the deaths caused by drug trafficking in Mexico, the history of the Middle East, among other. In this paper, we will analyze the contents of the Facebook posts from a compilation of memes[1] and posts made during the week following the attacks.

The hypothesis of this work is that social networks are means that promote an ideology that exalts a vision of the world linked to the preservation of a global *status quo.* This ideology promotes models of identity based on universal values such as freedom, solidarity, support to victims, among others. This vision, proposed as universal and global, can however generate reactions that are influenced by the context of every user and in accordance with the local situation, whether in Mexico, Lebanon or any other country.

The theoretical framework is based on Gilberto Giménez' identity postulates (1997), as well as Slavoj Žižek's notion of ideology (2012); this analysis will be conducted based on the methodological proposal woven from these concepts. Next, we will show some examples of some users' Facebook posts, all of them alluding to the use of the French flag as filter on the profile photo to support the victims of the terrorist attacks mentioned above. We will end the analysis by drawing the relevant conclusions.

Rebuilding the Sense of Identity on Social Networks

Identity is formed through an ongoing exchange of symbolic information between an individual and his/her social environment. This creates a psychological and social environment in which the subject evolves. These factors encourage the individual to find, recognize and distinguish him/herself from the other. Peter Berger points out that "society does not only define, but also creates a psychological reality. The individual is in charge of himself in society, i.e., he acknowledges his identity in terms socially defined and these definitions become reality when said individual lives in society" (1982, pp. 358-359).

The subject does not create an identity for the simple fact of belonging to a group. Society offers him different options and the individual chooses between one group or another, but society also reconfigures his alternatives based on the tendencies of the choice made by different subjects that make up said society over time. "Identity, with its corresponding adhesions to the psychological reality, is always an identity within a specific and socially constructed world, or contemplated from the standpoint of the

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

2

individual: one identifies oneself, and the others identify him according to one's situation in a world in common" (Berger, 1982, p. 363).

Over time, the concept of identity has changed. In ancient times and the Middle Ages, the identification with a group was as simple as mentioning the place of origin – Thales de Miletus – blood ancestry – Carolingians – or race – Moors -. At that time, identity had a meaning very different from the one it acquired in modern times, where a change in this vision brought about the transfer of the concept to new theoretical perspectives. "The dynamics of modern identity is increasingly more open, prone to conversion, exasperatedly reflexive, multiple and differentiated" (Sciolla, quoted in Giménez, 1997, p. 22).

It is essential to highlight that "one of the central characteristics of the so-called "modern" societies would be precisely the pluralization of life-worlds […], as opposed to the unity and globalizing character of the same in pre-modern societies culturally integrated in a symbolic unitarian universe" (Giménez, 1997, p. 22).

This pluralization of the life-worlds became more pronounced following the growth of interpersonal relationships in the media. This phenomenon multiplied at the end of the 20th century with the popularization of the Internet, and even more at the beginning of the 21st century with the arrival of Web 2.0 and social networks.

To understand the dispersion of the identity as of the arrival of digital communication, it is essential to recuperate Sherry Turkle's concept of "distributed identify" (quoted in Ardèvol, 2002) who makes a connection between the life-worlds of a person with the number of windows opened on his/her computer. Each of these windows has a different self which compels to make an ongoing juxtaposition of interests and formats of the personality which is understood as a "triumph of bricolage". It is becoming increasingly common for the subject to establish simultaneous interactions with other individuals through different screens –the computer, the tablet and the mobile phone-, and, in every one of them, he can interact with more than one person and with more than one interest.

The game of recognition and differentiation being constructed through identity processes is more complex over time. Besides, it is becoming easier to create fictitious characters on the networks, or even to supplant people alive or dead to interact through a false profile. In this network kaleidoscopic game, identities become disperse and fragmented; hence, the exercise of freedom promoted in this late modernity also provides the individual with the possibility of recognizing himself through different proclivities these networks offer.

With all these possibilities of interaction on the Internet, the presentation of the person before the virtual world is not radically different from what happens in the real world. The basic ideas described by Ervin Goffman (1997) remain in force, since it is still

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

3

important to obtain information such as the "general socio-economic status", the concept of oneself, the attitude that one has of others, his/her competence, his/her integrity, etc." (p. 13).

Even though some parameters change, the interaction on the Internet maintains aspects of the basic elements of social interaction almost intact. Sometimes it will be in real time, and at other times, the diachrony will be the temporary way in which the interaction between the subjects participating in the conversation is presented. After all, the individuals must play a role and seek making their story consistent for themselves and for others:

> Being in cyberspace means having a representation of oneself, a digital identity that is being constructed from one's own activity on the Internet and that of others. The current offer of leisure/business and cultural consumption on the Internet, the applications for electronic communication and the social networking sites build a structure in which lives a "virtual self" (Giones-Valls, 2010).

It is essential to highlight the particular qualities of the interaction through a network. The juxtaposition of social roles is an important particularity that occurs within the social network environment. In fact, social actors take over a role that oftentimes has already been assigned. "If the individual adapts a task that is not only new but that is not well established within society, or if he tries to change the approach of the task, he is likely to discover that there are already several well-established facades from which to choose. (Goffman, 1997, p. 39).

In the case of the Internet, these facades are overlapped, which creates a very dynamic and polymorphic visual effect such as Frank Gehry's architectural style, where the typical façade of an urban building is covered by another that modifies it which produces a type of metamorphosis that alters the visual composition of the construction as he did with the Prague Dancing House or the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles.

When a subject enters social networks, it is unlikely that, as a user, he finds a pre-established role model from which the new agent can draw and only has to imitate. While every social network generates its own interaction atmosphere, there is no specific way in being on Facebook, Twitter or any other social network.

The role of *youtuber*, *twittstar* or *influencer* is recreated constantly. There is not instruction manual to enter, belong, interact and share. If it ever existed, the updates to which these platforms are subject force the user to incorporate new options to create content, interact with other users and other topics.

This juxtaposition is displayed in the impossibility of separating the individual's everyday roles: leisure and work, entertainment and information, privacy and

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

4

socialization. What used to be opposite poles, are currently overlapping on the same surface that folds and unfolds the different personality modalities.

The construction of the "virtual self" must take into consideration the different audiences every person shows him/herself to. When interacting on social networks, an average subject is read by his relatives, classmates from years past and maybe complete strangers that have access to the user's profile.

A very peculiar paradox is given in the relation between digital social networks and the political expression. On the one hand, every individual is able to express his ideas on multiple forums and pass them on to public personalities (politicians, entrepreneurs, journalists, celebrities, among others) who used to be so distant that it seemed impossible to get in touch with them. On the other hand, the accumulation of information on these virtual spaces triggers a tight control of the topics and trends surrounding what is being said and exposed.

William Lafi Youmans and Jillian C. York (2012) analyzed four specific cases in which Facebook, YouTube and Twitter – understood as enterprises that seek to make profits – carried out subtle censorship actions to social movements during the Arab Spring and showed a certain support mainly to the authoritarian regimes of Egypt or Syria.

Activist Julian Assange and his team of collaborators narrated the Wikileaks[2] situation, since under the shelter of the Stored Communications Act[3], the North American government pressured Google, Twitter and sonic.net in revealing information of the site administrators and informants (Assange, 2012, p. 71).

This control is likely to operate on large-scale rebellion movements such as the two examples mentioned above. However, the rules of the *agenda setting* (Scheufele, 2000) are applied to social networks. This agenda consists in the media implementing a public agenda to establish priority topics the public should think of (*priming*). Likewise, the second phase of said agenda is called *framing*, that consists in framing these topics, i.e., dictate how one should look at it in a specific way, think positively or negatively about the actors involved or leave some aspects out of the topic of discussion, among others.

In the social network semantics, *priming* can be understood as the trends or *trending topics*, while *framing* presents the way in which we should deal with trend-setting topics. Both trend-diction and contextual framework are control devices that provide structure to messages and conversations. Power generates hegemonic discourses that circulate through social networks and determine the flow of conversation.

In this digital era, message control come in multiple forms. Through *bots*, *retwitts* and the manipulation of algorithms, among other network management strategies, it is

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

5

possible to privilege the discourse of one of the actors and reduce the impact of others. It is also possible to highlight intentionally only one part of a story to emphasize one detail over others more important or delicate. Conversations on false or non-existing issues can even be created (the so-called *fake news*).

This corresponds to Slavoj Žižek's way of explaining the concept of ideology as a trap that makes us see aspects in a natural and logical way when they are probably not so. "It is the invisible order that maintains your apparent freedom […]. Ideology is not merely imposed upon us, ideology is our spontaneous relation with the social world, as we perceive every meaning. Every one of us in our own way enjoy the ideology" (Žižek, in Fiennes, 2012). One enters the networks on one's own will, imitates the forms of interactions that happen there and incorporate as a moment of enjoyment this public exposure through technology. The determination of the topics and the ways to access them are necessary rules that the user unconsciously accepts if he/she wants to access this moment of enjoyment.

Facebook is generally seen as a leisure and entertainment space; however, as part of its kaleidoscopic façade, it sometimes has different contents, even politized ones. Oftentimes, this social network has suggested to its Internet users what and how they should think.

The first case detected in this study occurred in 2013, when some users[4] placed a phosphorescent green screen as a profile photograph as a sign of protest for the bankruptcy of an enterprise that designed visual effects for the movie *Life of Pi* (under the title of *An Extraordinary Adventure,* in Mexico), despite the outstanding sales the movie made. The Digital Visual Artists Guild fostered this campaign known as the Project Green Challenge, demanding better payment for its work (Martínez, 2013).

A second case occurred in 2014 when Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, became one of the main promotors of the YouTube trend known as the *Ice Bucket Challenge*. The challenge consisted in asking someone to dunk a bucket of iced water over his/her head and make a donation to fight amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

Zuckerberg met the challenge and called upon Bill Gates, billionaire and founder of Microsoft, a senior Facebook executive, and Reed Hastings, President of Netflix ((Burnett, 2014). Through Zuckerberg's participation in this challenge, the *Ice Bucket Challenge* gained great notoriety worldwide.

The first time Facebook proposed topics for the public agenda in a direct manner and under its own name was the rainbow flag, associated with the LGBTTTIQ community, was made available to the user as a profile photo filter in June 2015. This option was activated when the Supreme Court of Justice of the United States ruled that same sex marriage enjoyed the same guarantees as heterosexual couples, which represented a

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

6

major step in the fight for the human rights movement of the gay community. Within this framework, the network launched a filter with the rainbow flag to celebrate this decision and support the homosexual community.

No major controversy was given rise to in neither of these cases. These were causes difficult to oppose. They all belong to the politically correct rhetoric. Few people were aware of the green screen campaign; therefore, it had a low impact on the Facebook community. As for the research to prevent and treat ALS, a devastating disease, the moral stance seems irrefutably in favor of donations.

Supporting sick people is a humanitarian cause that virtually no ethical and moral code can challenge, although we could question how many individuals who performed the viral act admittedly donated to the cause. Regarding the topic of sexual diversity, this movement has grown in number of followers and it has gained notoriety and public support.

The issue of France terrorist attacks in November 2015 was quite different. It not only dealt with the humanitarian aspect, which was most important, but it sparked off a debate on a series of social, political, ethical and cultural values. The situation compared different oppositions; the West and the East, modernity and pre-modernity, colonialism and resistance, globalization and localism.

To engage in the visual analysis exercise, we will specify some necessary methodological aspects. The pictures were taken from Facebook during the ten days after the Paris attacks (between November 14th and 24th, 2015). Our study is based on Erwin Panofsky's proposal (1982), of the semiotic analysis of the visual arts at three levels: a) pre-iconographic that consists in the recognition of the figures presented in the play; b) iconographic, where the figures are set within a cultural context, which implies deepening the description of the play as a whole and not only taking the figures separately; and c) inconological, where the studio delves even more into the interpretative level of the play in considering it integrally.

While Panofsky's proposal addresses the analysis of visual arts, it is precisely what provokes and facilitates the in-depth analysis of the images in the profile photos. The graphic elements were first taken into consideration and, subsequently, their cultural sense, to conclude with the socio-political interpretation of the image, where we will find ideological clues.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

7

Profile Photo and the Paris Attacks: Beyond the Filter with the French Flag

In the early morning of November 14th, 2015, Facebook launched a filter with the French flag to support the victims of the Paris terrorist attacks on the night of November 13th. Mark Zuckerberg, creator and president of Facebook, was spontaneously one of the first in using a filter. Subsequently, thousands of users applied the same filter:
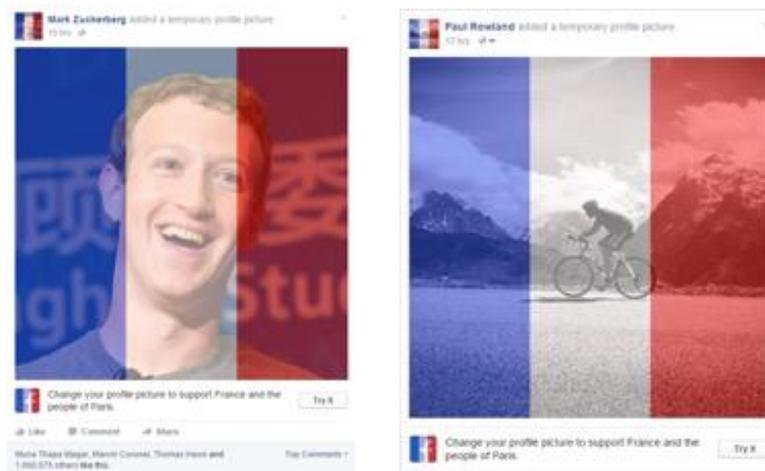
Pictures 1 and 2. Profile Photos of Mark Zuckerberg and
Paul Rowland days after the Paris attacks.[5]

Pictures as these widely circulated in the days after the attacks. The previous profile photo was overlapped with the colors of the French flag, in the same way as with the masking of the Dancing House facade. At the pre-iconographic level, there are only the two following elements: the composition of figures previously decided by the user for his profile photo (a close-up portrait in Zuckerberg's case, and an open shot of a mountainous landscape with a cyclist in Rowland's case) and the blue, white and red colors overlapping the previous picture (Picture 1 and 2).

At the iconographic level, there is a juxtaposition of two elements: a strictly personal one (a picture of each subject designated to represent him in front of a virtual community), and on the opposite side, a picture identified as national: the French flag. However, the correlation between the two elements can seem ambiguous.

In both cases, Zuckerberg nor Rowland are French; both are American. This is where the following level of analysis arises: the iconological level. Here, we would seek the correlation between France and the United States as historical allies, two nations that represent the Western world based on values such as democracy, liberty and individualism.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

8

When some users managed to use filters at that level, profile photos alluding to Syria began to appear (Picture 3).
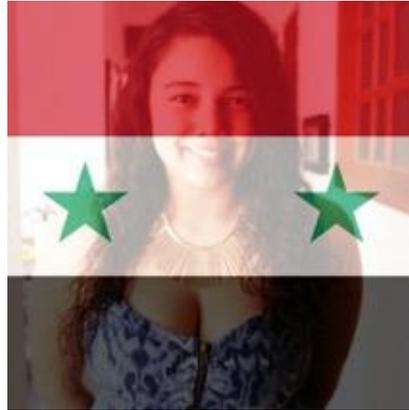

Picture 3. Claudia Murguía's profile photo days after the Paris attacks.

This picture presents the same elements found in the previous pre-iconographic level cases: a personal image (the only change is the medium close-up) and the overlapping flag. At the iconographic level, there is also a small modification: it is no longer an American relating to France but a Mexican woman with the Syrian flag. This makes it clear that the user does not identify with Western values, which is emphasized with the text added to the posting of the picture:

> Those of us who study this, read about these tragedies every day know very well what yesterday event mean. The West is being struck by the war they themselves have been provoking during years. The Paris event is the perfect excuse and we know that; as always, innocent Syrian citizens are going to pay the price for what radical groups are doing. Where has your solidarity with them been all this time? These people who are capable of anything whatsoever have destroyed Syria; people are fleeing by the millions. Iraq, as we knew it, does not exist anymore. Even though the international community denies it, Syria is on the verge of disappearing. And are people appalled by France? […]. Yes. I do stand in solidarity with the citizens of France, but now more than ever, I stand in solidarity with the Syrians and I am concerned about the future of Syria. Be strong, Syria (Murguía, November 14th, 2015).

Here, we notice the opposition between those who support the victims of the attacks in France and those who sympathize with those affected by the war in Syria. Different standpoints of the same event begin to take shape by simply adding a filter to the profile photo on the network. If we thought that these two standpoints sufficed to prompt a debate, we can add intermediate views that do not support either cause (Picture 4).

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

9
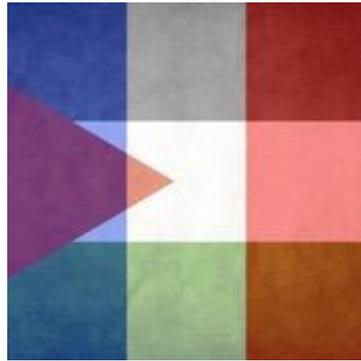
Picture 4. Mehdi Bouakka's profile photo
days after the Paris attacks.

The figures in this example are hazy (pre-iconographic level) since there is a nine-square grid and a triangle on the left, which all together gives the impression of looking at a mixture of colors and hues. However, at the iconographic level, the juxtaposition of two pictures each one with a nation connotation, the French and the Palestinian flags together, combined, without seeing which one overlaps the other.

This brings us to the iconological analysis where a more complex reading can be obtained. The strong relationship between France and the Middle East stems from colonialism and the post-colonial trade ties. An estimate of 5.5 million Muslims makes up close to 8% of France national population (Cañas, 2015); these figures have increased steadily so far this century. This clearly indicates that comparing France, an iconic Western country with the Middle East, is ever more complex than it seems.

The Facebook user, a Muslim living in Paris, that provided this picture is an example of this complex relationship. By taking this fact into account, the picture makes sense. In Bouakka's eyes, the Paris victims are as important as those of Beirut, the capital city of a Muslim State that suffered attacks a day before the French capital.[6]

These intermediate nuances point out to other views with a greater juxtaposition of pictures and meanings as we can see in Picture 5. Different figures appear in this picture at the pre-iconographic level. First, there is close-up of Britney Spears, the American singer, looking serious and unattractive. It is a picture that has become common in using memes, which is associated with tediousness. We also notice a tapestry of four flags: France, Syria, Mexico and the rainbow flag (Picture 5).

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

10

Picture 5. Jorge Fajardo's profile photo
days after the Paris attacks.

The composition gives plenty to talk about at the iconographic level. If we analyze Britney Spears's facial expression, the vagueness of her stare denotes scarce attention. This is emphasized by the blank expression of her mouth. The position of the head, slightly tilted to the front, completes an expression of reluctance and little interest. Added to this picture is the tapestry of the four flags.

The presence of French and Syrian bits and pieces is explained in the previous analyses; but in this case, the user wanted to show his own nationality by including the Mexican flag. Lastly, the presence of the rainbow flag in the lower right corner of the picture has to do with the LGBTI+ movement flag filter that was popularized five months before the attacks in June 2015, as noted previously.

At the iconological level, this picture provides very relevant aspects for the analysis. Why use a profile photo of a bored Britney when the attacks occurred in Paris? This version of Britney Spears is known in the world of memes as Neyde Spears and it is used to indicate boredom.[7] The interpretation of the ensemble of pictures suggests that this user finds the growing popularity of filters with the French, Syrian and gay flags on Facebook profiles boring.

The use of black humor rejects not only the filter of the French labarum, but also of the activism promoted by these tools. The ill will of the use of filters was a feeling that was not so easily displayed on the network; hence, this profile photo was very useful in understanding the reaction of the Facebook users since it illustrates graphically[8] a standpoint regarding the topic.

The most noticeable part of the discussion on the Internet was not given through the user's profile pictures but through the responses issued by his contacts. In these cases, we find two types of pictures: humorous and nationalist. In the case of the first, we have the meme of picture 6.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

11

At the pre-iconographic level, this picture shows a medium close-up of actress Meryl Streep, a picture taken from the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* (in Mexico, *El Diablo viste a la Moda*). The iconographic level refers us to the movie, since Streep's character, Miranda Prestley, is a demanding fashion designer hard to convince of the aesthetic value of the garment proposals. Miranda, with the sharp and serious gesture shown in the film, criticizes the profile photo aesthetics.

Picture 6. Meme alluding to the French flag
with a Facebook filter profile photo.

The iconological level would have to be accompanied by a text (hence, it is not strictly iconological since writing is also taken as a sign). Therefore, the reference to the *zopilote* (a Nahautl word for black vulture) refers to the typically Mexican, to the traditional. The humor focuses on the disruption that arises between the Mexican face with indigenous features of an imaginary user and the French flag representing the European and the Caucasian. This joke introduces signs of racism and classicism, two very common elements in Mexican humor.

As for the nationalist pictures, we find as many posts as memes referring to this topic (Pictures 7 and 8).

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

12

Picture 7. Meme alluding to the French flag as
filter of the Facebook profile photo.

As it is very common with this type of pictures, we refer once more to the frame of a movie. At the pre-iconographic level, we notice the picture of Heath Ledger, the joker in the Batman movie: *The Dark Knight.*

At the inconographic level, the gestures and the positions of the hands express a lack of understanding of some topic. Once more, this third level is understood through the reading of the text. The 52 thousand killings occurred during Enrique Peña Nieto's[9] presidency in Mexico are compared to the 150 Paris victims on November 13th, 2015 (Picture 7). Here, we are staggered first by the number of killings in Mexico in comparison to those of France. The local is prioritized over the global. This message was emphasized by other memes:

Picture 8. Meme alluding to the use of the French flag
as filter in the Facebook profile photo.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

13

In this picture, the only iconic element is the substitution of the *a* in the word Paris for the Eiffel Tower (Picture 8). Otherwise, the text is explicit and reinforces the idea of looking first at the local before the international.

Toward a Final Analysis

To go back to the theory expounded at the beginning of this analysis, we must verify if there are any processes of identification and ideological expressions behind these pictures. As for the first concept, it seems clear that the mere choice of a picture as representative of a person is converted into a postmodern expression of the manifestation of the "I" according to George Herbert Mead.

There is an identity principle since what is embedded in the picture aims at establishing links between those that think alike and try to distinguish themselves from others.

Let's take the example of the bicycle. People that are fond of cycling are likely to be interested in that user's posts, while those that do not have any liking for this vehicle will simply ignore the posts and they will never interact with said user.

The profile photo is intended to do so; however, it is also a sales element. The *Cosmopolitan* magazine even has articles on how to take good selfies. Its photography section gives advice on the lighting, frame and background to use on social networks. In a sense, according to Žižek (2012), choosing a picture has an ideological character. It is one of these ways of feeling good within the ideological system. The profile photo also represents being good with the system: one of the ways in which the Lacanian imaginary takes pleasure in masking the real.

Having a good profile photo is a guarantee of having many "likes" and abundant comments, which is a motivation to continue consuming social media contents. The more popular liking notifications, the more visits to review the profile; hence, the site obtains more information about its users, which is commercialized with different brands that sell directly to potential customers that publicly express their interest for certain topics.

As for image filters, they are used first of all in juxtaposing faces, facades Gehry's style. Now, it is not enough to show the best picture of myself, I can also add a cover that allows seeing something that the face on its own cannot convey. The image is iconographic and iconological and impairs the gestalt senses of form and content: everything is at all levels.

Likewise, filters overlapping the image are not a subtle suggestion of the site to obtain a kind of digital activism. There is truism in the fact that Facebook suggests the French

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

14

flag and no other in the profile. If we adhere to Žižek's notion of ideology, there would also have a masked ideology in choosing the Syrian flag in the profile.

The choice of the flag filter, whichever it may be, is a symptom in Lacanian terms. It does not matter whether it is France or Syria, whoever uses the flag in his/her profile photo seeks to symbolize what will never materialize. Placing a flag is an ideological act since it "is a social reality which existence implies the lack of knowledge of its participants regarding their essence, i.e., the social effectiveness, which reproduction implies that the individuals 'do not know what they are doing" (Žižek, 2012, p. 46).

The image that represents the best attempt to escape from the symptom and its ideological process is that of Britney Spears. It is not even a direct expression of the "self/ I", nor is it an adhesion to any of the causes. The image at least seeks to accept that the choice implies entering in the ideological game where to choosing some option means choosing Facebook, i.e., it does not even take the matter seriously. "Cynicism is the prevalent ideology; people do not believe any more in the ideological truth; they do not take ideological proposals seriously" (Žižek, 2012, p. 61). The image shows this "ideological fantasy".

As for the memes and their attempt to recuperate local topics, which are also symptoms, Žižek (2012) claims that the "bourgeois individual" (the Facebook user) "does not conceive the particular content as the result of an autonomous movement of a universal idea […] he does not think that the universal is a property of the particular, that is, of the things that really exist" (p. 60).

The criticism of the support given to France to the detriment of the Mexican victims, consists in trying to place humanitarian values solely on what is considered real and close, when in both cases, France and Mexico are only symbolic matters. A victim in Apatzingan is far from a Facebook user which is not a question of physical distance but of living the symptom of aggression as something personal.

By way of conclusion, we consider that this type of studies is not conclusive or final but it is rather an outline of the scenario that unfolds in the research on sociopolitical and cultural expressions in cybernetic spaces and in new public spheres where relevant topics and others that only appear to be so will be discussed.

It is important to keep a critical eye on the perspectives and discursivities that appear on digital means and that individuals generally adopt as their own without acknowledging the communication and social richness that exist in an image which corresponds more to a postmodern façade of a dancing building.

For this exercise, we conducted an analysis of the visual discourse since most of the content that circulates on social networks is of that nature. This exercise can be criticized

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

15

as being subjective as the vision of the creator of the profile photo or whoever posted the meme has not been considered. This methodological proposal follows the tradition of the hermeneutic methods that consider the importance of subjective and interpretative aspects as something essential to combine with the text (or, in this case, with the image) and with the Internet user (Vásquez, 2005).

We claim the importance of the subjective exercise of reflection as a fundamental method to trigger knowledge, even more so when the meme, understood as a "unit of cultural transmission" (Amiguet, 2018), is a process of socialization of the information. The best way to convert these data into knowledge is by carrying out these exercises of entering and exiting implicit contents where a large number of messages that, as such, seem trivial and frivolous, but in fact, are rich in ideology and particular world views.

Digital social networks have emerged as this 21st century public arena. They are spaces where sociality and politics compete. However, virtuality prevails. Users rant at length and argue as never before in an empty space that seldomly transcends into the real world. It is the jumping and dancing façade that only masks a building that remains the same, structured and unchanged in spite of the distorted reflections of the entrance. The question that remains is if these ferocious voices of the façade may at some point modify the structure of the building: the political system. This, we will see in a near future.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

16

REFERENCES

Amiguet, Ll. (2018). La metáfora es un invento tan importante como la rueda. *La Vanguardia*. Recuperado de: https://www.lavanguardia.com/lacontra/20181107/452785181682/la-metafora-es-un-invento-tan-importante-como-la-rueda.html

Ardèvol, E. y Vayreda, A. (2002). Identidades en línea, prácticas reflexivas. Seminario sobre la identidad en la era digital, 10° festival internacional de video y multimedia de Canarias. Recuperado de: http://cv.uoc.edu/~grc0_000199_web/pagina_personal/Identidades_online.pdf

Assange, J. (2012). *Criptopunks*. Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones.

Berger. P. (1982). La identidad como problema en la sociología del conocimiento, en G. Remmling (comp). *La sociología del conocimiento. Origen y desarrollo de un estilo de pensamiento sociológico.* México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Burnett, S. (2014). Mark Zuckerberg Accepts Chris Christie's Ice Bucket Challenge. Recuperado de http://time.com/3110357/mark-zuckerberg-chris-christie-als-ice-bucket-challenge-bill-gates-sheryl-sandberg-netflix-facebook/

Cañas, G. (2015, febrero 26). El 56% de los franceses considera que el Islam es una amenaza. *El País*. Recuperado de: http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/02/26/actualidad/1424956493_061260.html

Fiennes, S. (2012). *The Pervert Guide's to Ideology*. Toronto: Zeitgeist Films.

Giménez, G. (1997). Materiales para una teoría de las identidades sociales. En *Frontera Norte*, vol. 9, núm. 18, pp. 9-28.

Giones-Vals, A. (2010). La gestión de la identidad digital: una nueva habilidad informacional y digital. *Textos Universitaris de Biblioteconomia i Documentació*, núm. 24, junio. Recuperado de: http://bid.ub.edu/24/giones2.htm

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

17

Goffman, E. (1997). *La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.

Lackey, M. y Pottinger, O. (2018, julio 13). Stored Communication Act: Practical considerations. En *Mondaq*. Recuperado de: http://www.mondaq.com/unitedstates/x/717180/Social+Media/Stored+Comm unications+Act+Practical+Considerations

Martínez, D. (2013). Green Profile Pictures Show Support For Visual Effects Industry. Recuperado de: http://geeknewsnetwork.net/2013/02/26/green-profile-pictures-show-support-for-visual-effects-industry/

Panofsky, E. (1982). *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Salazar, M. (2018, mayo 23). ¡El meme más legendario de Britney Spears cumple 10 años! ¿Conoces la historia? En *E!* Recuperado de: https://www.eonline.com/mx/news/938537/-el-meme-mas-legendario-de-britney-spears-cumple-10-anos-conoces-su-historia

Scheufele, D. (2000). Agenda Setting, Priming and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication. *Mass Communication & Society*, núm. 3 (2 y 3), pp. 297-316.

Spanish Oxford Living Dictionaries (2018). Recuperado de: https://es.oxforddictionaries.com/definicion/meme

Vásquez, H. (2005). Hermenéutica y análisis cualitativo. *Moebio*, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Chile. Recuperado de: http://www.facso.uchile.cl/publicaciones/moebio/23/carcamo.htm

Youmans, W. L. y York, J. C. (2012). Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements. *Journal of Communication,* núm. 62, pp. 315-329.

Žižek, S. (2012). *El sublime objeto de la ideología*. México: Siglo XXI.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

18

[1] According to scientist Richard Dawkins, a meme is to be understood as a cultural or behavioral unit transmitted from one person to another or from one generation to another. This idea was transferred to the digital world of the Internet as a meme is considered as any "text, image, video or any other element that disseminates rapidly on the Internet and which is often modified for humorous purposes" (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018).

[2] Wikileaks is a multinational mediatic organization founded in 2006 by Julian Assange, who specializes in the analysis and publication of large information databases of restricted or censured government files, where topics such as war, espionage and corruption are analyzed (Wikileaks, 2018).

[3] This is the law that was enacted in the United States in 1986 with the intention of regulating the privacy of e-mails and other electronic messages. Generally speaking, the law protects the privacy of information; however, it allows the government to request from digital communication service providers to open electronic mails or other communications in order to conduct some investigation for federal crimes. There are voices that accuse this law of being unconstitutional since it violates the right to private life as set forth in the Constitution of the United States of America (Lackey, 2018).

[4] The people who joined the campaign were mostly digital artists or animators that worked in the film or advertising sector (Martínez, 2013).

[5] Images 1 to 5 are taken from several Facebook profiles that used flag or similar filters days after the Paris attacks. Except for Mark Zuckerberg, the other profiles correspond to characters unknown to public life.

[6] The Beirut attack was adjudicated to the Islamic State (ISIS), who executed on the spot one of the leaders of Hezbollha, a Shiite Muslim organization violently opposed to the Israel occupation of Palestinian territories.

[7] According the *E! Online* site, "the unfavorable (but iconic) image of Brit was captured on May 23rd, 2008, during designer Christian Audigier's fiftieth birthday celebration, attended by personalities such as Kim Kardashian, Fergie, Pamela Anderson, Snoop Dogg and even Michael Jackson! Spears attended the celebration in a mini black dress and sat in the VIP section. The camera captured some of her facial expressions of boredom and the rest is history" (Salazar, 2018).

[8] This was corroborated through an interview via Facebook of the profile user who claims that: "I actually found it ironic that everyone sent their "support" with their profile pic, which does not mean anything and it does not help either" (Jorge Fajardo, December 5th, 2018).

[9] The figures differ according to the source. *Aristegui Noticias* (News), announced 57 thousand casualties in August 2015, while *Sin Embargo* reports the same number of causalities one year before. Leo Zuckermann in *Excélsior*, reports 20 thousand executions in March 2015.

Paakat, Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad, Year 9, no. 17 (2019) ● September 2019-February 2020
eISSN 2007-3607 ● Universidad de Guadalajara

19