

Sini Kaipainen, Doctoral candidate, Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland, [sini.kaipainen@aalto.fi](mailto:sini.kaipainen@aalto.fi)

## **What Does a Close Reading Have to Do With Exploring the Meanings of Photojournalistic Self-presentation on Instagram?**

### **ABSTRACT**

The present paper tests and develops the process of close reading in the context of Instagram. The study shows how to use this approach when investigating photojournalistic self-presentation on Instagram for the data collected from a single Instagram profile and its user interviewed. Due to a) how Instagram works as a digital automedia technology and b) how the identity work mediated by Instagram can be an unstable and ongoing process, close reading can be tricky on many levels. Therefore, I also consider its ethical, practical and other challenges.

The theoretical reflection and interpretation can be missing from digital positivism. Indeed, Instagram research needs qualitative approaches which are theory-based and use small datasets instead of big data. In so doing, a scholar-reader may achieve something that digital positivism overlooks. This paper addresses a possible strategy to explore self-presentation and identity performance on Instagram: The process-driven practice of close reading, based on an active, sensitive interpretation process, not code identification. In this case, the approach applied means a theoretical, conceptual, and contextual reflection with and against the texts and subjects I study. The research provides, hence, a valuable insight into the practice traditionally associated with Literary Criticism.

While Instagram mediates our identity processes and products, it mediates our reading also. Instagram challenges our reading, yet the platform does not remove the need to form connections and create meanings. As a scholar-reader, I must be part of Instagram processes and products to understand its complex mechanisms, power dynamics, and demands for its users and readers. The study frames the automedial self-presentation on Instagram as texts and acts that are readable. I will distribute my personal experience as an Instagram user to understand the cultural experience. Thus, I can reflect, autoethnographically, what it means to read in the given context.

If we want to study journalistic images and professional identity work ‘among us’, we need to understand the logic of photographic data in platforms and social spaces like Instagram. Also, we must discuss how, in the present case, a professional photojournalist experiences our digital society, the roles of their photojournalistic self-presentation and photojournalistic images that Instagram mediates and shapes. This methodological paper participates in a critical discussion of what can be seen as a text. What does it mean to read the meanings of automedial acts and practices through visual texts in the digital visual era of personal, intimate self-branded professionalism?

**Keywords: Close reading, Auto/Media Ethnography, Photojournalism, Instagram, Self-presentation, Automedia**