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Selfie-stick accounts: extending and engaging visual methods in contemporary family practice

Purpose: the purpose of this paper is to consider the challenges of using participant-produced photographs in family food research.

Design/methodology/approach: families participating in a study on family dinners agreed to take photos of their weekday evening meal using their mobile phone and a selfie stick. These images were subsequently used as a photo elicitation cue in a long interview.

Findings: 'Selfies', or participant directed photographs, are a way to involve all family members in the research. Giving participants control over the composition and production of the image reveals how participants see themselves, and how they wish to be seen, while uncovering some of the physical, material and social realities of contemporary family practice. Photographs not only capture rich contextual and spatial details but act as an aide memoir and interview stimulus to investigate broader socialisation around family feeding. Visual images reveal otherwise unrecalled aspects of the family dinner and encourage more reflection and discussion by participants around the social realities of their family practice. Photographs taken using a mobile phone and selfie stick complement and stimulate traditional methods of qualitative investigation.

Originality/value: The paper contributes to the debate about the challenges in using visual methods and how the selfie technique can be employed, the photographs shared, and visual data incorporated as part of the research method. As communicative affordances, the mobile phone, camera and selfie stick frame the practices around family dinner and afford the subject an agentic perspective as both producer and consumer of the image.

Key words: photographs, selfie, selfie stick, photo elicitation, communicative affordances, qualitative methods, visual data, family practice.

Selfie-stick accounts: extending and engaging visual methods in contemporary family practice

Introduction

"In 2014, a new gadget hit the market: the "selfie stick," allowing photographers to take more "professional" looking selfies from ever-new angles." Iqani and Schroeder (2015: 407).

Families use photography to capture and celebrate high points of family life as part of a unified identity (Bourdieu 1990: 19). In this regard photographs offer a powerful means of binding family members together across different generations and as a way of capturing those ''magical moments" (Chambers, 2001: 84). Rather than just highlighting key familial moments, photographs can also uncover subtle and more nuanced meanings of performing family. Embodied choices that families make in everyday practices can reveal a lot about their outlook, their tastes and their attitudes. Photographs performed and framed in a "practice inspired performance perspective" allow access to the "family gaze" and introduce questions of sociality and social relations (Larsen, 2005:417). As Sweetman (2009) suggests, photography can uncover aspects of family life that are not easily, articulated by participants or seen by the researcher[i]. The selfie stick allows participants to add a new dimension to this traditional visual method. Moreover, involving all participants directly in data collection can help in the development of forms of critical self-awareness. (Sweetman, 2009: 507).

In this paper, we look at the visual turn in marketing related studies. We consider how pictures taken using a selfie stick can engage participants and extend the visual method. This approach brings a fresh visual perspective to the study of everyday family practice and simultaneously empowers both participants and researchers.

The visual turn and capturing the mundane everyday

The visual method in marketing and marketing research includes a wide range of methods ranging from using advertising images, magazine articles, collage, drawing methods, websites, digital images, and photographs (Belk and Kozinets 2005; Ganassali and Matysiewicz 2018; Rohani *et al.,* 2012). Incorporating visual material into an interview has been shown to generate more data and different data to that accessed through verbal accounts alone (Ganassali and Matysiewicz 2018; Harper, 2002). In marketing and consumer research photographs have been used to supplement field notes (Belk *et al*., 1989), document temporal flows of events (Heisley *et al*., 1991; Heisley and Levy, 1991; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), as projective stimuli, as cultural inventories or as social artefacts themselves (See Rohani *et al.,* 2014 for a review of visual methods). Photographs can be used in interviews to probe issues or used as data. Typically, photographs are taken, or provided by the

researcher to capture and frame the data collection in line with the research objectives. While the idea of using photographs in an interview to elicit information, or photo elicitation, is not new (Collier and Collier, 1986; Richard and Lahman, 2013) it is less common to allow research participants to take their own photographs. Notable exceptions include studies on health beliefs and rituals (Anderson, 1991; Heath and Cleaver, 2004), material possessions (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006), young people's identities (Croghan *et al*., 2008) and regionalism (Dion *et al*., 2011) where participant generated pictures became central to the research study. The proliferation of the camera phone and development of social media platforms have undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of self-directed photographs as the selfie emerges as a visual genre preserving everyday life through the medium of mobile technology (Murray, 2015; Zappavingna and Zhao, 2017, Larsen and Sandbye, 2014).

Photographs can capture the "fleeting nature of most observations" and reveal aspects that may have been missed by the researcher (Basil 2011:251). Equally, participants may take for granted the nature of the environment or the surroundings where every day behaviour occurs, particularly with familiar, mundane consumption practices. This is often a challenge when researching everyday consumption events like eating together (Marshall, 2005; Moisander *et al.,* 2009). Photographs of familiar circumstances allow for a more detailed description and identification or explanation of a specific event and can be revelatory of practice that may be difficult otherwise to articulate or recognise (Collier and Collier, 1986; Sweetman, 2009). Moreover, while asking participants to take the photographs allows them to express their views, literally, this participatory research method potentially changes their relation to the event. Johansson *et al.,* (2009) in their study of Nordic foodscapes found a desire to take a "nice-looking photo" among their young participants and photographs of dinner served at home often included set tables with matching dishes, carefully arranged cutlery, matching table mats and flowers or candles (but few people). In essence, what is documented often reflects the traditions and values of the family (Entin, 1982) and is culturally specific (Turner, 1991).

Picture this:

Basil (2011), discussing the use of photography as part of observational research, comments on the philosophical underpinnings and nature of reality, noting that for some, the photographic image is an "indexical representation of reality" while for others it is subject to construction and interpretation by the individual taking the picture. In Basil's words, *"(photography) also allows us to record behaviour in its situational context; it also allows for reflection, the use of informants, coding, and allows us to illustrate the situation or behaviour to others"'* (Basil, 2011: 251). Photographs allow

the researcher to record specific moments in time along with situational information otherwise not readily available or difficult to recall – the often missed, "minute observation"[iii]' in the highly charged context of fieldwork (Wacquant, 2004: 400). Additionally, the opportunity for reflection on past events provides a means of accessing richer and more naturalistic, descriptive data (Basil, 2011). Moreover, as Heisley and Levy (1991) argue in their account of the photo elicitation technique, photographs (and video) can be used as a projective device to enrich interviews and allow informants to explicitly reflect on their own behaviour in a process of auto-driving that can enhancequalitative research. They found it was best to limit the number of photographs used in auto-driving due to informant wear out. If successfully applied, this approach can motivate respondents to explain what is happening in the picture and relate this to their own perceptions and realities offering a fresh perspective on events. The photovoice, as a variant on photo elicitation, is a community based participatory research method that aims to enhance communication between the researchers and participants and to increase knowledge and empower participants (Thomas *et al.,* 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2004; Wang and Burris, 1997). This calls for a member check, and provides an opportunity for negotiated understanding (Heisley and Levy 1991).

Look at us:

"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 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", (Cornelio and Roig, 2018; 2773-2774).

These self-portraits can include other people and objects and are consciously created to convey different messages and depict a range of relationships including the relationship between the photographer and the photographed (Cornelio and Roig, 2018; Lim, 2016; Senft and Baym, 2015). The selfie image is first, and foremost, a photographic object and a cultural artefact but also a social practice intended to send different messages to different audiences via social media (Senft and Baym, 2015). Photographs can capture narrative representations denoting actions towards someone or something (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). The producer of the photograph, as the main character, becomes part of the visual narrative providing "first person stories" in contrast to the "elsies", where the producer captures someone or something else to create "third person stories" (Farace *et al.,* 2017:1963). Consequently, the visual narrative depends on who is holding the camera and how they are holding it. While for some the focus on the self serves a narcissistic purpose for

others it is about empowerment (Kwon and Kwon, 2018 Kim *et al.,* 2016; Murray, 2015; Senft and Baym, 2015; Sorokowski *et al.,* 2015; Walker, 2005).

Selfies provide a rich diversity of visual data in relation to both the physical self and the context (Gannon and Prothero, 2016; Presi *et al.,* 2016; Zappavinga and Zhao, 2017). Equally, they carry individual meanings for those who engage in the selfie experience (Kwon and Kwon, 2018). The very nature of the selfie means that, unlike much traditional photography, the photographer and the subject are one and the same; the actor is the model. Unlike traditional photography, the model gets to see and edit what they look like when composing the picture, with further opportunities for editing during and after the image is captured. This "staging", or "conceptual engineering" (Presi *et al*., 2016: 1822), involves selecting the location, setting up the camera/phone, arranging bodies and objects in the frame (Kwon and Kwon, 2018). In an extension of this, the group selfie involves the "selfier" proposing a group selfie with the "selfies" vetting the images before these are shared. This group selfie contributes to a sense of co-operative play and intimacy. While much of the inherent worth of the selfie centres on individual values, rather than group values, the pictures allow one to record, recall, reflect and reminisce via these visual memories (Cornelia and Roig, 2018; Kwon and Kwon, 2018). Consequentially these digital images permit a reconnection to past events and the physical world. From a research perspective, they allow access to private space that may otherwise be denied, thus blurring the distinction between the private and the public (Hess, 2015). This blurring is less about how these private images are shared, on public social media platforms, and more about the sort of access it affords to otherwise private domestic space.

'Real life':

The selfie, like snapshot photography, is often associated with images that are more natural, that is, un-posed, unconstructed, spontaneous and a more authentic record of consumer experience (Iquani and Schroeder, 2015; Schroeder, 2013*).* Moreover, it is associated with intimate, domestic situations that often present best experiences (Croghan *et al.,* 2008; Holland, 1997). There is, however, a question over the extent to which there is individual agency and how much of the framing is subject to expectations about what should be shown or depicted (Evans, 1999; Schwartz, 2010) and the limits of the technology (Barnard, 2016). While digital technologies have intensified rather than transformed family photography, relatively little has changed regarding the material basis or social practice in family photography (Rose, 2013). However, when selfies include the "selfier" and other family members there are limits to what is can be captured in the image using existing technology. At a practical level, the length of one's arm restricts selfies taken using cameras or smart phones! As the opening quote suggests the arrival of the selfie stick offers a different perspective and allows us

to go beyond the individual diner, or dish, to include other diners and broader aspects of the eating environment in the picture. Equipped with the selfie stick we can access the private domestic space of the domestic meal and connect with physical places in the home that we are not, normally, party too. As Presi *et al.,*(2016: 1816) note "*Selfies shot in private settings offer a peek into a person's unseen life, often revealing rich details that convey meanings of which the maker is unaware"*. However, this requires both a reading of the commonly understood or accepted cultural values or "studium" and the unique interpretation of the meaning of the image, the "punctum" (Barthes, 2000). Moreover, while Barthes' discomfort in front of the camera is clear in Camera Lucida he also saw photographic images as a way to show "*only and for certain what has been*" (Barthes, 2000: 85). In allowing the participant (actor) to be the co-creator and producer of the images we are permitted, as researchers, access to an otherwise private world made accessible via the shared pictures.

Objects and practice:

Rose (2010) argues that family photography is a social practice where the objects of the photography, the photographs, and the practice are "caught up in a process of mutual constitution" (2010: 20). Others suggest that objects that are made or enable social practices, are given importance within these practices as being constitutive of them and it is only together that objects (of the practice) and the social practice itself become reflective of relationships and identities (Appadurai, 1986: Miller, 2005). Thus, in getting families to take their selfies using their own camera phones and a selfie stick amongst their own mealtime objects, we hoped to understand how objects that enable social practices take on meaning and particular contextual purpose.

The research approach

*"A practice is social, as it is a type of behaving and understanding that appears at different points of time" (*Reckwitz, 2002:250).

Meals, as a universal phenomenon and routinised practice, offer a challenging area of study varying across cultures, class and stages in the family lifecycle (Douglas, 1972; Heisley and Levy, 1991). As an everyday practice, they require access to private domestic spaces that are not always accessible to the researcher. While there are some notable exceptions (Douglas and Nicod, 1974), much of our understanding of family of dinner is reliant on individual verbal accounts that rely heavily on recall. Like Heisley and Levy (1991), we focus on the evening meal. One of our research aims was to illustrate the ability of visual data to add detail and insight into family meal practice and collective identity; beyond the use of textual data. In this study of weekday dinners, ten participating families

across two cities took photographs of their weekday family dinner using their mobile phones (using selfie-sticks) and then uploaded selected images of their choice to a private secure site. In total, we had 167 images from 18 families; 111 images from 11 Edinburgh families and 56 images from 8 Sydney families. The uploaded photographs were printed and used as part of the photo-elicitation in semi structured in-depth, or long, interviews. These took place at either university offices or the family home depending on the participant's preference. The primary interview involved the main participant but in several families, both partners and children were included in the interview. Interviews lasted around sixty minutes and began with a general discussion around the family meals before focusing on the participant-generated photographs. All interviews were audio recorded. The data collection, self-directed photo elicitation and interviews, took place between October 2017 and May 2018. Given the small number of families it was decided to focus on heteronormative families and look for commonalities and contrasts in families at different stages of the life course ranging from families with very young children to families with older children. In contrast to Bielefeld's work (Barnes, 2017) which features a range of families this study looks at meal practices in full nest families. Single person households, young married or co-habiting couples or empty nesters were not included.

Methodological reflection

In this section, we reflect on the methods used in the research and the contribution of the selfie stick and the digital images to the data collection.

Selfie sticks as a communicative affordance:

The ubiquity of the smart phone meant that there was no need to provide any of the families with a camera, however few owned or used a selfie stick. All participants were instructed on how to affix their smart phone to the selfie stick[iii] and had the option of using a Bluetooth connected remote control and a mini tripod, attached to the bottom of the selfie stick. Most families simply held the extended selfie stick to take the picture. This instruction took place when participants first met the researcher to explain the project, hand over the selfie stick and establish a WhatsApp©[iv] connection to upload the pictures. This meeting provided an ideal opportunity to instruct the participants and in several cases the researcher took a picture using the selfie stick and uploaded this to the secure WhatsApp© connection to verify the link was working. This offered a private and secure end to end communication channel between the researcher and the participant. What it meant, however, was

that the photographs had to be taken on the participant's mobile phone;, although in several instances other family members took the picture of the family meal. In families with younger children and teenagers, the children often took the pictures of the family dinner on their parent's mobile phone. Approaching the data collection in this way allowed families to take ownership of the images and permitted all family members to be involved as either actors or models in the picture. We did not completely anticipate the effect of the particular use of the selfie and the selfie stick. While we saw the use of the selfie stick to be merely an enabler of the whole family selfie, we observed that it introduced for the participants a sense of 'looking in' and in some instances allowed them to frame the images in a more agentic manner. For example, one Australian family with young children posed their dolls at the table with them. In this we see the mobile phone camera and the selfie stick as a form of communicative affordance which "frames the practices through which technologies come to be involved in the weave of ordinary conduct" (Hutchby, 2001 :450). Thus, while mobile phones become a particular affordance of mobile media (Schrock, 2015), enabling the selfie and allowing us to reach into an individual's private space and moments; the selfie stick affords the subject an agentic perspective as both producer and consumer of the image. This allowed participants to stay in the frame while reaching out to 'look in' creating a degree of reflexivity about their own images that made the subsequent interviews richer and more self-reflective.

The idea of taking a selfie of the family dinner on their mobile phone using the selfie stick appealed to a number of the participating families. Most thought it would be a fun exercise and a good way to engage the whole family. The novelty of the approach, using a camera phone and a selfie stick, was another reason for several of the families taking part. However, several potential recruits were unable to take part as not all family members were keen to be involved or liked the idea of featuring in the photographs. This was particularly notable in families with teenage children who were more reluctant to take part. Everyone who participated felt comfortable taking pictures of their family dinner and none of the families experienced any problem with uploading the pictures; with one exception where the family preferred to take the photographs on a camera and forward these via a secure system. All the pictures were transferred to a secure site and password protected. Using an established end to end encrypted platform made it easy for participants to upload their pictures each day. Unlike the traditional selfies, images were not confined or restricted to the photographer but include the immediate family group. Moreover, the pictures were not publicly shared on social media or, like the selfie, transmitted as part of an individual project rather they were produced for the sole purpose of the research as part of data generation and collection. In this respect the pictures were used in a more restrictive sense as part of the photo-elicitation process and as a

means of engaging the participant(s). The selfie stick both added to the level of engagement and worked as an affordance that generated visual data in its own right to support, complement, and verify the verbal accounts in the interviews.

One unanticipated advantage of the WhatsApp© application was the opportunity to send a short message to the participants each day of the data collection to remind then to upload a picture of the family meal. Not all pictures were uploaded on the day they were taken. In several cases pictures were uploaded every couple of days. Photographs were often accompanied by comments from participants about the content of the dinner, who was there or what was happening on that day.One family included short videos of their meals as well. This provided additional contextual information that could be used during the interview phase and cross-referenced with the pictures and what was said in the interview.

Composition and Images of dinner:

No specific instructions were provided to the participants who were at liberty to select both the location of their family dinner and decide on the composition of the pictures. The only specification was that at least one picture was required of the family dinner and it should include not only the food but the setting and the meal participants. If dinner involved family members eating at separate times this should be reflected in the pictures. This was not possible in all cases, for example, if one family member ate dinner outside the home. The other request was that any guests attending the meal gave permission to be included in the pictures. Participants, or members of their family, composed and shot all the photographs used in the research. Unlike Heisley and Levy (1991), who took a number of photographs and then selected specific pictures, in our study participants were free to choose what pictures they uploaded. Most families provided more than the required five pictures with one family providing sixteen pictures over the data collection period. In several cases, participants uploaded short videos featuring family members or provided additional images of special meals, for example, of the family on holiday and birthday meals.

We do not have access to the complete set of pictures for each family but a selected sample of images that the families agreed to share. While this makes the visual data set more manageable (Heisley and Levy, 1991) it excludes certain images and puts the family in a position that allows them to select and censor what the researcher sees. Participants provided pictures they felt more accurately captured the family meal and most claimed that they had not deviated from their ‘normal’ behaviour. The majority of photographs centred on the main meal or dish, for example there were almost no pictures provided of dessert and none of starter courses and almost no pictures of the events that surrounded the meal such as food preparation or cooking, although these

were discussed in the interviews. All the images featured family members who were present at the event and almost all were located around a table. The interpretation of the family dinner clearly centred on the main dish, or dishes (if family members had different dishes), served at a dining table. There were few exceptions to this across almost all the families and the photographs provided an insight into the rich material culture surrounding the event that included not only the table, but utensils, tableware and condiments, along with objects they were engaged with. Indeed, several participants on reviewing the photographs reflected on their surroundings and the (un)tidiness of the table or discussed items in the background or the location of the dining space in relation to the kitchen or other parts of the house. Even though participants were taking the pictures in their own homes they saw things they had not seen before or had not reflected on such as the state of the table, or the seating arrangements, or the 'clutter' in the background, suggesting any staging was limited (Heisley and Levy, 1991). This was one of the particularly useful aspects of the selfie, the selfie stick and the printed photographs - all of which served as important communicative affordances for the family and their mealtime practices.

Aide memoires:

As an aide memoire, the pictures proved invaluable and served as a memory trigger for participants as they recalled each of the weekday meals. In some cases, interviews took place immediately after the data collection, in other cases the interview occurred up to one month later. Where there was a significant time lag the pictures proved invaluable in helping participants recall what they had for dinner and offered insights into the family practices around the meal. Interestingly, the discussion around the food was relatively limited, unless there were specific points individuals wished to raise, for example, around individual diets or health related matters. Most of the discussion centred on the ways in which the families accommodated different likes, dislikes and individual schedules. While food featured in all the images, the discussion was often around general practices and principles that shaped the occasion and reflected ways of doing the family meal. Photographs provide a different perspective and having a static 2D image allowed time for participants to reflect after the event, away from the occasion, on things that may not be as apparent as they try to serve and eat dinner at the end of the working day (Sweetman, 2009). Participants were so familiar with the surroundings that there was often little to add to what seemed obvious to them. The challenge was often getting participants to reflect on what they saw - the "punctum" - in terms of who was there, where they sat, what they had for dinner and the events that led up to that point and beyond. The "minute observation" (Wacquant, 2004) often came down to what the participants saw in the pictures, for example, more informal eating than anticipated, less order than recalled, more flexibility through the week, fewer homemade dishes, more technology at the table. The pictures allowed us to

capture this detail. The selfie stick allowed us to get the broader visual perspective and essentially participate in the family meal without being there as an independent observer contaminating the private domestic space. While the pictures did not, or indeed could not, tell the whole story they added a further dimension to the interview and encouraged participants to reflect on their own everyday and often taken-for-granted domestic dining praxis. In this respect, for some participants, the photographs were transformative in providing a means of critical self-reflection (Sweetman, 2009).

Social realities:

One issue about using photographs is whether they capture a more authentic record of the events and people (Johansson *et al.,* 2009; Iquani and Schroeder, 2015). As Doucet notes "*particular methods produce particular social realities*" (2011: 89) and our snapshot of the family dinner is subject to the technical limitations of the camera, the situational lighting and exposure, the location of the participants, and the timing of the photograph relative to the meal. While there was some framing, for example ensuring that everyone was in the picture, participants claimed that the images were not staged and a true reflection of the family dinner. Pictures typically included the food served and eaten at the weekday dinner, people present at the meal (occasionally rearranged to fit into the frame), and information on the location of the meal. Using the extended selfie stick allowed for a different perspective that permitted the photographer to capture the spatial arrangements[v] and the eating environment. However, there remain technical, physical, spatial and social limits on what is captured in the pictures. In a number of cases the foods were not clearly distinguishable in the photographs, was it pasta or potato on the plate; what foods were in the bowls, what books or documents were on the table? In shifting the perspective outwards to capture more of the eating environment we lose detail on the food served; important if you are interested in nutritional or portion information. Inevitably, as most participants held the selfie stick it meant that one individual was usually standing or operating the camera in a way that allowed them to include everyone, distorting what might otherwise have been a 'normal' picture. Equally, the perspective was often of the meal from above, as the selfie stick offers the opportunity for an elevated birds- eye view on the family meal (Farace *et al.,* 2017). Despite this, the photographs were not posed in the way that professional shots are, for example in Bielefeld's work (Barnes, 2017) or Blavman's images (Molander *et. al*., 2018); although in several cases, diners were not eating but looking at the camera. In this respect, the inclusion of the camera and the instruction to take the selfie does shape the social reality captured in the image (Doucet, 2011). Importantly it reveals what Sweetman (2009) and Gonzalez (1992) suggest is Bourdieu's (1990) original intent in his understanding of the purpose

of photography. Photography is used, according to Bourdieu, to establish and make tangible the unity of the family and its collective identity.

Rich data:

Individually, or collectively, photographs provide different data and systematic analysis can be used in qualitative research to identify themes or provide insights (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991) revealing aspects of the environment that are not immediately apparent or recalled (Basil, 2007; Heisley *et al.,* 1991). While it is possible to look at the images as data in their own right (Molander *et al.,* 2018; Presi *et al.,* 2016) the interpretation remains that of the participant rather than the researcher (Pink 2001). Incorporating the photographs into the interviews was a deliberate strategy to elicit participants' views, rather than making any independent judgement about the pictures presented (Kondo and Sjoberg, 2012). Much of the discussion centred on objects in the pictures such as the food served, the utensils, the material objects, the people present, and the physical environment but participants also talked about taking the pictures. As mentioned, these family dinners were relatively un-staged with a rich context, detailed surroundings, and a complex of elements captured in the image. The assemblage of objects identified in these photographs was discussed in the interview and comparisons made across the five weekday dinners. This provided further insights into the nature of the family practice and emergent themes and commonalities across the different photographs. Participants engaged in their own analysis of the selfies, describing what they saw (descriptive analysis), the relationship between the elements (formal analysis), the emotions evoked by the images (emotive analysis) and the recurrent themes (poly-textural analysis) (see Presi *et al.,* 2016 for a review[vi]). While there remain questions over their authenticity these pictures are the participant families' representation of the social practices around mealtime as they see it or want us, as researchers, to see it. This messiness makes the thematic analysis challenging but what we observe are different forms of initiation, integration and independence reflected in the images (Marshall and Davis, 2018).

Discussion

The affordance of the objects implicated in the practice of the family meal selfie was not something we were expecting to see. While the implication of objects used in the practice of the meal itself were obviously explored and discussed the phone and the selfie stick created specific practices themselves. As in Larsen's (2005) sense of an affordance, the design of the selfie stick encourages a certain performance of family around the family meal. The clustering of the family, and the moment of reaching out of the photographic frame to look in, created an image of the family, as they wanted to be seen. Thus, we draw upon the work of Hutchby (2001) and Schrock (2015) to reflect upon the

mobile phone, its camera, selfie, selfie stick and WhatsApp © as forms of communicative affordances[vii]. Schrock specifically identifies the affordances as they relate to mobile media as having four characteristics- portability, availability, locatability and multimediality. In this context, the mobile phone and camera together with the selfie, the selfie stick and WhatsApp © display these characteristics. They can easily go wherever their subjects go, are available all the time, can be geolocated (the phone and apps); and display a multimediality of affording the pictures to be taken, from a distance, framed and edited as desired and sent to the receiver with a message if needed.

Methodologically what we see is a sense of *co-construction* of a narrative around the practice of family meals that is engaging, enjoyable and empowering for the participants. Including the selfie stick adds to this sense of fun and is much more inclusive as both adults and children take part in the picture taking. Moreover, it gives participants the responsibility and control over the images they capture and choose to share thus offering their own perspective on the family meal compared to that of the researcher taking the picture. The implication of particular technological and communication affordances in this instance help the participants be involved in the co-construction of the data, allowing them to present and construct the image as they see fit, and yet be able to look at it from the outside. The selfie stick provides them with some distance to their own image, making them at once the creators of the image and the subjects. This helps us build in a polytextual layered analyses with them (Presi *et al.,* 2016). In terms of *composition,* the pictures provide rich data with which to supplement and elaborate the verbal interview providing important context to the narrative and allowing the researcher to get a much clearer picture of the physical, material and social surroundings in which the family dinner takes place. Using the selfie stick offers a different perspective to simply holding the camera at arm's length and shapes the composition of the photograph. It creates a distance for the photographer from the practice yet places them firmly 'in the picture'.

Images of the domestic setting allow one to see the open or restricted nature of the dinner location, identify which family members are present and determine who is included, or excluded, in the family dinner. It captures some of the richness and complexity that surrounds the family dinner both in relation to the event itself and the practices that surround it. Using the selfie stick requires less arranging of bodies to ensure everyone and everything is included in the image. While the composition and images only offer a "compressed performance" (Pinney, 2003: 8) the photographs provide a wealth of detail and information that can be drawn on in other parts of the research. The images suggest that there is much less framing than anticipated (Johansson *et al.,* 2009) as evidenced by untidy tables and cluttered backgrounds offering fresh insights into the everyday practice and 'messiness' of family dinner. Pictures allow not only researchers but also participants to

reflect on their family practices by revisiting the occasions through the medium of the photograph. Importantly, the pictures offer *confirmation* for both the participant and the researcher as to what food was served and who was present, offering a prompt into linked events and decisions around the family meal. This aide memoire proved invaluable in aiding recall of the food and the people present at each meal. A suitable reminder of what is often the ordinariness of everyday life.

Finally, there remain *challenges*, in the practicalities of recruiting, as mentioned not everyone we approached wanted their picture taken. Scheduling interviews close to the event was not always possible. Participants had to remember to take the pictures, decide when to take the picture, and ultimately what images to upload. Setting up the selfie stick on the tripod or deciding who would take the picture or hold the selfie stick, were all decisions taken by the families. Confidentiality remained paramount and the ability to use a secure app to upload the pictures was a key part of the success of the project. While none of the families reported any technical challenges in taking or sharing the pictures the picture quality did vary. Lighting, angles, and composition changed across different dinners and families, depending on who was taking the picture and the lighting conditions. Some pictures were very dark, others over exposed. The fact that participants could choose what to send means that we may have missed certain elements of the meal, for example there were almost no pictures of food preparation or clearing the table or cleaning up or shopping all important parts of the family dinner. Although, this may simply reflect the fact that participating families were instructed to take pictures of their weekday evening meal. Moreover, it was often a challenge to get participants to comment on what, to many of them, was obvious given the familiarity, frequency and temporal nature of the event. The selfie snapshots, while more authentic, lack some of the detail that professional photographs offer. However, it gave us a valuable glimpse of the composition and representation that the families wanted us to see or at least thought they ought to present at mealtime.

In using the participant as the photographer this epistemological turn posits them as the experts and acknowledges the existence of multiple meanings - despite the seemingly more objective and authentic data presented in static visual images as opposed to verbal accounts. Rather than seeing photographs as a means of capturing some objective reality of family meals, we see this as a way of capturing and accessing participants' images of themselves and their collective familial identity (Bourdieu 1990). In the process it allows us to identify common object integrated practices and individual interpretations in a way that would otherwise remain only 'imaginable' in the absence of access to the actual events. One of the main advantages is the opportunity to explore otherwise difficult to access private spaces while respecting the privacy of the individual family members who were encouraged by the affordances of the technology – the phone, the selfie stick and the use of

WhatsApp © - to co-create and curate what is shared. All the respondents were informed that the images would be used for research purposes and anonymity was guaranteed. No one expressed concerns about the ways in which their images were used. All family members gave their consent, or in the case of young children, parental consent was required, as was the consent of any guests. There is no doubt that the addition of photographs and the use of selfie sticks added to, and possibly changed, the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the practices surrounding the family meal. This research suggests that incorporating visual images created by participants into the data collection method can add to the richness of the data, offer another medium, and serve as a way of engaging and co-producing with those we choose to include in our research. Ultimately, it helped us grasp the essence of the image these families presented, of how they see themselves, looking from the selfie perspective. It revealed a familial voice through the context and detail captured in the images, which would not be as clear or nuanced if we had relied merely upon interviews about the family meal. We suggest that including the selfie account from participants evokes authenticity and is not oppressive or intrusive in its enquiring (Wang and Burris, 1997). Finally, it "*helps to ensure the respectful and dialectical development of critical consciousness*" (Brooks and Proudier, 2014: 46) by allowing participants to look back on the pictures they composed and explain the meaning and purpose while permitting them to re-examine their own reasons in constructing this representation of their family practice.

Acknowledgement:

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[i] Rather than just highlighting the ‘key’ familial moments, Bourdieu’s photographs implicitly reveal everyday life and its mundane objects operationalising and revealing the very elements of what he described as ‘habitus’ (Sweetman, 2009).

[ii] Wacquant (2004), reporting on Bourdieu’s fieldwork sees the photograph as a means of recording and storing information that may not be observable in the highly charged context of field work where it was not possible to linger.

[iii] In the UK study, we used a Fugetek FT-568 with removable Bluetooth remote control (extension to123 centimetres) and an IGadgitz PT310 mini lightweight table top stand tripod.

[iv] WhatsApp© can be accessed at https://www.whatsapp.com/. The App has automatic end to end encryption. Further details are available on the website.

[v] The pictures opened a discussion about the rationale behind the seating arrangements including – being close to the kitchen, making it easier to feed the kids, or family members having their own designated seat.

[vi] What we have not done is undertake an independent visual analysis of the photographs, but the visual data contained in the images would allow us to draw on the Presi et. al’s (2016) four step analytical procedure to independently identify emergent themes.

[vii] “Communicative affordances are defined as an interaction between subjective perceptions of utility and objective qualities of the technology that alter communicative practices”(Shrock 2015,p.1239)