

Two Media and their Implications: Photo Album vs. Photo Book

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Abstract. *This article compares the media “photo book” and “photo album” with regard to their implications for the user: both can serve similar purposes, among them, memory, identity, and representation, and their contents are often very similar on first sight. However, they carry different messages in relation to nostalgia, time, authority, authenticity, originality, and fixation. Even though the photo book is the newer medium, it seems that it is less suitable to satisfy “post-modern” needs. The photo album, however, appears as more authentic due to its uniqueness and enables a less linear and more open way to re-create the own life story.*

Keywords: *Photography, Photo Album, Photo Book, Nostalgia, Aura, Authenticity*

Introduction

Following advertisements of companies in the field of printing, the private photo album seems to be replaced by a new medium: the photo book. This leads to the research questions guiding this article: Has the photo book really taken over the place of the photo album? Is it actually a different medium or just a consistent development based on technological advance?

To answer these questions, media materialism seems to be the most appropriate foundation – i.e. the assumption that the media used in a cultural context have an influence on it that goes beyond information or entertainment. This theory, which, contrary to popular belief, dates back long before Marshall McLuhan’s famous statement “the medium is the message” (see Grampp 2016, 72f.) sees media – quite independently from their actual content – as creators of certain situational geographies and thus as exerting a special impact on our lives (see Meyrowitz 1990, 31). Vilem Flusser (1983) transferred this idea to photography, which he sees as the beginning of a new era. However, such assumptions are difficult to prove and this paper represents an attempt to empirically support media materialism. Yet, this is not intended to imply determinism: people appropriate media in creative ways that are often unforeseen by the media makers. In addition, research

on media impact should take into account feedback and references to the larger cultural framework – it is not a one-way street. People do not have to use photo books or photo albums and if they do, it does not have to be done in the manner intended by the industry and does not have to lead to the situations presented in advertising.

Private Photography – a definition

As per their names, private photo albums and private photo books comprise photographs that are connected to people's private life. The term "private" does not tell much about the pictures' quality (for the discussion see Jäger 2009, 184 f.): they can be taken ambitiously if the photographer is trying to get the perfect perspective, the right light, using a (D)SLR in a manual mode, and retouching the photographs in programs such as Photoshop, but they can be taken in a very simple way as well. Writing on the motifs of private snapshots, Jorgen Christensen and his fellow researchers state that "the selection of photographs structures the memory of personal lives, and snapshots construe history and reality. This construction of personal history is characterized by exclusion. Only a few, if at all any snapshots depict the workplace and colleagues. It is a history of life as leisure" (Christensen et al. 2015, 72). Both photo books and photo albums focus on the moments to be remembered, e.g. holidays and celebrations. In Pierre Bourdieu's (1965/2014) famous analysis, more than two-thirds of the photo amateurs choose family parties, meetings with friends, and holidays as subjects, and, as Katrin Scharzenberger from the company WhiteWall confirms, nothing has changed. The more integrated the group is and the more integrative power it has, the more it is chosen as a photographic motif. Photo albums and books show familial harmony and thus have a reassuring tendency.¹

Private Photography – its purpose

Private photographs and collections of them serve different purposes, but among them, memory, identity, and representation seem to be of the greatest importance and were mentioned by nearly every interviewee.

1 However, there is one more way to compile photographs in a "non-digital" way: ambitious or professional photographers might show their work in so-called portfolio folders. This usually means a large-format folder with transparent pockets for the photographs. Consequently, they can be easily taken out, the paper choice can be appreciated and it can be rearranged depending on the purpose. For private photographs, this type is not much in use.

Memory

“There is no better souvenir than self-made pictures of individual memories” (Haverkamp 1993, 48) – confirmed by more than 90% of the interviewees – and to store these, one could add, there is nothing better than something book-like, as it offers more order than a collection of loose photographs. This also corresponds to Katrin Schwarzenberg’s experience with photo book customers. Photo books and photo albums thus help to outsource memories and give them a shape.

Looking at the history of media it is not unusual to outsource memory – paintings can achieve this just like texts and photographs. “These artificial memories did not just support the natural ability to memorize and eventually replaced them, but also influenced our opinions on memory and oblivion” (Douwe 1999, 10). The critique on the outsourced memory has a long history as well: in the famous Phaidros dialogue, Socrates explains that writing would not be a means to support and to strengthen memory but, on the contrary, would let people forget easier – an assumption already similar to media materialism. Over 2000 years later, Siegfried Kracauer was among the people thinking about memory transmitted via photography. Kracauer saw photography as a conflicted terrain: a very specific moment is taken from the flow of time and consequently, this moment is conserved and in focus. The human memory, on the other hand, is much more fragmentary and less exact but is based on a principle that exceeds visual recording by stressing the *meaning* of a moment. Therefore, he describes photography as contrary to memory, as a “mass, which is partly a mixture of waste” (Kracauer 1977: 25). Memory follows content, and photography’s mere recording can seem far less adequate. When looking at old pictures from a distance, with new knowledge, a “ghostly” feeling can come up. There might be no more resemblance to the person with her former looks. Without any explanation, the pictures only show “costumed mannequins”.

From another perspective, photographs offer moments of isolation and static compared with the dynamics typical for everyday life. They enable a moment to pause, to stop the present and can give way to the appreciation of the past. As often said, a photograph is a *memento mori* (see Sontag 1973/2005, 11) and always should be understood in relation to time. It has power over time by freezing and conserving a moment, but at the same time shows its powerlessness: “Different than memory that fades, the photography stays sharp. It overcomes death, but it is dead right after taking it. The photographed is banned in a picture; without being able to fight back, he is brought to eternal contention and banished to smile forever” (Jerrentrup 2002, 111).

Within this present article it is impossible to summarize everything that has been said about photography and memory, yet, I would like to highlight one more phenomenon: Elisabeth Loftus (1998, 61f.) and others have found out how memory can be manipulated using pictures. Typical experiments used photomontage and created contexts in which the test person was shown as a child. Then, the test person, who was not aware of the montages, was asked to tell her memories in connection to the pictures. Surprisingly, many people told memories connected to the montages. The mere existence of the picture made them imagine a past that has never happened. Similarly, dictators such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini retouched pictures that were taken in documentary contexts, so that they enter history as an “improved version” or to eliminate unfavourable persons from history. These phenomena can be explained with photography’s authority: we tend to believe in photography, even though we know that it can lie. “Memories evoked by a photo do not simply spring out of the image itself but are generated in a network, an intertext, of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all theses and cultural context, historical moments” (Kuhn 2012, 2). Thus, memory is a contested terrain in private photographs: photographs might not be able to show what memory tells and might seem strangely dead. Nevertheless, they have the authority that we tend to believe in them.

The same can be assumed for the assembly of photographs: it creates a certain storyline that, due to its resemblance to real life, might have authority and prerogative of interpretation.

Identity and Representation

Photography has always been the “art of the person” and its identity (see Barthes 1989, 89). The term “identity” has a diachronic component that answers the questions “what was I in the past? What will I be, or will I still be myself?” This serves the narrative identity construction (see Schaupp 2012, 77) and at the same time, the synchronous perspective is inherent which treats different, simultaneously existing identities (see Henning 2012, 21 ff.). Both ways to look at identity are addressed by photography and were mentioned by expert Schwarzenberg and 60% of the interviewees. Perceiving oneself “from the outside” is based on an alienation comparable to the mirror experience: “Since the ego of the mirror experience is based on a picture, the identification of the subject with the self-image in the mirror is based on alienation. Like the mirror, photography transforms the subject into a picture” (Brodersen 2017, 145).

Today more than ever, identity is a contested terrain, is said to be a “tendentially fragile or precarious (post) modern patchwork identity” (Ferchhoff 2011, 107), which makes identity work necessary. For this, photography enables “opportunities for multiple viewing and, in particular, opportunities for editing, changing and re-taking” (Mechler-Schönach 2005, 16). In photography, identity is not only connected to the way we dress, pose, and stage ourselves (see Lauser 2004, 469) but also to the way we take pictures, what we consider as a suitable *sujet*, and how we compose it. Closely connected to identity, photographs serve a representational function, they are “a surface, a ground, on which presences that look out toward the viewer can be built” (Pinney 2003, 219). With our pictures, we state who we are and how we want to be perceived.

However, photographs compiled in photo albums or photo books go one step further than just single pictures: they do not just show a particular moment but construct an event or a period of time. The selection and arrangement give the viewer a chronological sequence, an atmosphere belonging to a certain period, a narrative or dramaturgy.

Besides, there is one more important purpose photo books and photo albums can fulfil: photographs, collected and compiled, do not just serve the individual memory but also the shared, collective memory of a group of people, often a family. As a result, they lead to communication and to the strengthening of group identity. If presented to members of an out-group, both books and albums can express the identity of the people shown – what matters to them, what they want to remember, how they pose for pictures etc. helps to make it clear who they are: every snapshot taken or kept by a person or respectively a group of persons “is also a type of self-portrait, a kind of ‘mirror with memory’ reflecting back those moments and people that were special enough to be frozen in time forever” (Weiser 2008).

Looking at photo books and photo albums – the methods

For photo books and albums, information can be provided on the one hand by the users who compile photos for photo books or albums and on the other hand by the producers who provide the “frame” – the photo album or the book.

From the producer side, I interviewed Katrin Schwarzenberg from the company WhiteWall. The company with its head office near Cologne is among the leading printing companies and offers in addition to other photography-related products photo books in various formats. Schwarzenberg talked about her own experiences with customers. A semi-structured, rather

informal interview was chosen as a suitable form to give Schwarzenberg a chance to talk about her own experiences.

To gain information from the side of the users, I posted an open survey on my own Facebook account asking whether people would prefer photo books or albums for their private photographs and why they have a certain preference. This method was chosen to reach a comparably high number of participants, yet have the chance to ask an open question that can be responded to in many ways. The survey could be answered right underneath the post, but I also allowed replying via email, so to write to me privately (or even anonymously when using an incomprehensible mail ID).

When conducting a Facebook survey, the sample of people reached has to be taken into account. As some of my Facebook contacts are into photography, are either (amateur) models or photographers or share the interest in photography, my sample will be specific: a certain number of people I reach are more enthusiastic about photography and more ambitious than the average. Further, these people might be also more reflective of their own photography-related actions. However, I have asked about “private” photographs, not about those pictures that relate to ambitious or professional photography, and looking at the answers I got the impression that people clearly differentiate private and ambitious/professional photography. The survey was posted by the end of 2019 and was answered by 56 people, mostly public. The gender ratio was quite balanced and looking at their age, I assume the participants were between 20 and 60 years old. Few said they would neither use photo books nor photo albums, but would just digitally save and share the pictures. For the rest, photo books enjoy slightly more popularity than photo albums.

To compensate for the survey’s weakness – possible influences from previous public responses and the difficulty of going further in depth – I also conducted 15 semi-structured interviews. I asked what private photographs mean to my interviewees, which medium they prefer for private photographs, what they associated with photo books and photo albums and how they would use them. The interviewees were between 20 and 61 years old, 9 of them female and 6 male, and most of them considered photography as one of their hobbies. Due to the small number of interviewees, it is difficult to show trends here, but the interviews did provide interesting insights into the practice of compiling private photographs.

Looking at the results of both the survey and the interviews, it is striking that there was no age-related preference for photo books or photo albums and that the preferences were fairly evenly distributed with a very small lead for the photo book. Some people indicated that they use both media.

“Private family photos: printing, sticking them in a photo album and writing everything that comes to my mind by hand (a kind of diary). After my journeys, I create photo books and insert texts with some important information.”² (Robert G., Facebook)

Finally, I should clarify my own situation: Being a member of the “photography scene”, I primarily understand my own experiences as an access point, to gain a feeling for the subject. In order to meet Katja Mruck’s and Günther May’s demands for polyphony as an antidote to subjective bias (Mruck and May 1998, 303), I gave the survey participants and interviewees a voice by letting them have their say.

Preferences	Responses (n=56)
No use of photo books or albums	6
- among them persons who express regret not using them or plan to do so in future	4
Preference for photo albums	19
Preference for photo books	21
Even preference	10

Results of the survey

Preferences	Interviewees (n=15)
Preference for photo albums	5
Preference for photo books	6
Even preference	4

Results of the interviews

Photo books and albums – the content

When talking about content here, in the tradition of media materialism, it is not about very specific photographs, but about general possibilities for designing the content of the two media. A broad definition of the term “book” would comprise both formats, the photo book and the photo album. “In the original Old English, the word could mean any kind of document,

- 2 “Private Familienfotos: drucken, in Fotoalbum kleben und mit der Hand alles dazu schreiben war mir einfällt (also so eine Art Tagebuch). Von Reisen mache ich Fotobücher und eingefügte Texte von den wichtigen Infos.”

and this wider meaning of ‘book’ survives in some colloquial expressions today [...] Book historians must insist on this all-embracing definition because they realize that all written and printed documents can be used to transmit culture, broadcast information, preserve human memory, distribute wealth, and exert power” (Rose 2003, 11). Yet it is questionable whether both media pave the ground for the same cultural context, or whether they suggest something different. The content of both private photo albums and private photo books can be described as pretty similar on first sight: photographs, thus memories. My interviewees mentioned that they mostly collect photographs of their vacations, of family celebrations, of their children, but also of themselves in various situations, e.g. having a new hairstyle, wearing a beautiful dress etc. Most pictures do not show everyday life, but special occasions, usually positively connoted. Life in the photo album or photo book seems to be more attractive, varied, and exciting. Andrew Walker and Rosalind Moulton found out that different types of photo compilations still share a common structure that helps to interpret them. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand the exact meaning it carries for its owner(s) – the captions might help, but in general, it needs conversation to get the proper picture (Walker and Moulton 1989, 165).

However, as already mentioned, there are more than just photographs: photo albums can contain “more souvenirs besides the pictures, short or longer texts that make the entire album a very complex narration, which should be analysed not as single pictures, but as the collection as a whole” (Jäger 2009, 188f.). Old photo albums often have very elaborate designs: it is clearly fixed, where a portrait, and where a landscape format has to be pasted and which size these pictures should have. Occasionally, oval frames would overlap parts of the photographs. Further, decorations such as floral patterns were printed around the images. Some modern photo albums show similar, elaborate designs, such as photo albums for newborns, which suggest a very strict narrative: the first ultrasound picture, followed by the very first newborn snap, baby and mother, baby and father, toddler pictures, the first day in kindergarten and school etc. However, many modern photo albums just have blank pages and mostly differ when it comes to the cover and the size. Further, one has to choose between an album of blank pages which allow various sizes and formats, or an album with transparent pockets, that fix a layout and a size of photographs, but enable it to easier take pictures out, exchange them, etc.

The typical photo book provider offers various options for the arrangement of the pictures on one page. The pages can have certain pre-made themes, including background images, doodles, stickers, fonts, etc. However, the customer is usually also free to create his or her own design by



One more difference between photo albums and photo books lies in the fact that the latter are usually rather monothematic, e.g. about one celebration or one holiday, whereas albums are more often comprehensive respectively cover a longer period of time. One survey participant wrote that she compiles a photo book for each holiday or family event and similar things were confirmed by several interviewees, but none of them said that they would use a photo album for such a short period of time.

Photo books and photo albums – the message

Photo books and photo albums both can contain the same pictures and can serve similar purposes such as memory and identity. Therefore, on first sight, the usage of both media seems to be very similar. For the design, both offer the individual to shape it according to one's own taste, but both have restrictions regarding layout, size etc. In both cases, a bigger format, more possible content, and a more elaborate cover mean that the medium will be more expensive. However, there must be one or more meaningful differences, as otherwise, companies would not have taken photo books in their program and individuals would not order them. Still, photo albums are sold as well, so the consumer decides what suits his/her need – what he/she considers as better. There may be some people who are not familiar with digital media and therefore stick to the photo album, however, this is an increasingly small group.

Nostalgia

Taking pictures of the family and its story was historically seen among the first ways to use the medium photography. In its beginnings, photographs were taken by professionals in studios and the family members were arranged in a characteristic way. Later, people started to take pictures at festivals and family reunions. Nancy West attributes the development to Kodak, which instructed its clients how to look, remember, and even love: Kodak taught how to understand experiences and memories as objects of nostalgia (see West 2000, 1).

The term “nostalgia” has its origin in the spatial and was understood as a kind of homesickness. Later, a shift of meaning from the spatial to the temporal has happened (see Schrey 2016: 342): “Even Kant and Rousseau address the fundamental inseparability of these two dimensions of homesickness, which still plays a central role in the narrower context of ‘analogue nostalgia’: the talk about the ‘digital natives’ and the ‘digital immigrants,’ for example, is between the same semantic poles” (Schrey 2016, 342f.). One could conclude, that home is where the family's photo book or photo album is, where the family's life narrative can be found. This brings together the poles of spatial and temporal distance.



**SEARCHING FOR STOCK PHOTOS UNDER THE KEYWORD
“FOTOALBUM” ONE IS LIKELY TO FIND IMAGES WITH A NOSTALGIC
FLAIR**

Photo: Micha Jarmoluk, Pixabay.

“My sister looks at the pictures, selects them and gets them printed at the photo booth to stick them into a photo album – because ever since WW2 the photo album is a family tradition.”³ (Peter B., Facebook survey)

Nostalgia can also be seen in the context of the haptic, even if this is actually virtual again: “By making our digital photos appear physical, we are attempting to purchase the cachet and importance that physicality imparts. I’ve noted in the past this trend to endow the physical with a special importance” (Juergenson 2015). The pictures that are put together in photo albums or books have gained a physical presence, and if they are retouched in a way described by Juergenson, e.g. by adding light leaks or scratches, there is even a twofold attempt to make them physical.

The photo album offers a nostalgic setting, and consequently, most interviewees who had a preference for photo albums mentioned nostalgia as a reason to use the medium. The photo book seems to be less capable of satisfying the need for nostalgia. It is understood as a rather modern medium

3 “Meine Schwester sucht raus was ihr gefällt und macht [...] am Fotoautomaten dann Fotos, die sie in ein Fotoalbum klebt - weil das Fotoalbum ist einfach seit WW2 so Familientradition.”

and due to its reproducibility, the potential spatial distance of the “one and only” photo album is no more relevant. The pictures are printed in one go and do not show individual traces of use.

Relation to time and coherence

Assembling an album usually takes much more time than creating a photo book: the book can be completed within seconds when using an algorithm provided by the photo book software. However, in this case, the algorithm will sort the pictures by itself and may not get the order as it is supposed to be. Therefore, the layout of a photo book is often a bit more time-consuming but mostly finished between thirty minutes and one or two hours as stated by the interviewees who use the medium. Accordingly, photo books are usually dedicated to a short time span, e.g. one singular event or holiday.

“I create photo books, one about every single year and one more for special events (holidays, weddings, etc.). I love these books and look at them quite often!”⁴ (Fynn T., Facebook survey)

In most cases, compiling a photo album takes much more time. All interviewees who use photo albums said they would keep working on their albums for years, thus keep them as ongoing projects. As such, even older pictures are more present when taking out the album to add new ones. Its entire narrative is visible at once which might construct a far more complex story than having it fragmented as in various photo books that do not have to construct a narrative as a whole: typically, people have their narrative split up in several holidays or family reunions, of which every single one gets its own photo book. A more general fragmentation of the body has been addressed as a metaphor for today's *conditio humana*: “We all are Creoles of sorts: hybrid, divided, polyphonic, and parodic – a pastiche of our Selves. This contemporary body-self is fragmentary, often incoherent and inconsistent, precisely because it arises from contradictory and paradoxical experiences, social tensions, and conflicts that have one thing in common: they are real, that is, experienced” (Van Wolputte 2004: 263). Such contradictory experiences become more salient when looking at the long-term photo albums whereas cognitive dissonances are less obvious in photo books that form entities on their own. However, this may become visible when the photo books are lined up on the shelf, eventually in different formats and sizes.

4 “Ich mache mir Fotobücher, über jedes Jahr eins und für besondere Events noch eins (Urlaub, Hochzeit, usw.). Ich liebe diese Bücher und schaue sie ganz oft an.”

The official look

A book, using a narrow definition, is something different from an album. Whereas an album has blank pages that should be used for making a collection, a book is a finished product and as such has a more official character. It appears to be less self-made, and therefore more like an industrial product. This might be a cause for the photo book's appeal: it is a bound book and thus closer to books that can be bought, whose content was found worthy to be published – thus it stands for quality and suggest more authority. Reproducibility makes photographs valuable in their own terms: many (amateur) photographers state that for them, being published in a magazine would be the highest distinction, better than being featured in an art gallery. The printed magazine, a mass medium, communicates quality; the pictures published in it thus carry the aura of being recognized as publishable, thus as “good” by an authority, usually the editorial board. The editorial board itself stands for the recipients that are assumed to be far more numerous than the people visiting an art gallery. Consequently, there are many professional or ambitioned photographers using the official look of photo books, as stated by Katrin Schwarzenberg and confirmed both by several survey participants and interviewees who said that they would use photo books for their model respectively fashion photography

On the other hand, a new tendency that might support the album is coming up: the DIY trend focuses on self-made products with an individual look. DIY is an acronym for “do it yourself” and usually implies a non-professional production. As such, it “is associated with mundane activity that has traditionally been understood as informal, illegitimate; indeed, less than hegemonic, part of the reason for which scholars have been interested in its potential to disrupt dominant culture” (Kanai 2018, 126). Kanai continues explaining the cultural significance of the phenomenon: the production is no more in the hands of a technical elite, but done by “ordinary people,” appealing due to its authenticity, the social connections it implies, and the disruption of the cycle of consumption that it offers. Therefore, DIY offers a counterweight to the cultural industry assumed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, that produces predictable consumer items in the service of the mighty. Culture industry can be defined as “the sum of the processing industry, which at one end is fed with creativity, and the other end brings about marketable goods” (Bohnet 2002, 327f.). It is not astonishing that the DIY culture develops at a time in which large parts of society reached saturation and at the same time a new consciousness for sustainability and authenticity has emerged. Thus, the photo album, looking less official and less mass-produced, can be more trendy, as belonging to the “do-it-yourself

identity kits consumers can use for a customized self” (Buechler 2016, 219). This was confirmed by the interviewees who use photo albums, mostly referring to as “more hand-made”, “a better way to express individuality”, and “less prefabricated”.

Authenticity

“The search for authenticity of experience that is everywhere manifest in our society” (MacCannel 1973, 589) – this is nothing new, Dean MacCannel wrote it in 1973, but the situation may have become more acute in the meantime. The Greek *authentikos* means “genuine”, “real” or “reliable” and derives from the Greek word *authentēs* that describes someone acting on his own authority, or, simply, an author. Discussions about authenticity often focus on photography: “Who is Speaking Thus?” asks Abigail Solomon-Godeau in an article in 1986, in which she states that even documentary photography is never “author-free”, the author’s own assumptions and opinions always find their way into the picture. However, “seeing something with one’s own eyes” is still regarded as a guarantee of realness; one is inclined to believe what photographs present: “The epistemically special character of the photographs is revealed by this fact: we are inclined to trust them in a way we are not inclined to trust even the most accurate drawings or paintings” (Cohen and Meskin 2010, 70). This even extends to images that are clearly non-documentary: “Even if such photographs stand under the suspicion of manual retouching or digital compilation, even if we may know about their ‘stagedness’, their ‘aliveness’ results from the (even today) remaining belief in a real reference of photography, a belief in its indexical capacity, its deictic power” (Blunk 2010, 34).

The digital world opened up a new realm of manipulation, not just for professionals, but even for the hobbyist: “The analogue photograph is a literal imprint of light, which ontologically ‘proves’ spatio-temporal reality and thus provides the image with a sense of authenticity, yet also with material decay. Digital photography has lost this direct relationship from reality to image” (Verhoeff 2012, 66). However, others explain that one should not overemphasize the difference “between analogue and digital photography. As suggested by the long history of photomontage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, analogue photographs have always had the power to manipulate and transform reality. Indeed, because the camera always selects – or edits – and otherwise changes the world that exists before its lens, no photograph – analogue or digital – can be said to represent the complete ‘truth’ of its subjects or objects. Digital images, moreover, still

have importance as documents, [...] continue to possess a great deal of evidentiary (as well as propagandistic) power” (Brio 2012, 366). In any case, the mere existence of photography changes life because it is constituting for experiences and events: “Photography does not just show a certain event, but creates it through the pure existence of a picture showing it” (Muscionico 2017). This questions the authenticity even more.

“For hobbyists and pros alike, we’ve reached a point at which the photos we see are both indecipherable from reality and not representative of it. Trust suffers. Viewers and creators alike crave authenticity” (Gottschalk 2016). The current boom in analogue photography can be seen in this light. The best-selling camera in 2016 was the Fuji Instax – an analogue instant camera. Instant photographs, usually single originals without any digital file or negative, are characterized by a special haptic quality. Obviously, photo albums are a more suitable option to store them.

However, in our context, it is not only the question whether pictures are taken with an analogue, analogue instant, or digital camera, if they are retouched or “out of box”, and we know that staging pictures is an important part of family reunions and holidays – and often, these pictures can be called “authentically staged” (see Venohr 2010, 47), as they do not hide their staged nature. When looking at the photo book and album, it is worth turning back to the origin of the word “authentic”: it is the authorship that matters. When comparing the two media, the photo book seems to be further processed, there is more digital technique involved, thus the author is at least in parts computer software or a company, but not a person. This authorship can make the photo book less individual (at least, as long as it is compiled by an amateur who is not too familiar with the software respectively with techniques exceeding the software). Individual creativity and handicraft can suggest more authenticity in the sense of individual authorship (see Jerrentup 2018, 76): looking at a photo album, we can imagine or even feel how the person has pasted the pictures and her handwriting adds another individual and authentic touch. It is like the hand-written signature of an artist stating that it is his very own work and refers to the above mentioned statements made by these who prefer photo album describing them as “a better way to express individuality” or simply as “more real”. This can be seen in close connection to the following point.

Original versus Reproduction

Walter Benjamin famously stated that reproducible works of art are less auratic. In his terms, aura describes an artwork’s charisma coined by originality

and uniqueness. “Even if an art reproduction is truly accomplished one aspect is missing: the ‘Here and Now’ of an artwork, the unique existence at one place. But in this one-time existence and in nothing else, the story to which it has been subjected in the course of its existence took place” (Benjamin 1980, 475). Photography, if not Daguerreotypy, anyway is a difficult matter when it comes to Benjamin’s understanding of aura: as a reproducible art per se, photographs can hardly be really auratic – even though Benjamin makes some exceptions such as the works of Eugène Atget.

Looking at photo books and photo albums, the book would be, in Benjamin’s terms, even less auratic: it is reproducible whereas the photo album usually is one-of-a-kind and carries the traces of its usage. This can be linked to the previously mentioned statements that photo books feel “more real”.

“I do like photo albums, which are then supplemented with drawings and texts – more individual and creative than photo books.”⁵ (Bianca M., Facebook survey)

Not only the aura, but also the associated use of a photo book can be very different from that of a photo album. As the album is just one single original, it will be most probably possessed or rather maintained by one person. The family has to gather around the album when looking at the pictures. For the photo book, there can be copies for everyone involved. Therefore, it is no more necessary to come together which implies that there must be less communication.

However, the situation may have changed: nowadays, sitting together and looking at old pictures can no longer be regarded as realistic, because family members often live far apart from each other. Therefore, in practice, the reproducibility can help people to connect and, further, avoids the question of ownership: every family member, every friend can have his/her own copy. Even more, everyone can make his/ her own photo book in their own way and the result is not more or less original and consequently also not more or less worthy than the others. If every person involved creates his or her own photobook, however, the memory is not supported by the same visuals for everyone in the respective group any more; everyone can select different pictures and a different layout. Consequently, the memory is less shared than in the case of the photo album. Two interviewees reported on this phenomenon and stated that the photo book was “more democratic” but “results in more isolation” respectively “may be less able to bring people together”.

5 “Beides. Gerne auch noch Fotoalben, die dann mit Zeichnungen und Texten ergänzt werden – individueller und kreativer als Fotobücher.”

Fixed versus open

As previously stated, the book is, in the narrower sense, defined by book-binding of ready-laidout pages. This implies that the book is rather fixed. Once the pictures are chosen and everything is compiled, ordered, and sent for printing, its process is ready. The album, on the other hand, will never really be a finished product. During its usage, there are often many empty pages that still can be filled. It is an ongoing project that can be undertaken in a group or alone, that often accompanies the people involved for a long time. In its general openness, it can include more things than just photographs, e.g. postcards with or without text and other rather flat souvenirs such as tickets, stamps, dried flowers, etc. Looking at a photo book thus resembles reading a book, following a linear structure, whereas handling a photo album is a far more flexible activity: the recipient can continue to be the creator by reordering the pictures, adding text or other elements etc., thus, can be active: “We are constantly working on our album,” explains one interview partner.

“For the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (McLuhan 2006, 108): in the photo book the timeline is linear and everything shown is over – the past is past and everything seen in there is past – it is a closed presentation. The photo album, on the other hand, leaves room for the present and the future – there are empty pages. Further, the photo album allows rearrangement and recontextualization.

Photo book	Photo album
Support of memory Communication of identity	
More official looking	More appealing to nostalgia
Singular events, shorter periods	Longer periods, lifetime
More professional	More authentic
Copy	Original
Fixed/finished	Open, working project
More virtual	More haptic, more integrative, more diverse

Associations mentioned by survey participants and interviewees

The medium for the future

Photo book and photo album are two seemingly similar media, which can lead to quite different social and individual situations. The assumption of media materialism therefore applies here, without this meaning that media determine human actions. The empirical data have shown that people consciously choose one or the other medium in order to change their situational geography.

But which of the two media is better suited for the future? Due to its ability to condense narratives like no other medium, I assume that photography will continue to be one of the most important media that we use to present ourselves and our stories and recent trends in social media confirm this.

For the presentation of private photographs, a reconciliation of photo book and photo album is conceivable, for example in the form of an interactive photo book that has some photo album features. Interactivity enables “greater involvement of the reader” (Teixeria and Goçálvez 2015, 1), thus the reader can find his or her individual way to navigate through a story which would be fundamentally different from e.g. watching a movie or reading a book. In this way, however, the position of the photo book or the album as a basis for a common family memory is weakened. The memory becomes more individualized, more democratic, and at the same time strengthened by the greater active involvement. Nevertheless, an interactive photo album (so far) cannot offer a haptic quality, neither the chance to integrate objects is given nor is it possible to physically, i.e. in a way three-dimensional, write on it. Further, it cannot fulfil the desire for non-virtual, “real” work on one’s personal memories – so the good old photo album seems to be an irreplaceable option for some people, but new paths may open up for the photo book.

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MAJA TABEA JERRENTROP

Dviejų medijų reikšmės. Fotoalbumas prieš fotoknygą

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje palyginama fotoknyga ir fotoalbumas atsižvelgiant į jų reikšmę vartotojui: abu gali būti skirti panašioms tikslams, tarp jų – atminčiai, tapatumui ir vaizdavimui, o jų turinys iš pirmo žvilgsnio dažnai būna labai panašus. Tačiau fotoknyga ir fotoalbumas perduoda skirtingas žinias, susijusias su nostalgija, laiku, autoritetu, autentiškumu, originalumu ir fiksavimu. Nors fotoknyga yra naujesnė laikmena, atrodo, kad ji mažiau tinka tenkinti „postmodernius“ poreikius. Vis dėlto fotoalbumas atrodo autentiškesnis dėl unikalumo ir suteikia galimybę mažiau linijškai ir atviriau kurti savo gyvenimo istoriją.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: fotografija, fotoalbumas, fotoknyga, nostalgija, aura, autentiškumas.