



THE SELFIE PHENOMENON: SELF- PRESENTATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract:

Selfies have become immensely popular and a new medium for self-expression and self- presentation following innovative applications in ios and android devices. The study attempts to explore how adolescent users identify the act of uploading selfies as an expression of self- presentation. It also provides a foundation for understanding the selfie phenomenon and its issues related to late adolescents. A review of literature indicates, there is a lack of research in the Indian context. A qualitative approach was employed to understand the selfie phenomenon. Results were analysed using narratives. Focus group Discussion (FGD) was done on a sample of 8 willing selfie users – 2 males and 6 females aged 19-20 years. This FGD explored differences in frequency of taking a selfie and its posting based on personality characteristics, motives and their awareness of the Selfie syndrome. Results showed that selfies are taken based on accomplishment of psychological needs of identity formation, uniqueness and independence. Selfies were taken in the background of not just natural environment but to also accentuate the physical attributes of oneself. They expressed a strong need for awareness on the negative implications of the Selfie syndrome.

Index Terms: Selfie, Self -Presentation, Adolescents & Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

1. Introduction:

The crucial challenge facing adolescents is one of self- definition and identity formation (Erikson (1968). As they proceed through a period of questioning (identity moratorium) to a phase of making commitments without crisis (identity achievement) their self-perceptions and social interactions enable to define their sense of 'identity'. David Elkind (1967) discussed how people at this point of life experience egocentrism, which leads to self-consciousness due to the belief in an imaginary audience. An important developmental task for adolescents is their ability to self - disclose (Harter, 1999). The Internet provides adolescents with avenues to explore their identities and exchange intimate disclosures (Wolak, Mitchell and Finklehor, 2003). Adolescents engage in Social acuity, a perspective - taking ability to successfully create a desired impression.

In recent years, the art of self-portraits has exploded into "the culture of selfies". Selfie, a modern day tool for self-presentation, has turned into a global pop-culture phenomenon. According to his theory of the looking-glass, Cooley (1902) believes that individual's self is created through the ideas and concepts that others have about them. His theory stated that people learn who they are from others and from their imagination of how they appear to others. As per his theory, people use the self as a mirror, and today, selfies are being utilized as mirrors.

Rosenberg (1979) noted that Self-construction is particularly prevalent where adolescents routinely try out different identities. They engage in Self-presentation which is expressive. Individuals construct an image of themselves to claim personal identity and present themselves in a manner that is consistent with that image through a selfie.

Swann's Self-verification theory (1987) stated that people seek verification for self-views. People prefer others to see and validate them as they see themselves. By receiving self-verification, individuals ensure that their beliefs about themselves are sensible, and, therefore, can predict and exercise some control over their lives outcomes (Chen, 2006).

Thus, a selfie is an expression of an individual's identity, of discovering oneself. There are a number of implications of the Selfie Syndrome, regarding the effects of social media use on self-views from a self-presentational perspective.

2. Review of Literature:

Selfies can increase the self-esteem and self-efficacy as it highlights what youngsters are going through (Today Health, 2014). According to Seiter (2015), posting selfies reflects high self-esteem levels, and it might also enhance one's self-esteem because such photos typically emphasize one's ideal and controlled image.

The profile photograph occupied a central part of online self-presentation, and one that is critical for relational success (Hancock & Toma, 2009, p.368). Selfies can also enhance the self-presentation by posting what is socially desirable. The halo effect, a cognitive bias, allows the famous fashion bloggers, who often have well-dressed and good-looking body, to be perceived as economically wealthy (Abidin & Thompson, 2012).

Krämer & Winter (2008) sought to explore the relationship between self-reported (offline) personality traits and (online) self-presentation in social networking profiles. It is believed that users of SNS have more control over their self -presentational behaviour than in face-to-face communication since they are given the opportunity to manage self-presentation more strategically than face-to-face communication (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). With the launch of Facebook in 2004, one of the obvious elements of self-disclosure or image construction was the profile photo; the default photo that allows the user the choice of identifying themselves to the entire Facebook community (Watson, Smith, & Driver, 2006).

In terms of identity development and psychological health, research suggests that young users report increased self-esteem and general well-being following instances of positive feedback on social networking sites (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Relatedly, results from a 2009 survey of college students indicated that the heaviest Facebook users were also most satisfied with their lives and exhibited greater social and political engagement (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). People who use selfies most often believe that selfies could boost their self-confidence. The number of positive comments and likes that one receives for their selfies was reported to influence the level of one's self-confidence, especially among people with low self-esteem.

People have their own reasons for using social media. Some like to browse other people's status updates and photos, while others use the sites as a way to vent their emotions. But according to Dr. Shannon M. Rauch, of Benedictine University at Mesa, Arizona, one of the main reasons people use social media is for self-distraction and boredom relief. In other words, social media delivers reinforcement every time a person logs on in the form of supportive comments and 'likes.' And repeated reinforcement makes extinction hard; ultimately turning into an addiction.

Some researchers linked the habit of taking a lot of selfies to narcissism, isolation, and even suicide (Bushak, 2015). Selfies are an indicator of low self-esteem, social dependence or even attention seeking behavior. When considering the potential negative effects of social media, there appears to be risks associated with certain types of online activity, rather than SNS usage at large. For example, social media use can be particularly maladaptive when it occurs in the form of 'passive browsing'. That is, when users spend time on sites like Facebook and Instagram exclusively looking at other people's photos and profile content; it can trigger a sense of exclusion, envy, and loneliness (Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja, & Buxmann, 2013). This sort of online 'surveillance' activity can also promote feelings of inadequacy or jealousy in the context of romantic relationships, especially among users who subject themselves to the Facebook-stalking of exes (Marshall, 2012). There is also a flipside to this addiction of clicking selfies in the form of being narcissistic. Narcissists have extreme preoccupation with their own physical appearance, mental abilities, success, and image as perceived by others (López de Victoria, 2008). They often find gratification (i.e., satisfaction, pleasure) from vanity or admiration of their own physical appearance. These people are in need of approval and validation, whose self-esteem is based on 'public contingencies', meaning how they are perceived by others. They often present themselves in a more sexualized way, geared towards gaining as many comments as possible to prop-up a more fragile sense of self.

3. Objectives:

The objectives of the study were two fold. First, to get a full account of first- hand experiences of selfie users. This Focus group Discussion enabled exploring differences in frequency of taking a selfie and its posting based on personality characteristics and motives. Second, the study also aimed at unraveling the respondents' awareness of the Selfie syndrome.

4. Methodology:

A qualitative approach was employed in understanding the selfie phenomenon. A group of 8 adolescents – 2 males and 6 females aged 19-20 years currently pursuing their B.A degree studies in an Autonomous College in Mangaluru city formed the sample. A FGD was an innovative approach to study the phenomenon.

The FGD opened with the moderator and the assistant moderator presenting themselves and giving a brief description of the main objective of the focus group. After obtaining the consent, of the respondents, each of them gave their names, their age, the mobile they currently used and their frequency of taking as well as posting selfies. Around nine questions were raised and the entire discussion was recorded and transcribed.

5. Analysis of Results:

Results were analysed using narratives.

Results & Discussion:

The results are structured according to the preliminary details of the participants and to each of the questions posed.

Table 1: Participants Profile

Participant	Age (Years)	Sex	Model	Selfies Taken Per Week	Selfies Posted Per Day
1	19	Male	Samsung note3	5-6	None
2	19	Female	i phone 5s	5-6	None

3	19	Female	Micromax	3-4	None
4	20	Female	Sony Xperia L	6-7	None
5	20	Male	Google one plus 3	1-2	None
6	20	Female	i phone 5s	5-6 (On special occasions, 10 per day)	One
7	19	Female	iphone 6s	1-2 (Use it more as a mirror)	None
8	19	Female	No phone	1-2 (Use a friend's phone to click and then delete it right away)	None

Q1. What is meant by a Selfie?

Almost all participants were aware of what a selfie is all about although they did have a few doubts. *To me, a selfie is just a photo taken by yourself instead of having somebody else take it for you. It just makes it a lot more easier because You know your angles, you know what you want in your photo and you can see there in front of you, rather than having somebody go and take it again and again.* (Participant 5, M). *I was wondering if you put these self timers on the cameras, are the pictures considered as selfies? You are setting it for yourself, you set up the tripod to suit the angle.* (Participant 2, F). Oxford dictionary defined this term as, "A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a Smartphone or webcam and shared via social media". An understanding of Self- Presentation emerged during the discussion- *I think the best part of a selfie is that you are not dependent on others. I think when someone else takes a picture, you become very conscious about the way you smile, the way you look and you are too conscious to make those weird faces. A selfie is a more natural side to you. I think you get a better picture because you get the entire space, to be all alone to smile, frown, cry.* (Participant 8, F). *But I think, it does increase your level of conceit. Because when you take a selfie, you know what are your best angles but if somebody else takes a picture of you it looks a little awkward, a little contrasting.* (Participant 7, F). *I feel that in a selfie, the 'Real' side to you is lost. Only your best angle is captured.* (Participant 8, F). *Like the person you see in a mirror, the person you see in a selfie and the person you see when someone else captures you are like three different aspects.* (Participant 7, F)

Self- Presentations denote motivations in behaviour. Baumeister (1987) distinguished two types of self-presentational motivations. One (pleasing the audience) is to match one's self presentation to the audience's expectations and preferences. The other (Self- construction) is to match one's self presentation to one's self-ideal. As expressed by Participant 8, a selfie caters to the expectations of others (audience) whereas to participant 7, there's more to a person in a 'selfie'. While a selfie makes one *self confident*, [There's a joy when you see your picture (participant 6,F)] *it's a self expression, self sufficient way of living, makes you more self confident*, nevertheless, it also brings in deception. [*In a selfie, the focus is on one's face and up to your chest. Your lower body is gone, you could make yourself look thin.* (Participant 8,F)]. The discussion followed on why selfies are posted. While it brought joy to some, some found it *short lived, momentary, like an obsession. If someone were to tell you that you don't look as good in the selfie, it wouldn't bother much if one has self confidence and self esteem. It is about what you want to see, if you choose to be positive, then selfie is going to be productive. If you choose to listen to others' judgment then I think it will affect you the other way.* (Participant 8, F). *Like the person you see in a mirror, the person you see in a selfie and the person you see when someone else captures you are like three different aspects.* (Participant 7, F)

Although a Perceived Self is how a person assesses himself/herself and how he/she thinks others view him/her, the Real Self is how the person really is and the Ideal Self is how the person would like to be. It is all about the choices one makes: to be happy as they look in the selfie or rely on others' judgments. Thus, the motives behind using selfies or the uses and gratifications of selfies depended on the personality of the individual and also on their self-esteem levels as reported by the findings of Bui (2014). One of the male participants gave importance to the moment like an event or the exterior surrounding while selfies are taken but most female participants spoke on beauty enhancements. *But it all points to why do you take a selfie? Is it to just take a picture and see how beautiful you are or whats on the outside or do you take a picture to remember what part of that time was that you really enjoyed.* (Participant 5, M). *That's where facial editing apps come in, contours, to highlight some features to bring out the best.* (Participant 7, F). *A selfie tells you what you are, where you are, what you are wearing.* (Participant 6, F)

According to Papadakis (2014), individuals who used selfies more often needed instant gratification and selfie was one such medium through which they could attain it. Also, every individual had their views and needs for selfies (Rutledge, 2013). It depended upon the value an individual adds to their external appearance and presentation. The way a person sees selfies also varies with the culture of that individual (Rutledge, 2013). Finding fulfillment based on one's motives is one reason why the selfie has become such a focal point where they are so self absorbed, viewing the world through their own perspective. The group is characterized by egocentrism and there emerges gender, personality and motivational differences in selfie behaviour.

Q2. Mention the important places where selfies are taken?

There were varying answers giving importance to environmental cues, like good lighting conditions, in places considered to be ‘cool’ like high on the mountain during treks, when alone, at social gatherings where all are well dressed and happy. Participant 4, F, uses it as a mirror.

I’ve taken photos standing at the edge of a cliff and have heard that people have died doing such things but it didn’t stop me because you don’t see these things every day, though risk taking but thrilling too. Its also thrilling for people who look at the picture. (Participant 5, M)

When I cry, when I am sad, I click a picture. First is I want to see how I look because I am too embarrassed to see in front of my mirror in a place where my parents can see me. First to see how I look, second for me to remember how much I cried that day. When am crying, I need to see how red my nose is. (Participant 8, F)

There was a discussion on ‘bathroom selfies’, ‘car selfies’, ‘drone selfies’, self stick pointed in riskiest places and heights as well as manuals and videos tutoring people to take the perfect selfie at the right angles.

Selfies are taken in different venues to define themselves capturing a moment in a person's life that meant something to them, of stating their identity so as to prove that they were ‘here’ and they made an impression.

Q3. Where are selfies posted?

The group expressed that Instagram, Whatsapp dp, Face Book and Snap chat are the places where selfies are usually posted. One participant posts a selfie daily on snapchat. Some expressed happiness that their followers like and make comments.

Q4. Mention any important selfies you have seen.

Participants mentioned Kim Kardashian and sisters, Ellen DeGeneres at the Oscars with many celebrities in one frame. One participant remembered his school mate posting his selfie with the ISRO Chairman, its impact on his self-value has increased. Another participant narrated a selfie taken of her cousin who fought all odds to finally wed. The selfie was like a proof, an achievement and a satisfaction of a sort. Yet another participant narrated how her school teacher took several selfies and videos on Youtube of his sky diving in Switzerland. A participant expressed how in some marriage receptions, there are no photographers, the guests come and take a selfie along with the bride and groom. One participant detailed a video and selfies of a person engaged in bungee jumping stressing that attention gets divided while taking a selfie and engaging in a particular act. Each participant recalled a selfie based on what was important and what made an impact on them, be it celebrities to self- actualizing moments. One cannot experience the moment of an event and capture the same via a selfie was the conclusion.

Q5. Why are selfies taken?

Participant 2, F	To show people where you have been.
Participant 6, F	Not to show people, but yourself, for memory. Like for an introvert, if shy to approach someone to take a picture of themselves, selfie is easy and convenient. Introverts find it hard to express themselves, so through a selfie they do express themselves. It tells you your whereabouts, to send people to get connected.
Participant 8, F	Used for approvals in terms of apparel selected, to know the other person’s opinion. Selfies also make you realize what features of yours are pretty- your smiles like fake ones, half, full, real etc.
Participant 7, F	It fuels your self confidence, you see your best angles in a selfie.

Selfies are taken to know one’s physically attractive features, to stay connected, to seek social approval and social acceptance.

Q6. What are the advantages of taking selfies?

It improves one’s confidence, receiving compliments makes one happy, its easy to use, convenient, it is faster and helps capture the moment were a few answers from the participants. *It invokes self sufficiency, you don’t need another person to take a picture. It makes you independent in case you are travelling alone.* (Participant 6, F). Selfies are taken based on accomplishment of psychological needs of identity formation and uniqueness and independence. The Internet has become a place for adolescents in particular, to become “celebrities” of social media and have their psychological needs fulfilled. *It boosts self esteem.* (Participant 7, F). According to Moreau (2014), the main reasons people take and post selfies are to get somebody’s attention, to show off, out of boredom, to boost self-esteem, and because social media is fun. Truly, social media has allowed people to have more personal control over how one presents oneself to others. But not everyone shows his or her unbiased and genuine self. People with low self-esteem tend to be more involved with the trend of taking selfies, as well as the use of social media to mediate their interpersonal interaction in order to fulfill their self-esteem needs (Varnali, 2015).

Q7. What are the disadvantages of taking selfies?

Sometimes, people say that I have a better phone than theirs and use my phone to take their selfies. It could be a disturbance to others. (Participant 5, M). *I think body shaming.....Celebrities get a lot of negative feedback which makes them feel terrible about how they look.....I think because of people not accepting you, terrible words hurt people and cause depression.* (Participant 6, F).

So, if a girl who hasn't hit her puberty yet and gets into a relationship, the guy could trick her to take pictures of herself, nude. Because of selfies, she could send it but if there was no selfie, I don't think she would go to her mother or her friend to take a picture of herself nude. (Participant 8, F). The artificial world is more important to them than the real world. (Participant 6, F). People become insensitive, when there's a crisis, people click a picture rather than go to help. (Participant 6, F). ... Introverts not depending on others has a negative impact. The selfie would make him less dependent and wouldn't let him come out, to gel with others. (Participant 5, M) If there was no selfie, there would be more interaction coming forth, of getting to know people. (Participant 8, F) It could fuel your narcissistic tendencies. Once you start liking it, when you look at the comments you get, it gets a little bit obsessive. (Participant 7, F)

There exists societal obsession with selfies taken at funerals, at accident zones etc. Selfies could result in social isolation, social criticism, narcissism, premarital relationships, suicide, depression etc. Findings of Weiser's (2015) study indicated a significant relationship between narcissism and selfie-posting frequency. Q8. Is Selfie syndrome a kind of OCD? Is it harmful to people?

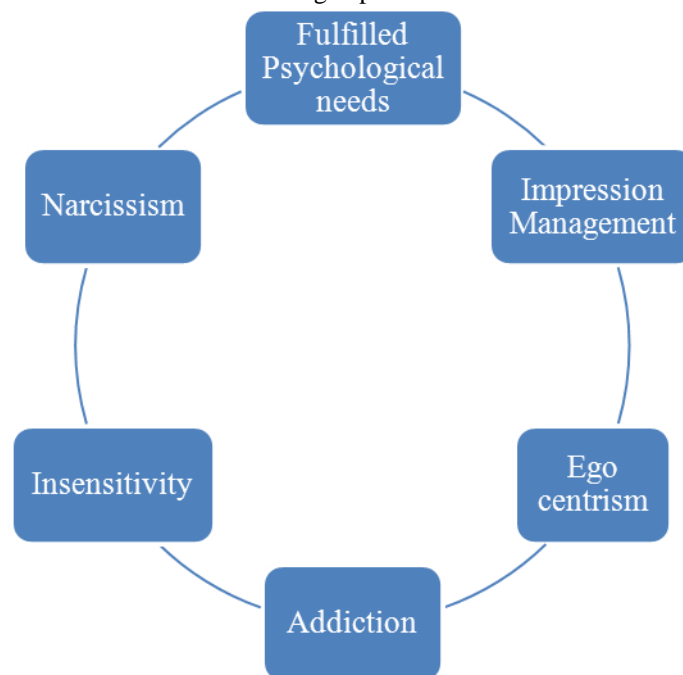
How harmful it is to a person depends on the location, that is if you are taking a selfie in a dangerous place. But how repeatedly you tend to do it is to be known. Selfies have a potential to be an OCD because it is so addictive. (Participant 5, M). Most of the participants were unaware of the Selfie syndrome. The moderator explained that the American Psychiatric Association has identified a new disorder called selfitis. Facebook addiction disorder (FAD) and Internet Addiction disorder were discussed. The participants were curious to know about the diagnostic criteria to know their diagnostic status.

Q9. What suggestions do the youth need to receive regarding this behaviour of Selfie syndrome??

I think we should be talked about it, we should be given its symptoms to know if we are getting in there. (Participant 6, F). Most of the youth may not be aware whether they are already having this syndrome. (Participant 2, F) The participants felt that they themselves should be spoken to about the Selfie syndrome, to have it included in the syllabus, news broadcast it on Television, and through All India Radio programmes. They wanted the topic ingrained in the Educational system at all levels to raise awareness on the same.

6. Findings:

The below chart reveals the issues that emerged post narratives.



The present generation is technology-addicted and selfie-obsessed. Efforts need to be made to educate all about how social networking is leading to the culture of "popularity" based on materialism and giving way to unreal standards of physical appearance. The feelings of loneliness arise in adolescents who spend several hours on SNS waiting for someone to communicate with them and brooding over the active lives of others. Efforts can be made to reduce the prevalence of depression and anxiety among youngsters. Furthermore, efforts can also be made to identify a healthy way of using new media and introducing educational programmes regarding responsible use of new media.

7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the results of this study show that the usage of selfies and its posting has an impact on the self-presentation of the participants. They expressed a strong need for awareness on the negative implications.

8. Implications:

- ✓ In the current digital age, it is important for mental health professionals to explore how an adolescent/person uses selfies, social media, and digital communication as an important part of a mental health assessment, and open the door for discussions about self-esteem, body image, healthy relationships and digital safety.
- ✓ Counsellors need to see discrepancies or gaps as well as consistencies and connections among the client's Perceived Self, Real Self and Ideal Self.
- ✓ Health professionals need to provide screen-free ways for tech addicts to spend their time.
- ✓ Gadget-free zones need to be created at homes, centres of learning, public places etc.
- ✓ Attempts need to be made at personal and societal levels to reduce the electronic overload to regain a healthy balance of life, work, and technology.

9. Limitations:

- ✓ The results cannot be generalized as it is a very small portion of the population and does not fully represent all adolescents who have taken large number of selfies and share on their online network.
- ✓ This study merely provides a jumping off point for the topic of selfies; more research should be done about selfies at a global level.

10. Scope for Further Research:

- ✓ An in depth study can be done using a more representative sample.
- ✓ Large surveys and quantitative analysis with more relevant variables like gender, age etc would give precise results.

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