



Selfie: An Infectious Gift of IT to Modern Society

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the 'Selfie' culture is deep rooted in the modern society. It begins with brief history of selfie moving on to why people click selfie? Further it focuses on the question, how this photography technique impact on the modern society in negative ways. In the end few remedies have also been suggested for society.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, a selfie is a photographic object that initiates the transmission of human feeling in the form of a relationship (between photographer and photographed, between image and filtering software, between viewer and viewed, between individuals circulating images, between users and social software architectures, etc.). A selfie is also a practice—a gesture that can send (and is often intended to send) different messages to different individuals, communities, and audiences. This gesture may be dampened, amplified, or modified by social media. Origin of the term **'Selfie' (self + ie)** has appeared from the early 21st century. The immense development of social media, world wide availability of smart phones, Wi-Fi and mobile data package really impact the emergence of this word and being widely used as a general term.

In the year 2013 Oxford Dictionaries announced their word of the year as the "selfie", due to his sudden popularity. 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"**. Before the rise of this selfie concept, smart phones or social media, the thought of taking self portraits was existed among people with using self-timers on the cameras. The idea behind the selfie meant to be different than using a self timer, and also it should not take a longer snapping time process as self timer. Most importantly to be a selfie, photograph should be captured with a camera held at arm's length or focused at a mirror. Anyway the whole concept is; wherever you are, whatever you are doing, with whom you are with, flip your smartphone, point the camera towards your face, strike a pose and snap! That's a selfie for you.

BRIEF HISTORY OF SELFIE

History of Selfies is not a relatively new concept; in fact, it is believed the first American self portrait photo produced in 1839 was of Robert Cornelius using a daguerreotype, who took a photo of himself outside of his family's store in Philadelphia, PA (Washington D.C.:Smithsonian Institute for the National Portrait Gallery).It is unclear when the term selfie originated but the earliest images that were tagged with #selfie (read as: hash tag selfie) emerged in early 2004 to a photo-sharing website named Flickr to describe self-taken portraits. In 2005, Jim Krause, a photographer, also mentioned the term selfie in his book, *Photo Idea Index*, which discusses various techniques for shooting photographs. He defined selfies as, "...one of those images that is taken by aiming the camera at yourself" (Krause, 2005, p. 148). This concept of selfies did not fully pick up until the arrival of a start-up project that revolutionized how photos are captured on mobile phones and transforming them as a mean of communication that enabled people to connect more easily. This start-up project would later become Instagram, which launched officially to the App Store for the iPhone 4 platform on October 6, 2010. The iPhone 4 was also the first iPhone that came equipped with a front facing camera. With the front facing camera, users now have the ability to snap photos of themselves without requiring assistance from a second person.

The year 2013 was eventually dubbed as, "the year of the selfie". A

2013 Google search for the term 'selfie' returned 11 million results, with over seven million entries resulting from 'self-shot.' In fact, doing a self-search for #selfie on Instagram yields more than fifty variations of the word selfies and the photos that are tagged. Hash tags are usually written as one long word, for example, #selfiesaturday (reads as selfie Saturday). Other variations of the word selfie include group selfie, selfie (insert any days of the week), funeral (selfies taken at a funeral), etc., virtually any possibility to group the term selfie and any other word together exists in hash tag form and on Instagram. Further, there are over 160 million images that incorporate the hash tag #me or #selfie on the photo-sharing network Instagram in 2014 (which can be viewed in real time through Tyler Madsen, Erik Carter and Jillian Mayer's internet artwork selffeed.com).These numbers are significant (if only) for the statistical inference that the quantity of selfies presently stored in our social networks or online photo repositories overwhelms the entire aggregated and recorded history of portraiture known to man prior to 2005, and the numbers are growing exponentially.

WHY PEOPLE CLICK SELFIE?

Selfies are immensely popular these days. Millions of selfies have been posted on various social networking sites (Unmetric, 2014). They have become a new medium for self-expression and self-representation. Mark R. Leary, Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Duke University and author of *The Curse of the Self: Self-Awareness, Egoism, and the Quality of Human Life* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and editor of *Interpersonal Rejection* has pointed out that "by posting selfies, people can keep themselves in other people's minds. In addition, like all photographs that are posted online, selfies are used to convey a particular impression of oneself" There are majority two schools of thought on why people take selfies; one blaming narcissism for forcing people into taking selfies while the other praising people who take selfies as "self-confident".

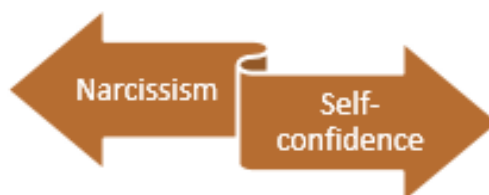


Fig.1: Representing two schools of thought for taking Selfie

Narcissism – Going by the narcissism school of thought, the belief of psychologists is that the people who post selfies on social media websites are craving for attention and are expected to have less intimacy in their relationships. These people are in need of approval and validation, whose self-esteem is based on 'public contingencies', how they are perceived by others. This group often presents themselves in a more sexualized way, geared towards gaining as many comments as

possible to prop-up a more fragile sense of self.

A study in this regard was conducted where 508 Facebook users with an average age of 24 were asked to rank how close they feel to their friends, coworkers and relatives who also use Facebook. They then compared those answers to how many selfies those people posted. Overwhelmingly, the more someone posted selfies, the lower they ranked on the intimacy scales of the participants.

Self-confidence – The other thought of self-confident people makes sense – if the culture of selfies is instilled at a young age, then people are growing up taking photos of themselves. Theoretically, this will make them more comfortable with their own self-image, which could lead to a more resilient self-esteem overall.

Dr. Aaron Balick, a psychotherapist who has written a book about the human motivations behind social networking, explains that we have both “active online identities” and “passive online identities”. He says: “A passive one is like when you search for yourself, or when friends post information about you- it’s your online identity that you have no control over. Active online identities are ones you can control, like a Facebook profile. A selfie is an expression of an active online identity, something you have some control over. You might take lots, but you’ll publish the ones you like- even if they are silly or unflattering”.

CONSEQUENCES OF TAKING SELFIE

With through analysis it is evident that selfie is becoming more fashionable predominant trend among young generation. But as cool as it might be, there, is also a flipside to this addiction of clicking selfies all day. Jill Weber, a psychologist, says that people start associating their self-esteem with the likes and comments that they receive on their snaps. People who add more and more selfies on a regular basis suffer with low self-esteem, she adds. This is where narcissism comes in. People become self-absorbed and pursue gratification through a social network. With developing trend of taking selfies, psychiatrists are beginning to consider the compulsion to take selfies as a serious mental health problem. A recent study done in USA demonstrated a significant connection between time spent on Facebook and negative body image that individuals who spent more time on social media were more likely to compare themselves physically to their friends, which in turn was shown to generate negative attitudes towards their own appearance. Thus initially starting with fun and time-pass gradually it becomes habit and then addiction.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has officially confirmed what many people thought all along: taking ‘selfies’ is a mental disorder. The APA made this classification during its annual board of directors meeting in Chicago. The disorder is called selfitis, and is defined as the obsessive compulsive desire to take photos of one’s self and post them on social media as a way to make up for the lack of self-esteem and to fill a gap in intimacy. APA said there are three levels of the disorder:

- **Borderline Selfitis** : Taking photos of one’s self at least three times a day but not posting them on social media
- **Acute Selfitis**: Taking photos of one’s self at least three times a day and posting each of the photos on social media
- **Chronic Selfitis**: Uncontrollable urge to take photos of one’s self round the clock and posting the photos on social media more than six times a day

As a result of becoming technology-addicted and selfie-obsessed the youth is currently undergoing therapy for Body Dysmorphic Disorder (an excessive anxiety about personal appearance) A recent survey conducted by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery revealed that selfies are behind a boom in young people seeking plastic surgery contributed to a 10% increase in nose jobs, 7% increase in hair transplants and a 6% increase in eyelid surgery in 2013 compared with 2012. The survey also found that the pervasiveness of social media is driving down the age of people having plastic surgery, with 58% of the surveyed members reporting an increase in cosmetic surgery and ‘injectables’ in patients under 30yrs age. It’s hardly a surprise that social media is increasing body dissatisfaction. In 2011, study of 248 girls aged 12-19 at the University of Haifa found that girls who spent more time on Facebook were more likely to suffer from a range of conditions, including bulimia, anorexia, negative physical self-image and have more of an urge to be on a weight-loss diet.

The other consequences may include distraction from important of-ficial work with less productivity and poor performance in the work place, job dissatisfaction, unseen stress, peer pressure (without knowing the root cause), unhealthy family relations, marital conflicts etc. It may lead to orthopedics complications viz. computer related work injuries, cervical spondylitis, low back pain, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, carpal tunnel, tennis elbow, frozen shoulder etc due to prolonged use of the thumbs for typing, awkward posture of the body while using the phone or computer for social media and even catastrophic road traffic accidents while using phones during driving.

REMEDIES

In order to save our young generation from being technology-addicted and selfie-obsessed, several remedies should be adopted. These include: Behavioral counseling emphasizing on self-motivation and self-control on unnecessary use of social media, giving quality time to family and friends. Cognitive behavior therapy also works wonder. In addition to these, efforts can also 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 appearance. Parents and teachers can then begin moral education of children from an early age to help them realize that appearance is not everything as there other aspects of personality, intelligence, and good nature of a person, which should be used, judge a person. Similarly, adolescents should be encouraged to spend more time outdoors in recreational activities to promote a healthy development. The feelings of loneliness arise in adolescents who spend several hours on social networking sites 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 programs regarding responsible use of new media.

CONCLUSION

Internet and latest IT technique has revolutionized our life style and made life fast and easy for communication purpose but it’s double edged sword. If selfies, specifically, are proven in the future to cause negative mental health issues, it would most likely come as no surprise to experts in the fields of psychology and medicine. It is very harmful for adolescents because it is the age where identity of an individual develops and if these unreal standards of appearance are bombarded on the young mind, it can have a catastrophic effect on the entire Millennial Generation in the long run. So technology must be used for productive purpose rather than selfie.

Moreover prospective large surveys are needed including a large numbers of persons who are actively involved on such social media to find out the underlying psycho-social factors responsible for selfie syndrome and the possible consequences of this syndrome.



Fig. 2: Representing Three Levels of Selfies Disorder Named Selfitis

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