

Social Media-based Self-Expression: Narcissistic Performance, Public Adoration, and the Commodification of Reified Persona

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ABSTRACT. This paper analyzes the outcomes of an exploratory review of the current research on social media-based self-expression. The data used for this study were obtained and replicated from previous research conducted by BLS, eMarketer, FinanceBuzz, Georgia Institute of Technology, Mobile Marketing Data Lab, Nielsen, OPPO, Pew Research Center, Statista, and YouGov. I performed analyses and made estimates regarding U.S. adults who have ever taken a selfie (% , by ethnicity), the ways in which U.S. Internet users share selfies (% , by demographic profile), % of generation admitting to sharing selfies, U.S. smartphone users who use selfie-sharing apps (% , by age), and U.S. adults who think it is acceptable to take a selfie in various circumstances (% , by age group). Data collected from 5,200 respondents are tested against the research model by using structural equation modeling.

Keywords: selfies; narcissistic performance; social media; reified persona

How to cite: Sion, Grațiela (2019). "Social Media-based Self-Expression: Narcissistic Performance, Public Adoration, and the Commodification of Reified Persona," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 11(2): 70–75. doi:10.22381/CRLSJ112201910

Received 12 May 2019 • Received in revised form 11 October 2019

Accepted 15 October 2019 • Available online 15 November 2019

1. Introduction

Selfies are linked to certain social roles and reputation (Miltner and Baym, 2015) and are features of a narcissistic society. (Murray, 2018) Users having significant levels of narcissism get involved in recurring use of selfies. (Halpern et al., 2016) People higher in narcissism tend to assess selfie-posting behavior positively, be engaged in the comments supplied by other individuals, and be attentive of other persons' selfies. (Lee and Sung, 2016)

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

The trendiness of selfies is symptomatic of a ubiquitous narcissism, or of a determination to disintegrate the public realms (Blacker, 2018; Brennan, 2018; Life, 2017; Mihăilă et al., 2016; Nica, 2017; Roberts and Marchais, 2018; Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia, 2017) into persistent and excessive images of the self. (Giroux, 2015). The pervasiveness of narcissistic people practicing selfies may bring about an escalation of this peculiarity among individuals who have some preliminary level of narcissism, or conceivably even generating it in users who do not display it. (Halpern et al., 2016) Notwithstanding their endeavors to manage the assessments conveyed by their digital self-portraits, experienced selfie-takers may accidentally disclose features of their personality through the selfie-taking behavior, e.g. conceit and narcissism. (Re et al., 2016)

3. Methodology and Empirical Analysis

The data used for this study were obtained and replicated from previous research conducted by BLS, eMarketer, FinanceBuzz, Georgia Institute of Technology, Mobile Marketing Data Lab, Nielsen, OPPO, Pew Research Center, Statista, and YouGov. I performed analyses and made estimates regarding U.S. adults who have ever taken a selfie (% , by ethnicity), the ways in which U.S. Internet users share selfies (% , by demographic profile), % of generation admitting to sharing selfies, U.S. smartphone users who use selfie-sharing apps (% , by age), and U.S. adults who think it is acceptable to take a selfie in various circumstances (% , by age group). Data collected from 5,200 respondents are tested against the research model by using structural equation modeling.

4. Results and Discussion

Positions in relation to narcissism, selfie-posting, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norm constitute notable drivers of a person's purpose to post selfies on social networking sites. (Kim et al., 2016) The selfie-taking behavior represents a narcissistic performance which enables users to authenticate their distinctiveness and relevance. (Griffiths and Balakrishnan, 2018) Whereas narcissist people take selfies more routinely over time, this rise in selfie production intensifies ensuing levels of narcissism (Halpern et al., 2016) As any performance of rhetorical articulation, selfies are deliberate and provide cultural speculations and conjectures, operating as hallmarks of a narcissistic culture, but there are substantial connections between technology, persona, factuality, and networks. (Hess, 2015) (Tables 1–10)

Table 1 The ways in which U.S. Internet users share selfies
(%, by demographic profile)

	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55+
Publish it in social media	36	25	19	12	8
Send it in private to your close friends	22	28	22	16	12
Send it in private to your partner	9	16	32	24	19
Keep it for yourself	7	14	23	28	28

Sources: Statista; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 2 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
Selfie sticks are... (%)

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Stylish	14	19	31	36
Annoying	12	17	28	45
Embarrassing	11	15	23	51
Waste of money	7	10	27	56
A fad	8	12	29	51

Sources: YouGov; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 3 U.S. smartphone users who use selfie-sharing apps (%, by age)

15–19	41
20–29	22
30–39	17
40–49	12
50–59	6
60+	2

Sources: Mobile Marketing Data Lab; eMarketer; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 4 U.S. adults who think it is acceptable to take a selfie
in various circumstances (%, by age group)

	18–34	35–54	55+
While at a concert	58	28	14
While visiting a tourist destination	42	31	27
While attending a party	59	26	15
While at a wedding	55	27	18
While at a gym	63	25	12
While dining at a restaurant	65	24	11
While riding public transport	61	25	14
While in the bath	74	17	9
While attending a funeral	71	18	11

Sources: Statista; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 5 Hours spent annually on each activity

Taking selfies	42
Personal finance management	8
Job searching and interviewing	10
Attending social events	37
Walking	27

Sources: BLS; FinanceBuzz; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 6 % of generation admitting to sharing selfies

Silent generation	4
Baby boomers	19
Generation X	27
Millennials	50

Sources: Pew Research Center; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 7 Selfie usage patterns

Selfies taken with	Family and friends (37%), solo (54%), in front of a landmark (9%)
Group selfies are taken while	Partying (27%), family function (8%), travelling (65%)
What constitutes a perfect selfie	Big eyes (19%), flawless skin (11%), sharp face (8%), clear subject (48%), wide angle (14%)
Top reasons for taking more than one shot	Difficulty in fitting all people in frame (55%), issue with lighting (19%), difficulty in fitting the background scene (26%)

74%	Send pictures to connect with friends
88%	Upload selfies on social media to share their new experiences
87%	Take more than one shot every time to ensure a perfect selfie

Sources: Nielsen; OPPO; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 8 U.S. adults who have ever taken a selfie (% , by ethnicity)

White	29
Black	28
Hispanic	31
Other	12

Sources: Statista; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Table 9 Selfies taken by category (%)

Appearance	26
Family, friends, and pets	19
Ethnicity	7
Travel	37
Health and fitness	7
Others	4

Sources: Georgia Institute of Technology; Statista; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

Based on an analysis of 1.6 million selfie posts on Instagram.

Table 10 Which of the following have you ever taken a selfie with? (%)

I have never taken a selfie	1
Family	77
Friends	94
Pet(s)	32
Buildings/Landmarks	91
Landscapes	89
Objects	67
Food	17
Celebrity	18
Exotic animal(s)	12
Other	1

Sources: Statista; my survey among 5,200 individuals conducted April 2019.

5. Conclusions and Implications

Rapid build-up of performances in network culture facilitated by the expansion of social media technologies indicates that selfies signify the ascendancy of virtual memes without being a confirmed manifestation of narcissism. There is a seemingly narcissistic disposition to duplicate with webcams and smartphones digital self-portraits destined for broad online diffusion. (Lee, 2017) Selfie-taking behavior is on many occasions complemented by posting on social media sites and belongs to a narcissistic action. Individuals may also improve their mood. (Balakrishnan and Griffiths, 2018)

Note

The interviews were conducted online and data were weighted by five variables (age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, and geographic region) using the Census Bureau's American Community Survey to reflect reliably and accurately the demographic composition of the United States. The precision of the online polls was measured using a Bayesian credibility interval.

Funding

This paper was supported by Grant GE-1571948 from the Center for Innovative Data-driven Smart Urban Ecosystems, Cleveland, OH.

Author Contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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