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Expert Opinion Article

The Self and the Selfie: The Rise of Psychological Dysfunction Through Selfie-Taking Behavior Among Indian Adolescents Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

Selfitis is considered as an obsessive-compulsive desire to take photos of oneself and post them on social media either to enhance self-esteem or gain attention. Selfies refer to self-portraits taken by one using a digital camera or a smartphone (APA, January 2015; Social News Daily; Adobe Chronicle). Selfie-taking is increasingly popular among young adults without knowing that selfies reflect their owners' personality traits and how people judge others' personality. Thus, the current study aims to identify the different dimensions of self that get engaged and affected by mere selfie-taking behaviour. The research adopted a qualitative design and used a purposive sampling method to survey 1080 individuals aged 18-25 years, who were aware of and took selfies, to identify the various dimensions of self-associated with selfie taking. The thematic analysis of the responses indicated 11 dimensions of the individual self that get engaged and affected namely Self-Esteem, Happiness, Intimacy, Obsessive-Compulsive Behaviour, Narcissism, Sense of Independence, Self-Concept, Neuroticism, Attention Seeking, and Socio-Cultural Factors. These results help structuralise and comprehend the impact of selfie taking behaviour which help in self-assessment by excessive users and aid planning intervention.

Keywords: Selfitis, Self-Esteem, Happiness, Intimacy, Obsessive-Compulsive Behaviour, Narcissism, Sense of Independence, Self-Concept, Neuroticism, Attention Seeking, Socio-Cultural Factors

Introduction

Definition

A *SELFIE* is defined as a photograph of oneself by them, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.

History of Selfie-Taking

According to research by the University of Columbia, USA, the first trace of a selfie is drawn by an Italian artist, Parmigianino, in 1524 called "Self Portrait in Convex Mirror." In 1839, the first recognized selfie photo was made by amateur photographer Robert Cornelius of Philadelphia. He set his camera up at the back of the family store in Philadelphia, took the image by removing the lens cap, and then running into the frame where he sat for a minute before covering the lens again. On the back, he wrote, "The first light Picture ever taken" (Sajadbangash, 2015). In 1900, a 13-year-old Russian girl, Anastasia Nikolaeva, took a picture of herself standing in front of the mirror with trembling hands (Sajadbangash, 2015).

Fig: 1.1. Robert Cornelius' Self-Portrait: The First Ever "Selfie" (1839)

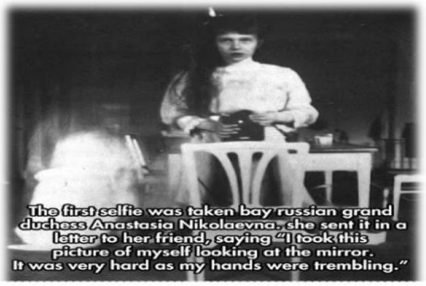

Fig: 1.2. Anastasia Nikolaeva' (1900)

In 1996, during the "Gemini 12 mission," astronaut Buzz Aldrin took the first-ever selfie in space (Sajadbangash, 2015). The word selfie appeared in an Australian internet forum on September 13, 2002, by Dr. Karl Kruszelnicki's self-serve science forum, describing the behaviours of the artist to take a picture in the mirror of everything he did in a day

(Sajadbangash, 2015). In 2003, Italian media artist Alberto Frigo started photographing every object his right hand used, resulting in the first categorized collection of selfies. The Sony Ericsson Z1010 mobile phone, released in late 2003, introduced the concept of a front-facing camera sensitive for selfies and video calls (Frigo, 2003).

From 2004-2012, the period of internet and social media, platforms like Facebook and Instagram made selfies a favourite hobby among youngsters worldwide. Statistical estimates claim that over 53 million people tagged with selfie, and over 368,000 times selfie was mentioned in Facebook status for a week in October 2013. During the same period, selfie was used more than 150,000 times in tweets on Twitter, proclaiming the spreading popularity of selfies. During the last quarter of 2012, Time Magazine included the word selfie in the dictionary. In November 2013, selfie was announced as "word of the year." Now, in 2016, selfie is no longer individualistic; it's now a group behaviour called "Usie" seen among people of all ages, castes, and kinds, activating a selfie culture (Yahoo, 2016).

Selfie as a Dangerous Behaviour

Selfie-taking is fun, entertaining, and passionate but also dangerous to one's life. Here are some examples: Although selfie-taking is generally considered to be a fun and expressive practice, it has become more closely linked with dangerous and sometimes lethal outcomes. Increasing numbers of incidents worldwide point to the physical danger involved in hazardous selfie-taking habits, especially among young people.

There have been many deaths and injuries caused by unsafe selfie-taking in risky settings. These cover falls from balconies, bridges, and cliffs; unintentional drownings; train collisions; and lethal encounters with weapons and wildlife. As an example, a 12-year-old female in the Philippines died from falling from a balcony (2014), and a 15-year-old male was gravely hurt while taking a photo with a pistol (2015). In India, there have been several instances of train-related fatalities, such as three university students in 2015 and a 16-year-old in Chennai. In the same vein, a young woman was drowned while taking a selfie by the high tide in Mumbai, and others have tumbled from ancient forts and sea cliffs.

Global cases also demonstrate the increasing risk. A Polish woman was killed after she fell off a bridge, a Russian soldier was killed when a grenade detonated while he was taking a selfie, and a 19-year-old British youth tried to commit suicide after taking 200 selfies every day because he was obsessed with them. Some other cases are a fatal plunge while running the bulls in Spain and a senseless shooting accident in Washington State.

These disturbing incidents demonstrate how the quest for the perfect selfie, especially in hazardous environments, can have deadly consequences. They highlight the imperative to create public awareness and prevention measures to counter the physical risks involved in taking selfies, particularly among youth and young adults.

A series of death and injury cases are reported worldwide, reaching over a million to take selfies, thus giving selfie-taking an edge to consider as dangerous and abnormal behaviours, alarming all health professionals to draw ground and intervene in such behaviours. Recent research has classified these behaviours as an addiction called "Selfitis."

Selfitis

Selfitis is defined as "the obsessive-compulsive desire to take photos of oneself 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, January 2015; Social News Daily; Adobe Chronicle).

Selfie-taking has become an increasingly popular behavior among young adults. However, little is known about how selfies reflect their owners' personality traits and how people judge others' personalities from selfies. What are the emotions involved in depicting such actions?

Clinical Characteristics

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has officially deemed taking selfies a "mental disorder" and defined the disorder as a type of obsessive-compulsive disorder to take one's pictures and post them on social media. They also stated that this condition is a mechanism used by people to make up for their low self-esteem and increase intimacy with others (MN, June 29, 2015).

According to the APA, there are two types of selfie-taking: group and individual selfies, and based on nature, there are three levels of selfitis:

- Borderline Selfitis: Taking selfies at least three times a day but not posting them on social media.
- Acute Selfitis: Taking selfies at least three times a day and sharing them all on social media.
- Chronic Selfitis: An uncontrollable urge to take one's pictures around the clock and post them on social media platforms more than six times a day (Adobochron, 2014).

Signs of Selfie Addiction

According to an article on MedicalDaily.com and Psychology Today, the following are signs of selfie addiction:

- Minimum of one selfie a day.
- Spend a lot of time planning for the place and time to click a selfie picture.
- With a conscious effort, one can never deny the urge to take the selfie.

- Selfie is equivalent to other important ongoing activities in the day.
- There is awareness of the addiction pattern occurring but still can't reduce the obsessive thought or the compulsive behaviours of taking a selfie.
- There is an obsession with posting and frequently checking people's likes or dislikes on social media.
- Irrespective of public opinion, selfie-taking is continued to get a better picture.
- Selfie is a compensation for social life and relationships.
- Everyday activities are objectified to a selfie picture.
- Self-importance and pride are associated with taking and posting a series of selfie pictures (Carteblanch, 2016).

Theoretical framework

Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), proposed by Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973), explores how individuals actively seek specific media to fulfil needs. This audience-centred approach posits that media usage involves four steps: active audience selection of media for specific goals, choosing outlets perceived to satisfy those needs, competing media providing satisfaction, and ultimately providing diversion, entertainment, and information to the audience. Originally developed for traditional media, UGT can also be applied to understand gratification-seeking behaviours on new social networking sites, such as selfie-taking activities (Bui, 2014). According to Papadakis (2014), individuals seek instant gratification through selfies, influenced by their values regarding appearance and presentation. Additionally, cultural variations impact selfie gratification experiences (Rutledge, 2013).

Looking Glass Self Theory

Cooley (1902) introduced the Looking Glass Self Theory, positing that individuals develop their self-concept based on the perceptions and judgments of others. He described how people use their imaginations to envision how others perceive them, shaping their self-image and personality during social interactions. Warfield expands on this theory, suggesting that modern selfie practices serve as mirrors for individuals to project desired self-images facilitated by advanced photographic technologies. Thus, the Looking Glass Self Theory directly applies to contemporary selfie use (Cooley, 1902; Warfield, year).

Self-Verification Theory

Swann (1983, 1987) proposed the Self-Verification Theory, asserting that individuals seek confirmation from others that aligns with their self-views. This validation allows them to predict and control life outcomes by confirming their beliefs about themselves. Positive self-verification enhances self-esteem and social interactions by guiding actions and communicating expectations to others (Chan, 2006). Self-verification through selfies involves seeking positive feedback such as likes and comments on social media platforms, which serves as a confidence booster and enhances self-esteem (Grabmeier, 2015).

Review of literature

Selfitis, a more recently emerging behavior, has no large volume of empirical literature, and thus this study represents a pioneer work. What little research does exist, though, is informative in terms of the psychological and social aspects of selfie-taking behavior.

Research indicates that overuse of selfies is linked to several psychological vulnerabilities. For example, an Iowa State University report (2011) established that teenage girls who use Facebook a lot are likely to develop negative body image and eating disorders, comparing themselves to others on the internet. Houghton (2011) concluded that people who upload many selfies have shallow relationships, indicating a decline in intimacy and higher self-absorption.

Hemmen (2012) focused on the fact that overuse of selfies can threaten authenticity and emotional connection, especially for adolescents. She pointed out that insecure people tend to upload posed or sexualized selfies to satisfy their need for approval. Pamela Rutledge (2013) positioned selfies as instruments for narrative self-creation, albeit she warned they can prompt narcissism or are indicative of low self-esteem.

Fox (2015) found that men who edit and post selfies are more likely to score higher on narcissism and psychopathy scales, with photo-editing being strongly correlated with self-objectification. Likewise, Lin-Qiu (2015) discovered that selfie characteristics—such as facial expressions and posing styles—can be attributed to personality traits such as agreeableness and neuroticism.

Sorokowska (2015) and Dutta & Sharma (2016) stressed the connection between self-esteem and online self-advertisement, specifically among teenagers. They discovered that females were more susceptible to addiction to selfies due to insecurity and self-centeredness.

Case reports also show worrying trends. Veal (2014), Souza (2014), and Shetty (2014) have reported that compulsive selfie behavior is the outcome of a distorted self-image and an unconscious addiction. Clinical practitioners such as Dhir (2014) and Chhabria (2014) noted rising cosmetic surgery among young people motivated by the desire to

beautify selfies. Panpimol Wipulakorn (2015) attributed selfie addiction to low confidence and demoralized self-image.

The findings highlight the need to recognize selfie addiction as an emerging mental health issue in the post-pandemic age. Early identification and intervention must be implemented to offset the psychological harm of this increasingly popular online activity.

Rationale

Despite extensive research on addictions, selfie addiction (selfitis) is understudied, especially in India. Increased gadget use has led to technological addictions and related mental and physical health issues among youth. Social media has altered lifestyles, with young people often seeking attention and validation through selfies, compensating for unmet emotional needs.

Selfie-taking behaviours is harmful and has increased fatalities due to risky photo locations. Key questions remain: What drives these behaviours? How does it become an addiction? What are the factors and effects? Who are at risk? Has pandemic drowned adolescent into the world of internet? An attempt was made to answer these questions through some of these questions and exploring the dimensions involved in selfie-taking behaviours in the Indian context.

Need

The increase in the availability of technological gadgets and lockdown from external world has increased selfie addiction among Indian youth. This behaviour is associated with falsified relations, unmet needs, constant drive to seek online validation. This trend has not just impacted mental health but has raised safety and legal concerns, as selfie taking has led to fatalities. Though addiction is much researched topic selfie remain unexplored creating a need.

Method

Research Design

The research utilized a qualitative research design based on phenomenological investigation to examine the psychological aspects of self-influenced by selfie-taking habits among Indian teens during the post-pandemic era. The aim was to learn how such habits impact self-perception, emotional control, and social relations, relying on participants' personal experiences as the main source of data.

Operational Definitions

To this research:

A selfie is operationally defined as a compulsive act of taking one's own photos and publishing them on social media sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter.

Psychological dysfunction is any emotional, cognitive, or behavioural disturbance resulting from habitual selfie-taking behaviour, such as but not limited to anxiety, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, or social withdrawal.

Participants

Purposive sampling method was employed to recruit 1080 participants between the ages of 18 and 25 years from urban and semi-urban regions of India. Participants were included if they (a) self-reported as regular users of smartphones and social media, and (b) took selfies at least three times a week. The sample was a gender and educationally diverse balanced sample to gather different viewpoints. Informed consent was taken before they participated.

Data Gathering

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews that were carried out in-person and online through video conferencing tools because of pandemic-related limitations. The interviews took between 30 to 60 minutes and were carried out in English or the participant's preferred regional language. An interview guide was employed to maintain consistency, addressing topics like motivations for taking selfies, emotional reactions, perceived social influence, and identity-related issues. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were examined using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This entailed six systematic steps: familiarization with data, initial code generation, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. NVivo software was employed for data organization and coding to increase transparency and rigor. The themes were validated using inter-coder reliability checks by two independent researchers, with over 85% agreement.

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of interview responses of 1080 Indian adolescents identified a rich interplay of psychological factors in the wake of selfie-taking practices, especially during the post-pandemic period. The findings indicate that selfies' use among adolescents is not an evanescent trend but a complex phenomenon with varied consequences on their sense of self, relationships, emotions, and mental health. Eleven international themes were identified from the analysis, each with unique sub-themes describing unique psychological effects. These

themes are discussed below with illustrative participant quotes that speak to their lived realities. The analysis indicated that dimensions of the individual self that get engaged and affected in selfie-taking behaviour post pandemic are tabulated in table 1 and are discussed below:

Table 1 *Global Themes, Sub-Themes, and Representative Excerpts on Selfie-Taking Behaviour Among Indian Adolescents*

Global Theme	Sub-Themes	Representative Interview Excerpt
Self-Esteem	Self-love, self-rejection, validation-seeking	"When I post a selfie and get lots of likes, I feel good about myself. But when no one reacts, I start thinking something is wrong with me." (Female, 21)
Happiness	Momentary joy, dependence on social media feedback	"Taking selfies makes me happy only when people comment 'so pretty' or 'amazing'. If they don't, I delete the post and feel very low." (Male, 19)
Intimacy	Pseudo-relationships, social withdrawal, reduced bonding	"I chat less with my parents now. Most of my bonding feels like it's happening through Instagram comments." (Female, 20)
Obsessive-Compulsive Traits	Repetitive behaviour, perfectionism, appearance obsession	"I keep clicking until I feel it's perfect. I don't even realize that I've taken 50 or more in one go." (Female, 22)
Narcissism	Vanity, leadership traits, admiration-seeking, self-objectification	"I love the feeling of being admired. When I look good and people notice, I feel like I'm in control of how they see me." (Male, 24)
Sense of Independence	Perceived autonomy, inflated self-worth, pseudo-control	"When I take a selfie and post it, I feel like I'm showing I don't need anyone's approval to exist." (Female, 23)
Self-Concept	Identity confusion, self-presentation, public image dependency	"My real identity is blurred. I often wonder—am I the person in my selfies or someone else?" (Male, 21)
Neuroticism	Anxiety, fear of rejection, excessive editing	"If I don't edit my selfies before posting, I feel nervous. I constantly check for flaws and fear people will judge me." (Female, 18)
Attention-Seeking	Emotional voids, online gratification, agitation with poor engagement	"If people don't comment or like, I feel restless and start doubting everything about myself." (Male, 20)
Socio-Cultural Influence	Peer pressure, online conformity, beauty norms	"Everyone's doing it. If I don't post, I feel left out. Like I'm not trendy or part of the group." (Female, 19)
Mental Health	Depression, BDD, OCD, social media dependency, plastic surgery tendencies	"Sometimes I feel I don't exist outside social media. My real self is lost behind these pictures." (Male, 20)

1. Self Esteem and Selfitis

Self-esteem and self-respect are used synonymously and are defined as one's own worth or abilities. The responses indicate that this concept seems to be varying with selfie taking behavior of youth altering the aspect of self-love, it reclaims public image and broader representation. Selfies also enhance self-confidence giving a realistic positive Self-Image and enhancing Self-Love. It also keeps away negative aspects like despair, anxiety, hopelessness and suicidal tendencies resulting from low self-confidence and self-esteem. And thus, selfies are seen as a maintaining factor for high self-esteem. On contrary if the expectation of the selfie is not matching the thought process, then it is initiating self-rejection and associated consequences.

2. Happiness and Selfitis

Happiness is defined as a joyful state of living. By snapping selfies happiness is redefined as a joyful state only when adolescents receive positive feedback on social media. It's also observed that selfies change self-perception by manipulation facial expressions and self-efficacy which can enhance pro social attitudes and make people feel livelier online and not otherwise, in real life they are not really enjoying any momentary experiences / joy but is restricted to mere selfie responses and acceptance.

3. Intimacy and Selfitis

Intimacy is defined as close familiarity and friendship, giving space for a private and relaxed atmosphere. The habit of constant selfie taking and posting on social media is heading toward pseudo relationships wherein intimacy, closeness and bonding are getting limited to likes, comments and feedback. The time spent exhibiting this behavior is also killing the personal time meant for the family and friends and thus distorting the social relationships which could form real-life relationships and support systems and decreased communication.

4. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Selfitis

With growing smart phone usage selfies are initially used as mirror for self-checking about how

adolescents look, gradually turns out to be multiple clicks till they get that perfect picture, and they post it on social media. In this process an unconscious addiction is formed among young minds. What goes through many of the young minds, as they take pictures of themselves for social media, see other people's pictures, seeing the attention they may or may not get, end up comparing self and the fine details of their looks. Overtime, an obsession builds, and a compulsion drives them to the aspects of looks become increasingly more important triggering the perception of self, distorting it and leading to mental health issues.

5. Narcissism and Selfitis

Narcissism is pursuit of gratification from egoistic admiration of one's own attributes, it is an excessive preoccupation with personal adequacy, prestige, superiority and are not consciously aware of the destruction they are causing to themselves and others. Narcissism and selfitis are linked by a small amount of self-posting behavior on social media; giving intrinsic pleasure and thus considering several traits of narcissism, selfie taker exhibits - *Self Sufficiency* (thinking of doing things on our won without others help), *Vanity*(over concerned about the appearance and self-physical admiration), *Leadership*(sense of superiority and desire to have authority and power), *Admiration Demand*(exhibitionism, feeing entitled titled to special status or privileges and feel of superiority than others) and *self-objectification* (value self for appearance than positive traits) But this does not mean that all those who score high on narcissism traits depict are vulnerable for selfitis or vice versa (Seidman, 2015).

6. Sense of Independence

The definition of sense of independence among Selfie takers are observed in terms of authority one exhibit, the relationship between selfie and independence is in terms of the extraordinary sense of power, attractiveness and pseudo sense of controlling one feel of vesting on one's life. The aspect of taking one's own photo has made people believe that they are individually capable of doing anything on the earth and thus setting a false sense of pride, arrogance and limited socialization.

7. Self-Concept and Selfitis

Self-concept is the perception about oneself they hold and about the responses given by others. Self-concept here is observed in terms of self-objectification on the grounds of physical appearance and judge their worth based on the feedback given. People are treating themselves as an object for exhibition and thus the self-image is merged with public image forming an identity /self-concept regarding people's opinion, the more favorable the opinion is the higher the congruence of self-concept.

8. Neuroticism and Selfitis

Neuroticism is a state of unpleasant emotions like anger, anxiety and emotional instability. Responses draw the association between selfie taking and neuroticism by the type of expressions adolescent show on pictures and responses also associate duck face selfie to anxiety or neurotic experiences like high worry of how they look and spend lot of time on self-corrections on imperfections by editing and experience fear of rejection.

9. Attention seeking and Selfitis

Social media has changed the way we communicate and perceive the things around us and paved the way to form pseudo relations. Selfie posting among adolescents is a medium to get attention and love that was lacking in real-life relations. And responses also indicate that attention seeking is a very part of personality because of which they indulge in increased selfie taking and were seen gratified by the feeling of being loved by people online and that indeed reduces anxiety. But on the contrary if the gratification was not attained, they depicted agitation, irritation, restlessness and rage and exhibited homicide behaviours.

10.Socio cultural factors and Selfitis

The world of the internet has blurred the line between private and public life. Every aspect of daily living is by and large influenced by the internet and success is rated in terms of online acceptance. Selfie taking among adolescents is a new trend and culture, online conformity is treated as a sole social identity. Selfie taking is considered modern behavior, fashionable, social reinforcer, imitation and role play to develop social self. Selfie is also a platform to showcase vanity and entertainment which has increased mass injuries, deaths and giving threatening edge to life

11.Selfitis and Mental Health

Taking a selfie picture and posting on social media has now become a popular entertainment activity with hidden multiple addictions which is the source of psychological and mental disorder. Selfie is a threat to self-esteem, confidence and creates attachment to likes and comments they receive on social media which changes the natural personality traits to artificial makeup personalities. It is seen more fashionable and glamorous and the passion of appearing perfect and appealing has increased plastic surgeries among young, resulting in lack of resilience and self-trust of natural bodies. It has also created a false sense of overconfidence, attention

seeking, social dependence with no compassion, understanding or identity of any kind. It has raised the incidence of a wide variety of psychological disorders like Body Dysmorphic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, social media depression, Homicide behaviours, isolation, eloping from homes and deaths among adolescents.

Summary and Conclusion

The study "The self and the selfie, the raise of psychological dysfunction through selfie taking behavior among Indian adolescents post pandemic." aims to identify the different dimensions of self that get engaged and affected by mere selfie-taking behavior. Using qualitative approach and purposive sampling method 1080 participants were interviewed to understand different domains of self that gets engaged and affected, review of literature and thematic analysis of the responses has identified 11 dimensions of self and selfie taking namely self-esteem, happiness, intimacy, obsessive compulsive disorder, narcissism, sense of independence, self-concept, neuroticism, attention seeking, socio cultural factors and mental health.

In summary Selfie-taking behavior post pandemic is affecting various dimensions mentioned above alongside enhancing self-esteem and self-respect, while also reducing negative aspects like despair, anxiety, hopelessness, and suicidal tendencies. Self-posting behavior on social media causes intrinsic pleasure and self-sufficiency is linked to narcissism and objectification. It has redefined happiness and joy and attached it to more online life. It has limited the aspect of intimacy to likes, comments and feedback, distorted social relationships and reduced communication offline. Selfie taking has also increased the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder which has led to habit formation of taking multiple selfies for self-checking leading to mental health problems. In conclusion, self and selfies are a real-life phenomenon that is living in the world on internet post pandemic is a complex and multifaceted concept which needs in-depth exploration.

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