

# A study on the selfie posting habits and perception among social media users

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## 1. ABSTRACT

The selfie, which is a photograph taken of oneself, typically with a smart phone has gained tremendous momentum and has developed into a global phenomenon. The aim of this study is to examine if there exists a difference in the selfie posting habit and perception across variables such as gender and age. The objective of the study is to understand the differences if any in the selfie posting frequency, selfie type, uses and functions, as well as the differences in the perception of the act of the selfie across different sections of social media users divided by variables such as age and gender.

A focus group discussion, was conducted among college students, with two groups of 10 participants from either gender in order to gather data as well as refine the survey which was to be administered. The survey was administered to 200 participants, with 50 from each age group. For the purpose of this study, the participants were divided based on age groups (Group A: 15-23, Group B: 24-30, Group C: 30-40, Group D: 40+)

The results indicated that there was no significant difference in the selfie posting habit and perception across the age groups, however, there were variations in the perception of the selfie across the gender.

Keywords: Selfie, Habits, Perception, Age, Gender

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## 2. INTRODUCTION

The "selfie", which has been defined as a photograph that one has taken of oneself typically with a smart phone and posted to a social media website(BBC,2013), has been an anchor for controversies and debates which seem to have no evident end in sight. The ambiguity of the selfie has left psychologists varying in the perceptions of the act. While one side firmly believes that selfies taken are an expression of narcissism, the other views it as nothing more than a channel for self-expression and representation.

The practice of taking "selfies" seems to have gathered tremendous momentum that it was hailed the most significant phenomenon of 2013 by BBC News. They further added that based on researches conducted in the area, it was found that the frequency of the term used in the English language has seen a dramatic increase of 17,000% (BBC News, 2013). In fact the word "selfie" was recently added to Oxford's online dictionary and in 2013 was named the word of the year. (BBC News, 2013). From regular social media users to International celebrities such as Miley Cyrus known for her provocative poses and Ellen DeGeneres to celebrities from the Kollywood industry such as Shruthi Hassan, who is known for her squint eye poses to Anirudh. Not forgetting world leaders such as Obama and our very own Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, with none wanting to be left behind.

The recent hype in the trend of the selfie would easily have one believing that the selfie is a result of technological innovation. However, that notion is quite far from the truth. Although the word "selfie" is a relatively new term to the vocabulary, and was inducted into the dictionary as recently as 2013(BBC,2013), the concept of self portraits has been in existence much before the advent of the technologically advanced cellular phones and even predates the camera. Traces of the modern take of selfies can be found in the self portraiture of artists such as Rembrandt, with the first selfie ever taken with a camera being traced back to 1939.

As stated above, the practice of self portraits has been in existence for a long time, take for example, Parmigianino, who painted a self portrait based on his reflection in a convex mirror (c 1524) which would be the inspiration of John Ashbery's poem "Self-portrait in a convex mirror", or Pablo Picasso, and his self portrait facing death in 1972( The guardian, 2014)

The widespread occurrence and the phenomenon that is the selfie can also be attributed to the presence of the communication vehicle of our time-Social Media. The instant communication platform has spurred and

continues to encourage people to not only self-document their daily lives through selfies, but also upload and attach clever captions alongside their selfies in order to generate the interest of the audience and motivate them towards "liking" and posting comments of appreciation regarding the selfie.

While some would say this process validates the user and increases the user's self worth, others argue against the point by stating that it does quite the opposite by degrading a person's self worth and self-esteem when the "likes" received are not satisfactory to the user. It is this ambiguous nature of the selfie, where no one conclusion or explanation satisfies the concept that makes it a phenomenon.

### 3. SUPPORTING LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Nielsen(2013), all within a single day, Facebook users alone share an estimated 2.5 billion pieces of content. Twitter shares as estimated 400 million pieces of content while Instagram users upload 40 million images. The sheer size of these uploaded images makes one wonder about the reason of posting images that document everyday life.(Nielsen,2013)

A study conducted revealed that the amount of selfies has increased by 900 times from 2012 to 2014. Selfies are an effective medium to grab attention and they generate on average 1.1--3.2 times more likes and comments on social media platforms like twitter (Flavio Souza et all ,2015)

In an experiment carried out by psychologists, 748 men and women were asked to count the number of selfies they had posted to their social media website the past month. It was reported that the volunteers posted 350 single selfies featuring only themselves, upto 100 selfies with a romantic partner and up to 200 group selfies. The data revealed that women posted significantly more single and group selfies than men with woman volunteers reportedly uploading an average of 6.7 single selfies per month while the men only posted 3.3. The gender difference for group shots was significantly greater with women posting an average of 6.1 group selfies per month while the men reportedly posted only 2.6. There was no significant difference in the rate of selfies posted with romantic partners between the men and the women. While the women posted 1.2 romantic selfies per month the men posted 1.72.(Sorokowska et all,2016)

### 4. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, the methodology implemented for the gathering of data were- the focus group discussion method and the survey method. The focus group discussion was conducted with 20 college students, 10 from each gender. The survey method was administered to 200 participants, of whom 182 were based on purposive sampling selected for the study.

### 5. RESULT

#### **SELFIE POSTING HABIT**

The chart below reveals the percentage of participants from each age group who do take selfies. Each of the four age groups was comprised of fifty participants, of the fifty, the number of people who were included for the study and the number of people who take selfies from each group is as follows:- Group A(15-23) : 49/50, Group B(24-30) : 48/50, Group C(30-40) : 46/50, Group D(40+) : 29/50. As is evident, the frequency of selfies taken across the age groups decreases across the age groups.

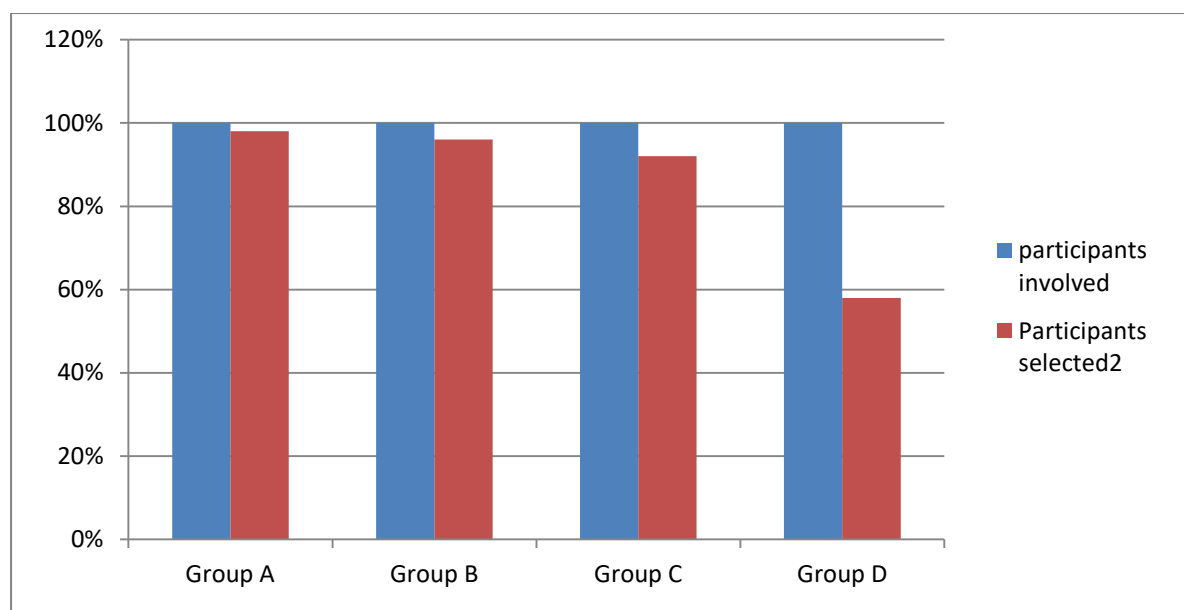


FIGURE 1: FREQUENCY IN SELFIES ACROSS AGE GROUPS

The data collected also revealed that people are most likely to take selfies during special occasions and events. The majority (52%) of Group A respondents, 58% of Group B respondents, 56% of Group C respondents, and 30% of Group C respondents, agreed on feeling the need to pose for selfies during special occasions and events.

The majority (78.7%) of the selected respondents cited taking no more than 2 selfies in a day, while 94.2% of respondents claimed they posted no more than 2 selfies to their social media accounts in a week. The majority (76%) of total female respondents and 77% of total male respondents claimed of not taking not more than 2 selfies per day which leads to the inference of no variation across gender.

The majority (81.4%) of selected responses fell under the category of investing not more than 5 minutes in efforts to capture a good selfie. 74% of total women and 81% of total male respondents showed a majority for the category which results in no note worthy variation across gender. However, 61% of all responses in the total responses under the category of 5-15 minutes spent was attributed to the female gender, while the male gender made up for only 39% of all responses received.

The majority of responses across the age groups, except for group B, which showed a majority of 68% towards Google plus as the preferred site for uploading of selfies, preferred facebook as the site for uploading of selfies. 54% of all female respondents and 62% of all male respondents showed a majority inclination towards facebook as their choice which resulted in no significant variation in the choice of social media across gender

The majority of selected respondents predominantly posted group selfies, with the various groups showing a clear majority of 66%, 67%, 52% and 62% respectively.

There does exist a variation in the theme in the various age groups. This can be largely attributed to the use of the selfie. It was observed that Group A showed a reoccurring theme of selfies that market their best feature with 42% of respondents from the age group siding with the option. While Group B and C showed a majority of 43% and 44% respectively in the theme of representation, where their selfies reveal pieces of who they are such as their talents and likes. Group D displayed a majority in the theme of self-documentation with 28% of respondents from the age group using the selfie for the purpose of self-documentation.

Data revealed that group A and B had a majority of 45% and 37% respectively in respondents who used filters while editing, while group C and D had majority of 39% and 30% of respondents who edited their selfies using the crop tool.

The majority (77.1%) of all respondents denied following trends such as the duck face and T-rex hands which are made popular and endorsed by celebrities, while 22.9% of the total respondents admitted to following the selfie trends. Of the 22.9%, the majority of contributing votes towards the following of trends originated from the female gender who contributed 59% of positive responses.

**PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE SELFIE**

The perception towards the selfie and aspects of the selfie remained relatively neutral throughout each question posed, this reveals that, the majority of the people view the selfie as nothing more than a tool of entertainment.

While many researchers believe that the selfie is a form of self expression, where the individual both acts as the artist and subject and thus not only control the appearance and how he or she wants to be perceives but also the art and manner of representation as well. However, the data reveals that the majority of selected respondents neither agree nor disagree with 37.4% of respondents remaining neutral on the notion of the selfie being a tool of self-expression . There was no significant variation in the perception that was observes across the age group.

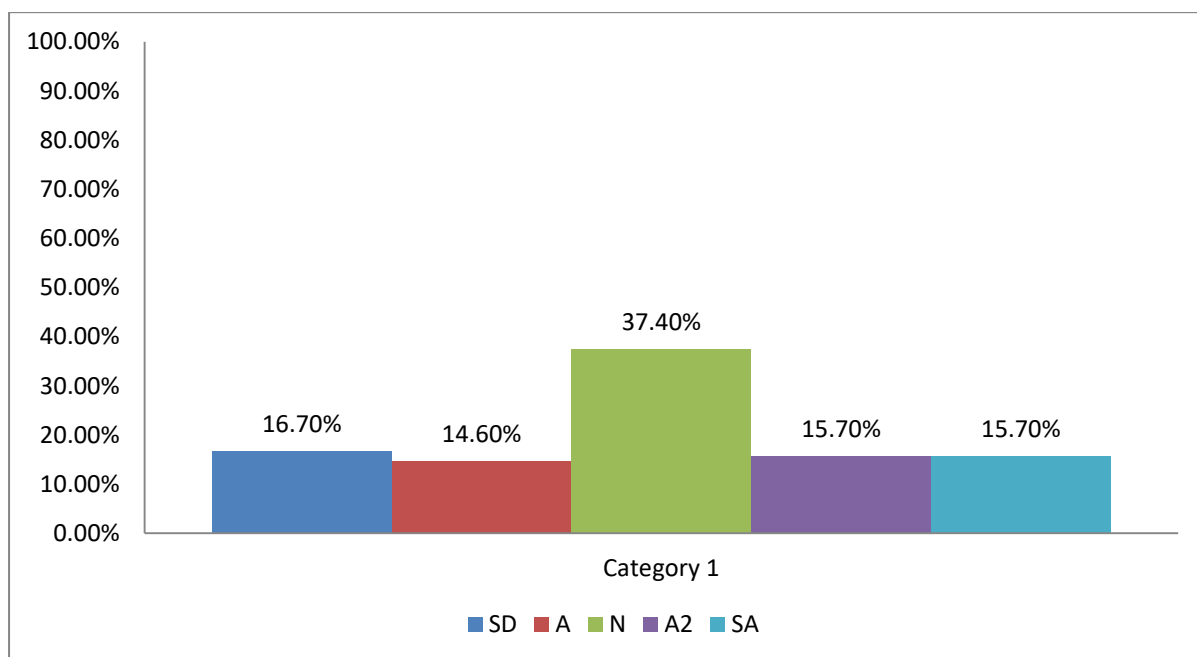


FIGURE 2: SELFIE AS A TOOL OF EXPRESSION

The majority (28%) of selected respondents remained neutral on the notion of selfies promoting self-exhibitionism. The majority of selected respondents ( 31%) also chose to remain neutral on the matter of the selfie and the topic of empowerment. The majority of respondents also remained neutral on the matters relating to the selfie being an accurate representation of people, with 28.7 %. The majority of selected respondents(31.6%) agreed that the selfie has changed the perception of people, citing the change in the capturing and posting of infant pictures. However, the majority(36.2%) chose to remain neutral on matters of the selfie being able to further change perceptions.

**SELFIE AND ADDICTION**

S.N	Question	Yes	No
1.	Do you believe the constant documentation through selfie can result in an addiction?	76%	24%
2.	Do you personally know of anyone who seems addicted to self-documentation through selfies?	71.9%	28.1%

3.	Could you refrain from capturing or being part of a selfie for a period of one day?	79.8%	20.2%
4.	Could you refrain from capturing or being part of a selfie for a period of a week?	80.2%	19.8%

TABLE 1 : THE SELFIE AND ADDICTION

This section deals with the constant self-documentation through the selfie resulting in addiction. As is evident from the table, the majority of respondents believe that the selfie does in fact result in an addiction, while 71.9% claim to personally know someone who seems addicted to self-documentation through selfies. There exists no significant variation with regards to the selfie and it being a source of addiction across the age groups.

There is no official way of diagnosing an addiction to selfies, however, it is an accepted parameter that anything more than 3 selfies taken in day can be classified as an addiction. Based on data gathered on the frequency of selfies taken in one day, no age group shows a significant majority sign on addiction, with large sections of each age group detailing only 0-2 selfies taken in a day.

The majority of respondents believe that they can refrain from taking and being part of a selfie for a period of both one day as well as a week. There was no variation that existed across the age groups. There was no variation found across gender. However, in the 24% of responses that stated they would not be able to refrain from taking selfie. 51% were female.

**SELFIE ETHICS**

The figure shown below discusses the issue of violation of privacy in the people who appear in the background of selfies taken in public places. As is evident the majority of all respondents agree with the notion. The breakdown of responses across the age groups is as follows: Group A(25%) Group C(57%) Group D( 41%), the majority of respondents from Group B(25%) remained neutral.

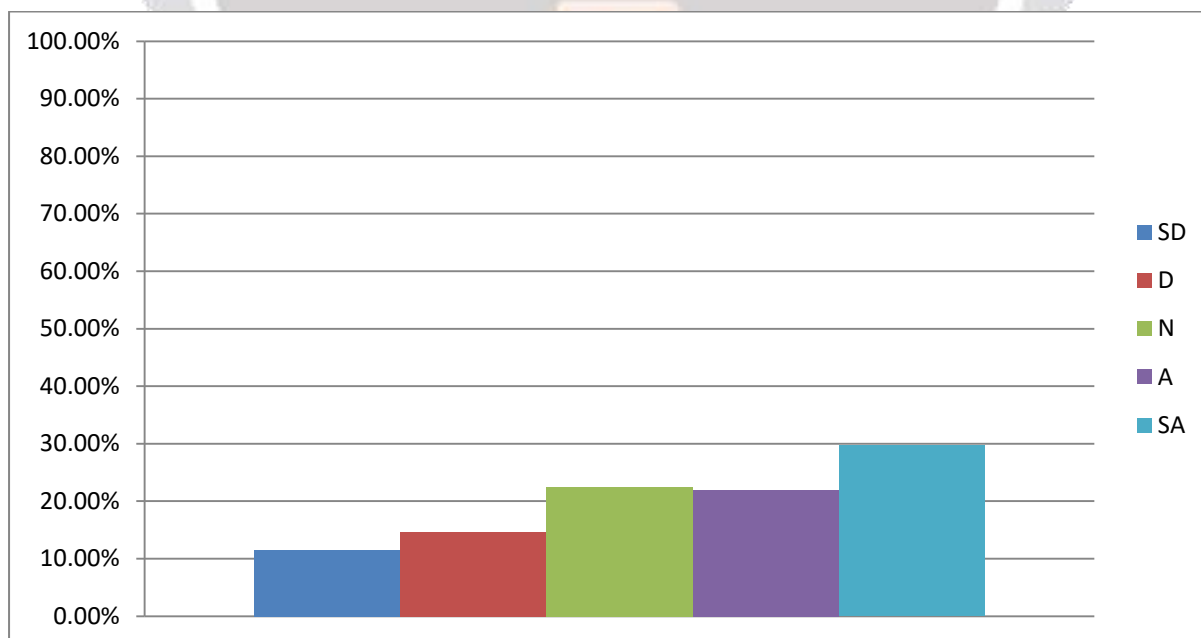


FIGURE 3: SELFIE AND THE VIOLATION OF PRIVACY

The majority of respondents(31%) strongly agreed that it was a hindrance when cameras were being flashed and poses being struck in the midst of a solemn event. The majority across the age groups did find the act

disrespectful. The breakdown of responses across the age groups is as follows: Group A (27%), Group B (25%), Group C (57%), Group D(48 %).

The majority of respondents(36.6%) do strongly agree that people are more willing to put their lives at risk for the purpose of a good selfie. The majority of respondents (34.2%) also strongly agreed with the notion of the police to make few areas a selfie free zone. There was no variation across gender and age groups. The majority of respondents also disagreed making use of the informal selfie for the more formal purposes of transaction and resume with 76% and 73% majority respectively.

### **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

The focus group discussion revealed that people view the selfie as a tool of entertainment, with the primary purpose and use of taking pictures of themselves which they upload to social media accounts for the world to see. They do not look deeper into what selfies say about a person, nor do they seem to care, when an aesthetically selfie is seen they "like" or comment on the selfie and move on. The selfie is a concept that is viewed only on the surface level.

### **SELFIE POSTING HABIT**

There was no significant difference in the amount of selfies that were claimed to be taken by both of the genders, however, the discussions also revealed that appearance played a vital role in the determination of the frequency of selfies that will be taken by the female gender. The frequency of which increases significantly when makeup is done. It was also found that the female gender in particular spend time preparing themselves for selfies that will be taken which questions the possibility of "spontaneous" selfies

Both genders make use of editing tools and techniques in order to increase the aesthetic appeal of selfies and make themselves look more pleasing to the eye. The female gender tended to use selfie specific editing applications such as B162, CandyCam, and the like. While the male gender used general image editing applications such as Picsart. While the female gender predominantly made use of filters and the option of changing lens colour, the male gender specifically only used "surface blur" and "oil paint" editing options which decrease the appearance of imperfections and blemish by giving an air brush type finish to the image.

### **SELFIE PERCEPTION**

As mentioned before, the participants viewed the selfie as a tool and form of entertainment and hence could not see the selfie being used for anything apart from its primary purpose. With both groups remaining neutral on the scale with regards to the various perceptions of the selfie, i.e., self expression. They did not seem to care of the use nor the meaning of the action but rather responded as it being a tool to capture and share images.

### **SELFIE ADDICTION**

During the course of the discussion, all members of the groups revealed that they did know someone personally who seemed addicted to the taking of selfies, with some members even describing how their friends would be prepared with their phones in hand in case a good opportunity for a selfie popped up. Some described it as being a "funny" sight while others viewed it as a nuisance. However, none in the group admitted to being addicted to the taking of selfies, which leads one to believe that there does exist a stigma around selfie addiction and the vanity of the action.

### **SELFIE ETHICS**

While the female gender disagreed on the use of the informal selfie for the more formal purpose of resume and also agreed against the hiring of individuals who utilised the same, the male gender was more forthcoming about the use and the hiring of individuals through the selfie resume. All the participants involved in the focus group discussion agreed against the use of the selfie as a form of password for data storage and for approval of transactions because they did not believe the selfie was a reliable form of protection or encryption, and further added that images could be easily manipulated and distorted.

### **CONCLUSION**

The selfie, although it has been termed a global phenomenon, is an up and coming trend in India, which has not yet reached its maturity. This study has observed that while the selfie posting behaviours may show little or no variation across the age groups because of factors such as its recent entry into the Indian society, there clearly exist variations in perceptions across gender and age groups, which may be subject to change with the time, technology, and accessories that all converge to make the selfie a truly ambiguous occurrence.

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