Selfies, Self-Presentation, and Self Esteem

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Introduction

Social media has become prevalent among modern individuals, in particular, selfies are even more notable amongst social media users. “A picture is worth a thousand words” and selfies can say much about a person’s presentation, but can this affect someone’s self-esteem? Recent studies have analyzed the phenomenon of selfies and their impact among users self-esteem and have noted the many effects of selfies among modern users. Based on the research done on the topic, there exists a strong correlation between an individual’s self-representation, self-esteem levels, and the feedback received from online selfies.

Article 1

“Global self-esteem is conceptualized as one’s positive and negative evaluations of himself or herself and relatedly, one’s approval or disapproval of the self” (Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson, & Herrington, 2015, pg. 3). Individuals have the opportunity to self-select how they represent themselves through their social media posts. Self-selection and the ability to build your own online perception through selfies could possibly be related in creating a positive sense of self-esteem. According to a study done by Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson, and Herrington, they hypothesized that selfies are positively associated with self-esteem.

The researchers began by gathering a group of 128 undergraduate participants who were required to have an Instagram account. Participants were then asked to complete a Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a 10-item scale assessing global self-esteem. The scale information was supplemented with information gathered by the researchers who monitored and recorded observations of the participants’ Instagram accounts over a period of 30 days. These observations

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were coded under a number of categories (number of photos, change in the number of followers, overall selfies, etc.). Their findings showed a lack of significant association between selfies and self-esteem, but do not conclusively cancel out the existence of such associations. Findings on selfies and self-esteem have been mixed; showing negative, positive, and no associations (Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson, & Herrington). The variation in findings could result from a number of limitations including a higher representation among females (68% of Instagram users) and an age range of participants from 18 to 45.

Article 2

In Chua and Chang’s research, adolescent girls from Singapore are using selfies as a way for self-presentation on social media sites to receive positive or negative feedback from peers (Chua & Chang, 2016). Selfies are considered self-presentation since selfies are defined as taking a self-portrait photograph of oneself. (Chua & Chang, 2016). The authors state, girls are concerned about other’s perception of themselves and play a major role in a girl’s identity and self-esteem (Chua & Chang, 2016). This is shown by girls using the feedback from peers on Instagram such as likes and comments on a posts (Chua & Chang, 2016). According to Chua and Chang, girls’ self-esteem would be affected in a positive way because of engagement with individuals with downward comparison: where someone is believed to be less fortunate than themselves (Chua & Chang, 2016). On the opposite end, there were girls whose self-esteem was lowered by comparing themselves to someone they thought was attractive, and receiving more likes on social media sites (Chua and Chang, 2016).

The study was performed on school girls in Singapore where the participants were interviewed, and then asked their observations on a peer’s beauty based on selfie posts on Instagram (Chua & Chang, 2016). The results of the study showed that girls were fixated on
physical perfection, and would often use edited pictures with filters to make a selfie appear more attractive (Chua & Chang, 2016). The articles says, “Their beliefs in the need to edit their photographs to perfection brought to the surface two root factors that underpinned the edited self-presentation: insecurity and low self-esteem” (Chua and Chang, 2016, pg. 4.1.2).

Article 3

Marketing researchers, Pounders, Kowalcyzk, and Stowers, have recently completed a study over the motivation of selfie postings. Their findings state that selfies largely affects millennial females’ self-esteem. The researchers note in their study that the motivation for the young female demographic to post selfies is “to project a positive physical appearance to maintain and enhance self-esteem” (Pounders, Kowalcyzk, Stowers 2016). This notion coincides with self-esteem because the pressure of presentation and perfection on social media can dictate an can affect it tremendously. The researchers confirm in their focus group of thirteen girls that “self-esteem emerged as both a motivation and outcome of selfie-posting, which was a consistent theme” (Pounders et al 2016).

Social media is largely based on a outward view of a person’s life and the pressure to keep up appearances can be damaging. However, this study did not just focus on the negative effects of selfies, but also the positive effects as well by helping an individual learn how to present themselves in a positive light and find happiness out of this presentation. They noted that one of the participants “experienced genuine positive feelings about herself, and these positive feelings were enhanced by the responses that the self-posting received and illustrated the positive impact of self-esteem…the feedback of selfies in terms of number of “likes”, can affirm positive feelings about the self” (Pounders et al 2016). The link between self-esteem and selfies are apparent in both of these findings and can have both a positive and negative affect on social
media users. The emergence of social media has drastically affected modern users and this study confirms that social media is very important to study for future users with technology advancing faster in this day and age.

**Article 4**

“Selfies appear as a double-edged phenomenon. Taking, posting, and viewing selfies has become a daily habit for many. At the same time, research revealed that selfies often evoke criticism and disrespect, and are associated with non-authenticity narcissism” (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017). In this article we learn that sharing selfies is a way that people express self-presentation. Selfies allow us to present ourselves online in ways that we want people to view us. Everyone has an idea of how they want people to perceive them and sharing selfies on social media allows people to maintain that image. The article discusses three specific forms of self-presentation: self-promotion, understatement, and self-disclosure. Self-promotion allows for us to showcase things about ourselves that we are proud of, in contrast, self-disclosure is used to gain sympathy from viewers. Understatement is used to minimize self-presentation.

The authors of this article produced a study that showed that “high values for self-promotion and self-disclosure were correlated with a positive experience of taking selfies but high values for understatement were correlated with a negative experience of taking selfies” (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017). The reason that high values for understatement were correlated with a negative selfie-taking experience is because people who choose to present themselves on social media using the understatement strategy don’t get enough positive feedback that they hope for. This study sheds light on the idea that selfies are shared online for self-presentation. The strategy of self-presentation that an individual chooses to use when sharing a selfie on social media determines their motives behind taking the selfie. The strategies that
someone chooses to use when sharing a selfie show that a selfie can be shared for personal profit or for sympathy.

Conclusion

With social media on the rise, so is the habit of taking selfies. These articles indicate that there exists some sort of correlation between an individual’s self-presentation, self-esteem, and how it is affected from peer feedback on social media. There are numerous reasons behind the intentions of sharing selfies on social media. Selfies are often shared to enhance self-esteem, however, that is not always the case. It is clear however, that with selfies becoming an increasingly popular trend in media that more research will be required to grasp a fuller understanding of the phenomena.
References


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