



## Uptake of Selfie Culture is much more than Fun in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of Smart Phones in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The advent of cameras and Smartphone have made self-photographs easier, more convenient and handier. Secondly, the flock of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Instagram have added their contributions to information sharing. These have sparked a new trend of sharing images of oneself through a visual medium in the form of selfies among Nigerians today. A selfie is actually any photograph taken with a smartphone or a webcam and uploaded to a social media as a way to communicate one's perceived identity, present state of emotions, activities or cognitions. This culture of selfie taking in some cases has resulted in some forms of obsession with self (narcissism), low self-esteem, depression and its' associated suicidal ideations, Body Dysmorphic Disorder and even actual deaths. Some countries like India have declared some places no-selfie zones after several deaths at those spots. Hence, this paper explored factors to prove that selfie culture could be much more than harmless fun. It traced the origin of selfie cultures, the contributions of technology to the rise in selfie taking behavior; common reasons why individuals engage in selfie taking and posting, and positive and dark sides to selfie culture, including the dangers of narcissism, physical harm and possible addiction. Lastly, addiction counseling was proposed as an effective intervention for affected persons. Several intervention strategies that could help victims were highlighted (e.g., 12-step programs and motivational interviewing). In conclusion, the selfie culture is seen to really be much more than harmless fun.

**Keywords:** Addiction Counselling; Selfie Culture; Selfie Addiction; Narcissism

### Introduction

Most persons do not give a special thought to the act of pointing a smartphone camera at self, taking a cute shot and uploading such unto a social media platform. Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the advent of the internet, smartphones and several picture editing apps, the picture taking trend has gone on the increase (Essays, UK, 2018). On the bus, in the class, at the church, at social gatherings, and even at home, it is not uncommon to find people capturing their unique moments in form of pictures. The best images are then selected and uploaded for others to view and leave comments. This trend is popularly known as the "selfie". One wonders the force that drives such action, is it merely a means to show that one is self-confident enough or are there some hidden, probably psychopathological undertone to it? While some researchers subscribe to self-imaging as a way to validate and express themselves [1]; others believe "people take and post selfies to get attention of others, to show

off, or enhance self esteem [2]. However people perceive it, it is important to understand what selfie really is, its origin, why more and more persons are getting involved, the positive and negative aspects of selfie culture, as well as how counselling psychology can help people strike a balance in their self- presentation. These and many more are the crux of this seminar paper.

### Meaning and origin of the selfie

The slang expression "selfie," first appeared in 2002 in an online post from Australia [3], and was selected by Oxford Dictionary as the word of year 2013 [4]. Saltz [5] defined a selfie as a fast self portrait made with a smartphone's camera and immediately distributed into a social network for instant visual communication of where a person is, what he or she is doing, who they think they are and who they think is watching. In other words, a selfie is actually any photograph taken with a smartphone or a webcam and uploaded to a social media as a way to communicate one's perceived identity,

present state of emotions, activities or cognitions. Selfies have become a new medium for self-expression and self-presentation [6]. Selfie is therefore a means of communicating with an audience. Selfie culture on the other hand refers to the digital picture sharing behavior [7].

The first ever selfie was taken by an amateur chemist and photographer Robert Cornelius in 1839 [8]. He was reported to have produced a daguerreotype of himself with a camera at the back of his family store. Over the years, the technological advancements in photography and the social media have further popularized the selfie culture. The invention of the self-timer in the late 1880s allowed for any individual taking a photograph to preset their camera and allow themselves 5 to 10 seconds to get into a shot [3]. That was believed to have introduced the concept of self-photography. Today, cameras have evolved to the level of sophistication that it can fit into mobile devices like the smartphones. This has made self-photographs easier, more convenient and handier. Then in recent years, the flock of social media platforms has added their contributions to information sharing. Tajuddin, Hassan and Ahmad [9] noted that popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Instagram have been called the public display of connection, and give people opportunities to satisfy the need to socially identify with others who share similar interests. On Instagram, the number of selfies posted as at June, 2015 was 238 million [10], which has actually risen to 267 million [11]. These social media enable the users to snap photos on their mobile devices, transform or enhance the image, and upload to their friends as a way of documenting the moment. Hence, it does not come as a shock to discover that social media has sparked a new trend of sharing images of oneself through a visual medium in the form of selfies. The increase buttresses the need to consider why people take and post selfies.

### Reason for taking and posting selfies

A lot of researchers have supplied several possible reasons why people take selfies. Etgar and Amichai-Hamburger [11] reported that varying motivations are found among selfie takers. Self-approval, belonging, and documentation were the three distinct selfie motivators they found. Kim, Lee, Sung and Choi [12] found that attitude toward selfie posting, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and narcissism are the significant determinants of an individual's intention to post selfies on social networking sites. Gupta and Pooja [13] proposed two major schools of thought on why people take selfies; Narcissism and Self-confidence. The narcissism school of thought believes that people

who post selfies on social media are craving for attention. On the other hand, the self-confidence school of thought believes that if a person grows up with the culture of taking photos of self, such will make the person more comfortable with own self-image, and by extension, generate a more resilient self-esteem overall. Selfies are also used as mirror to reflect self-image [14]; to get positive comments and likes [15]; social construction of reality [16] among others. Bazarova and Choi (2014) anchored selfie-taking behavior on seven self-disclosure goals: identity clarification, relational development, social validation, social control and resource, self-expression and relief, information sharing, and storage and entertainment.

The present researcher sampled the opinion of some thirty undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria offering a Counselling Psychology course (18 females, 12 males). They were asked whether they take and post selfies and their reasons for doing so. The most recurrent responses indicated the following reasons: fun and entertainment, a means to advertise their 'assets' (new hairstyle, hourglass figures, muscles for men), as a platform to tell friends about the events and places, for record purposes, capturing the moment for future reference, as a means to feel good and boost self-esteem and seek for attention, admiration and self-worth. Their reasons are no different from the reasons in the literature.

### Demographic variables and selfie taking

Research on gender differences in selfie-related behaviours has been quite interesting. Al-Kaandari and Abdelaziz [17] reported that females were more likely to be involved in selfie-related activities and to use selfies for appraisal-seeking self-presentation. In their study, Dhir, Pallesen, Torsheim and Andreassen [18] found that females are more likely to take and share selfies and edit photos than males. Sorokowski, *et al.* [19] also found that females take more selfies than their male counterparts. Tajuddin, Hassan and Ahmad [9] also found a significant gender difference in selfie taking behaviours. Souza, *et al.* [20] found that young females appear more in selfies around the world than other gender and age group, except for certain countries such as Nigeria and Egypt that show male dominance. However, some studies have found that men take more selfies than women. A survey commissioned by Samsung Electronics in 2013, revealed that men take nearly twice as many selfies as women but since women have a greater instant sharing rate, they are labeled for taking more selfies [21]. Sparkes (2015) wrote in the Telegraph that young British men share twice as many selfies as women the same age, with over a third of males vainly posting five or more self portraits a week.

Dhir [22] conducted an online survey of a sample of three thousand, seven hundred and sixty three (3,763) Norwegian social media users. The study provided the first empirical evidence on how different age groups (adolescents aged 12-19; young adults aged 20-30; and adults aged 31-50) differ in terms of selfie behavior. In the findings, age had a predictive effect on selfie behavior. Adolescents were found to be more likely than young adults to take own and group selfies, similarly, young adults were more likely to take own and group selfies than older adults. Hence one can say that the older a person becomes, the less likely the person is to continue in the selfie spree.

### Positive Sides to Selfie Culture

- **Self-confidence and self-esteem:** Gupta and Pooja [13] opined that if the culture of selfies is installed at a young age, that people will grow up with the habit of taking photos of themselves. They believe this will make them more comfortable with their self-image, which could then lead to a more resilient self-esteem. According to Varnali [23], one way of fulfilling self-esteem needs is the use of social media to communicate interpersonally which might provide an opportunity for people with low self-esteem to engage in public behavior with reduced risk of humiliation and reduced social anxiety. Seiter [24], found that posting selfies reflects high self-esteem levels, and it might also enhance one's self-esteem because such photos typically emphasize one's ideal and controlled image. In other words, posting selfies might boost self-esteem, as individuals could select the way they wish to present themselves. Such control over their appearance gives them some level of esteem and makes them more comfortable in dealing with others. Apart from that, the people who post more selfies might also receive more social support or positive social feedback [24]. Grabmeier [15] also found out that some of those who post their selfies on social media use selfies as self-esteem booster. Ordas [25] also reported that selfies are one of the powerful tools that help a person feel good about him or herself. This indicates that selfies have the power to increase one's self-confidence. Many psychologists believe that selfies, when used in moderation is healthy, and boost one's self-confidence and thereby, their self-esteem (Yadegaran, 2013).
- **Selfie and marketing:** Selfies now have a place in great marketing campaigns. Advertisers are utilizing the visual effects of selfies in promoting their products and services. The fashion and cosmetics industries are topping the list of those who encourage the selfie culture. According to Seiter [24], brands are harnessing the power of selfies in different ways—from soliciting user-generated con-

tent, to creating interactive apps and everything in between. It is common to see make-up artists post made-up face selfies to attract patronage, hair stylists are not left out in the selfie advertising. Hence selfie can serve as a simple means to tell people what one does.

- **Selfie, entertainment and social connections:** At times when an individual is bored, one of the fastest ways to find distraction is to log online and view other peoples' selfies as a means to entertain oneself. Online response to a selfie post also serve as evidence of the size of a person's social network. When a selfie gets many likes, people perceive it as proof that they have much followership. Thus, such social connection could be the motivation for a person to keep taking and posting selfies.

### The dark sides of selfie culture

- **Self-comparison and low self-esteem:** Posting selfies in social media may foster low self-esteem because one may compare oneself to others, and there is a possibility that one may receive negative, or no, social feedback [26]. They reported that Facebook has the ability to fuel low self-esteem through the comparison of oneself to others, which is based on how much feedback they get on their photos (via 'likes' and comments), and whether other peers are more attractive in comparison to themselves. Curwen (2016) posited that the common quest in social interaction between young girls seems to say, be more beautiful, be more popular and be more successful than others. Hence, when the feedback from a post is not positive or up to expectations, it has some negative impact on the person's self-esteem and confidence. Haferkamp and Kramer [27] in their study found that participants who look at an attractive person's Facebook profile have increased negative emotions and are more disheartened by their own personal images. Such social comparisons could have a negative effect on a person's psyche.
- **Narcissism and self-worth:** Some researchers linked the habit of taking a lot of selfies to narcissism, isolation, and even suicide [28]. According to Weiser [10], selfie posting is a byproduct of driven narcissism and the process is a pleasant tactic for the self-absorbed. Narcissism is characteristically illustrated as an affinity to believe one's self to be superior over others, to incessantly pursue adoration from others, and to participate in egotistical thinking and behavior (Panek, Nardis and Konrath, 2013). Social networking sites give narcissistic individuals the chance to keep the focus of their profile's content specifically on themselves. In doing this, they post status updates, comments and pictures that depict only themselves, and not others, perpetuating their self-interested nature [29]. Consequently, this can damage an individual's ability to

shape healthy, mutually beneficial relationships [30]. Curwen (2016) described a special form of narcissism known as vulnerable narcissism. According to him, that happens when people attempt to cover up deeper feelings behind a façade. Individuals who fall under this bracket are seen to be sensitive and fear rejection and abandonment. Ziegler-Hill, *et al.* (2015) found that vulnerable narcissism had a significant positive association with the contingencies of self-worth. Because these groups of persons perceive themselves as the ultimate stars of the show, they invest a lot of energy in creating the most appealing images of selves and post these on the media, expecting the in flock of likes and positive comments. Note that the portrayed image is actually a façade, not a reflection of true status. Because they anchor their self-worth on the opinion of others, their true happiness will only come when others respond to the post according to expectations. A low or negative online feedback will actually plummet one into the deep gorge of unrealistically low self-worth., which will impinge on their relationship with others in real life.

- **Insecurity and self-consciousness:** According to Barry, *et al.* [26], the perfect selfie can establish higher levels of insecurities, and damaging levels of self-consciousness. One of the basic human needs is the need for belongingness. Social media has been said to meet two basic evolutionary social needs: the need to belong and the need to for self presentation [19]. In other words, anybody can become anything online to fit into a desired status, or present self in a way he/she sees as best. Such belief can backfire when other's response or feedback fails to uphold the portrayed self. A little form of criticism brings a deep feeling of insecurity and unnecessary self-consciousness. Such self-consciousness is grossly inhibiting in the sense that once bitten, twice shy. It can make a person withdraw from the social circle to the extent that it may lead to isolation and depression. There are persons who may have had a healthy self-image, which could be deflated by any negative criticisms posted in response to their uploaded pictures [31]. Hence, one can conclude that unrealized expectations in feedback from a post could be a source of feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness which can lead to more psychopathologies if left unchecked. A poll conducted by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery found that selfies became a reason for the increasing number of plastic surgeries in the United States [32]. The insecurities some persons feel moves them to take extreme steps in trying to look admirable.
- **Selfie and physical harm:** Some persons have gone to the extent of harming themselves as a result of the negative feedbacks gotten from posted portraits online. Beside selfies posing a possible threat to some societies, Alblooshi [33] stated that selfies have been one of the causes for suicide attempts and deaths. A 19-year-old British teen Danny Bowman tried

killing himself by overdosing on pills because he was not satisfied with the quality of his selfies. Bowman said that he spent more than 10 hours every day taking selfies, and because of his selfies addiction, he dropped out of school and stayed at his home for six months. Even though the chances for similar cases to happen again are very rare, selfies have become the cause of many fatal incidents [24]. Lamba, *et al.* [35], report that deaths sometimes occur as a result of trying to take selfies in dangerous contexts and that India tops the list with a record of 76 selfie deaths from a worldwide total of 127. Jain and Mavani [36] reported that from 2014 to mid 2016, 75 persons have died while attempting selfie in 52 incidents worldwide. In Chicago, 20 out of 23 college students reported social media induced anxiety and stress [37]. Pilot Amritpal Singh, 29, and his passenger were killed in an airplane crash when Singh attempted to take a selfie. He lost control on the airplane and crashed into a Wheat field [38]. Chugh [39] reported that selfie takers are in danger of developing Selfie-Elbow- an abnormal and repetitive loading of muscles around the elbow leading to micro ruptures that cause inflammation and pain on the elbow. This condition could come as a result of incorrect stretching of the tendons on the elbow while taking selfies. The truth is that selfie taking and checking for likes and comments may constitute distraction that can have serious consequences for some persons.

- **Selfie and Time management:** Tolly [37], found that the habit of scrolling down in their social media accounts probably posting a selfie or checking out other people's selfie posts, reduced the time they allocated for their studies. They may have surfed well into the evening and early morning hours, resulting in fatigue-related school and job problems. Today, it is common to see students taking selfies and chatting even as lectures are ongoing. That few seconds or minutes taken to take a picture and upload to social media can distract a student from benefiting from the lectures and eventually affect the student's academic performance. Particularly at risk are college students, who may have unlimited free internet access in their dorms as well as large blocks of time in which to surf (Young, 2004).
- **Social Construction of false self and healthy social relationships:** With all the digital apps available online, many are able to construct a personal profile that is an opposite of real self-image. And persons who hook up with this individual actually relates with him/her based on the portrayed self and not the real self. Ma, *et al.* [40] describes the taking of selfies in terms of self-presentation theory, which is applied to impress others. The self-presentation theory (Goffman 1959) believed that when people come in contact with others, they will try to control the kind of impression they make on people by giving close attention to their looks, actions and even words to avoid any form of derision or embarrassment. Selfie takers try to provide a greater appeal to others in their social media space



[41]. They could alter their real face, height, weight, or even colour when taking selfies in order to make the best impression. Relationships formed based on such a fake foundation are surely going to be unhealthy, and will not have any positive impact on the persons involved.

- **Selfie addiction:** Many forms of addictions common today include addiction to computer or video games, shopping, gambling, adult videos, excessive exercise, eating disorder, workaholism, and the internet. Hence, one can note that one way a person can be addicted to internet use is the time spent taking, editing and uploading selfies on line. Kottler and Shepard (2008) defined addiction as a persistent, chronic, and intense focus on a single behavior pattern that feels (or is) out of control. It is possible then that a person can focus so much or get so preoccupied with taking and uploading selfies to the point that it starts interfering with other aspects of his/her life and could lead to an addiction. Shah [42] wrote that selfie taking meets the criteria of addiction because it leads to a chain of reactions (taking a selfie shot, uploading such to a social networking site, and further waiting for comment of friends and others) leading to a possible addiction disorder. Stevens and Smith (2005) identified some symptoms of addiction to a substance or an activity as follows: persistent and frequent thinking about the activity throughout the day; significant interference with enjoyment of other important aspects of life; inability to control, cut back, or stop the behavior even after becoming aware of debilitating effects; restlessness or irritability when attempts are made to cut back the behavior; feelings of anxiety or agitation if behavior is stopped for a period of time; use of the addiction to escape or avoid other responsibilities; dishonesty or exaggerations when reporting the incidence of behavior; minimizing the problem to self and others; engaging in high risk behavior that jeopardizes emotional or physical safety; and intense mood swings associated with the activity, ranging from euphoria to shame, guilt and depression. A person can exhibit any of the listed symptoms with regards to selfie taking. A look at some of the reasons why people take and post selfies proves that some are covered by some of the symptoms listed here. When an individual is experiencing more than three to a disturbing degree, the person is in danger of developing "selfitis" or selfie addiction, and needs immediate intervention.

In view of the identified dangers associated with excessive selfie taking, there is need for some form of awareness and intervention by the mental health professionals. One such help could be rendered by Counsellors in the form of addiction counselling.

#### Addiction counseling and the selfie culture

Addiction counseling can be defined as that form of counseling that employs psychological principles to help victims of addiction identify the causes of their addiction, sustaining factors and the

best way to overcome the addiction. The internet has introduced unlimited forms of addiction ranging from online gaming addictions, gambling, compulsive internet shopping, cybersex, and the most recent trend of selfie culture. Carnes, Delmonico and Griffin (2001), outlined six components that cause any kind of media to be so alluring. They are: Intoxicating- users get to a feeling of euphoria; Integral- internet access is so integrated into peoples' lives, it is impossible to avoid; Inexpensive- most persons have free access or can afford some data charges; Interactive- one can multitask, chat, email, and browse at the same time; Imposing- the number of social media sites are unlimited, people have assorted sites to chose from; and Isolating- since it is private, one can have a million virtual presence while remaining isolated. This last component is very dangerous since it is one of the most compelling forces behind media addictions. In view of the alluring nature of selfie culture, counselors make efforts to figure out some effective ways to prevent selfie takers from becoming selfie addicts, and then provide practical help for the already addicted ones.

Counselling is very important to addiction treatment because aside from interrupting the self-perpetuating cycle of an addiction, it provides a new way for sufferers to think, feel and act. This puts them in line for a quicker recovery. Delmonico (2002) developed a treatment protocol for cybersex addiction that would seem to make sense for any kind of internet overuse. In applying the protocols to selfie taking, the first step is that Counsellors need to help users reduce access to their computers or smart phones. It is almost impossible for one not to have any need to use a smart phone or browse the internet once in a while. However, the counselor can encourage the client to off the data connection on the phone as a way to limit incoming notifications of other people's posts, which could trigger the desire to use the phone. Secondly, the client can unsubscribe self from the networking sites till he/she feels able to better decide the activities to engage in while online.

The second protocol is that Counselors must help their clients recognize they have a problem and make the object of addiction (selfie taking behaviour) a central focus of their treatment. This means that the client needs to be aware of the dangers associated with the selfie taking behaviors and come to see their situation as serious and meriting urgent attention. Such a stand will foster commitment in the client and make them more willing to follow whatever regimen the counselor applies to help. Many people today do not consider selfie taking as posing any challenge. They feel they are in control of how many and how often they take and post pictures online, some also believe they can deal with whatever

criticisms their posts receive online, while others feel that taking and posting pictures is simply a hobby. They need to be educated on the implications of the number of pictures one takes and posts on the networking sites, the possible emotional responses that could be generated when posts do not get the expected positive feedback, and the subtle but corrosive effects on their time and general wellbeing. The awareness can motivate the client to be more cautious in the use of the internet for selfie purposes.

The third protocol is that counselors can explore with the clients to find out if the internet is being used to self-medicate for depression or anxiety. If so, addressing these issues, applying psychotherapy as well as providing a psychiatric referral for possible medication, would be appropriate. The truth is that there is always a reason why people take and post selfies. The counselor needs to explore the client's specific reasons. The information gotten will better equip the counselor to work better. If underlying causes are disclosed, such as rejection, loss, depression, loneliness among others, the counselor does well to address them because if the treatment for selfie dependence is given, without properly handling the causes, there is a possibility of a relapse. Counselors should really equip themselves with the skills to maneuver the self-denials and manipulative behaviours of victims.

Because of the several factors that sustain selfie-taking behaviours, Counselors need to develop multifaceted treatment programs to combat resistance at all levels. They can employ any of the following strategies: 12-step programs - a faith-based 12-step model of addiction recovery originally developed by Alcoholics Anonymous, but now applicable to all types of addictions including selfie addiction; behavioural therapies - behaviour modification techniques based on several principles of learning; motivational interviewing - a psychotherapeutic approach that helps people resolve ambivalent feelings and insecurities to find the internal motivation they need to change their behaviour; relapse prevention - a form of cognitive behavior therapy designed to help individuals successfully maintain their sobriety after they have completed their addiction treatment; therapeutic groups - these are groups that engage in therapeutic activities aimed at helping members deal with psychological challenges; and family counseling - a type of therapy that involves the whole family aimed at utilizing familial support in helping an addiction client deal with his/her challenges; among other forms of therapies available for addicts. The menace of selfie is a pervasive reality; all must put up efforts to combat this subtle but very dangerous trend.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, selfie culture is much more than harmless fun. From the forgoing, there is a danger of a person becoming so preoccupied with taking, editing and posting selfies that it interferes with normal functioning, and could lead to some psychological disturbances and even addiction. While steps for prevention of dependence have been identified, addiction counseling has been prescribed for persons who feel they have little or no control over their selfie culture. Adherence to intervention strategies is required for the full benefits of the therapy to be achieved. Selfie culture is really much more than harmless fun.

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