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Uses and Gratification of Posting Selfies on Social Media

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Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Uses and Gratification of Posting Selfies on Social Media

by

Amanda Kearney

A Thesis submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science Degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

Degree awarded:

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Theoretical Perspective.....	7
Literature Review.....	9
Research Questions.....	11
Methodology.....	12
Results.....	19
Discussion.....	22
Limitations and Directions for Future Studies.....	25
Conclusion.....	26
References.....	28
Appendix.....	32

USES AND GRATIFICATION OF POSTING SELFIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Selfies have become an easy and instantaneous form of self-expression and communication. Posting selfies to various social media platforms has become wildly popular and socially accepted in the digital age. This study investigated the motivation behind posting selfies to Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat using the framework of uses and gratification theory. This study also compared differences in gratification sought from individual social media platforms. A cross-sectional survey shared on Facebook using a snowball sampling method recruited participants who post at least one selfie per week ($N = 156$). Factor analysis revealed five gratifications for posting selfies to social media: attention seeking, escape, entertainment, archiving time, and communication. An independent t -test revealed female selfie-posters seek self-presentation gratification over men. An independent t -test also revealed selfies are posted to Facebook to satisfy entertainment needs, while Instagram selfies satisfy needs of self-presentation, habit, attention-seeking, entertainment, and status-seeking.

Keywords: Selfie, uses and gratification theory, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, social media

Uses and Gratification of Posting Selfies on Social Media

The selfie phenomenon has erupted in the 21st century with the convenience and accessibility of smartphone technologies. A search for *#selfie* on Instagram yields over 300 million results (Pounders, Kowalczyk, & Stowers, 2016), while between the years 2012 and 2013, the use of the word “selfie” rose 17,000 percent, and went off to be named Oxford Dictionary’s Word of the Year (Holiday, Lewis, Nielsen, Anderson, & Elinzano, 2016). Google statistics reported in 2014 that Android users sent approximately 93 million selfies per day (Brandt, 2014), and apps such as Snapchat, along with products like the “selfie stick,” have even been developed to embrace and enhance the selfie experience.

A selfie is

a self-expressive photograph featuring the photographer as the primary individual in relation to any secondary products in the background that is consciously created, modified, and shared with others to varying degrees, conditional on the dynamic interaction between the personal and situational factors present and facilitated by technology. (Lim, 2016, p. 1775).

The selfie has emerged as a socially accepted and cultural norm within a digital age. It is unique, as it knows no linguistic, cultural, or spatial bounds, nor is it restricted by any socioeconomic hierarchy (Iqani & Schroeder, 2015). A society armed with camera phones has taken advantage of this newly surfaced form of instantaneous self-presentation, widespread sharing, and communication.

As the internet becomes flooded with habitual selfie-posts in a social media driven society, scholarly research has only just begun its exploration to better understand the selfie craze. A recent study by Holiday, Lewis, Nielsen, Anderson, and Elinzano (2016) revealed three

archetypal groups who share similar motives for taking and posting selfies: the communicators, the self-publicists, and the autobiographers. Communicators share to engage in conversation, self-publicists share for control of their self-image, and autobiographers to record memories. Meanwhile, a study by Diefenbach and Christoforakos (2017) found self-presentation to be a key component for the success of selfies, but also discovered a general distant attitude towards selfies, associating them with negative consequences and a preference toward viewing other photos on social media. If social media audiences would rather view non-selfie images on their accounts, then what is fueling the selfie phenomenon?

According to uses and gratification theory, audiences consciously choose a particular media platform to satisfy particular needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Using the uses and gratification framework, this study posits that selfie posters are actively choosing to pose, snap a picture, and post their image to a social media platform, seeking specific gratification. In this study, I surveyed users who regularly post selfies on social media to understand their motivations and identify gratification needs driving their engagement with the selfie phenomenon.

Theoretical Perspective

Uses and gratification theory suggests media users are active in choosing which platform they prefer to satisfy their needs, as opposed to an audience which is passively effected by the media (Katz et al., 1973). Through this framework, scholars recognize the audience as making a conscious choice for one media over its competitors, seeking specific gratification. Although originally popularized in the late 1950s and early 1960s, uses and gratification research cannot ignore the ultimate individualism offered by new technologies in computer-mediated communication. Internet users are empowered by choice, with complete control over information

sought and information created. They can control and manipulate their online personas, as well as dictate which websites they prefer, and how much time to spend online (Ruggiero, 2000). In other words, audiences are more active than ever, as the internet has become the most personalized mass communication medium to date.

Previous studies employing uses and gratification theory have offered insight into understanding user motives in an internet dominated age. Malik, Dhir, and Nieminen (2016) found that gratifications for sharing photos on Facebook include affection, attention seeking, disclosure, habit, information sharing, and social influence. Other research has discovered social network consumers use multiple social media platforms simultaneously (Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker, 2015), indicating different motives in relation to different social media platform use. Facebook is primarily used for socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009), while Twitter users are more interested in breaking news events. Instagram privileges fan following and fashion trends, including demonstrations of sociability, while Snapchat is primarily used for passing time, sharing problems, and improving social knowledge (Phau, Jin, & Kim, 2016).

The popularity of selfies in the social media culture requires further research into motivations fueling the phenomenon. Sung, Lee, Kim, and Choi (2016) recently used a uses and gratification framework to study the motivation behind selfie posting in Korea, and the correlation between selfie posters and narcissistic personalities. Their findings suggest four gratifications associated with selfie posting: attention seeking, communication, archiving, and entertainment. Further research is required however, to determine motives of selfie posters across varying demographics and social media platforms. This study contributes to existing scholarship by focusing on demographic variables.

Literature Review

The mystery of the selfie phenomenon thickens as conflicting attitudes regarding selfies have emerged from recent research. The selfie exists in a paradox where negative perceptions are associated with viewing them, yet participants have their own justifications for taking and sharing them (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017). In this study by Diefenbach and Christoforakos (2017), 82% of participants admitted they would rather view “usual” photos on their social media feed compared to selfies, yet, they also discovered that, on average, participants agreed taking selfies is a positive experience. A self-favoring bias surfaced as participants positively viewed their own selfies as more “authentic” or “self-ironic,” while selfies by others were negatively viewed as “narcissistic” or “illusionary.” On the same token, selfie-takers generally overestimate the positive attributes portrayed by their selfies (Re, Wang, He, & Rule, 2016). Re, Wang, He, and Rule (2016) discovered that selfie-posters believe their selfies to be more attractive and likable than photos taken by someone else. However, results showed selfies were actually rated to be less attractive and less likable than photographs taken by other people, granting the selfie another self-favoring bias.

In a similar fashion, female millennials who post selfies identified their posts as being motivated by a need to convey the impression of happiness, physical appearances, and to boost their self-esteem (Pounders et al., 2016). However, these gratifications are dependent on constant validation through likes, comments, and shares (Kedzior, Douglas, & Schroeder, 2016), leaving the potential for adverse effects. Likewise, living in a digital age with mass control over self-presentation creates another self-esteem paradox, where self-esteem is boosted with the ability to choose and edit profiles pictures for presenting the ideal self (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). However, constant comparison to other profiles shows negative impacts on the self, where users

conclude that others must be happier or more successful (Chou & Edge, 2012). Thus, in both instances, the same technique used to boost self-esteem may also backfire and prove to be detrimental to one's confidence (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017).

Considering that audiences would prefer to view content other than selfies, it seems as if the selfie phenomenon never should have existed in the first place. This indicates that the posting of a selfie is done so with the intention of personal gratification, rather than for the viewing pleasure of others. Using uses and gratification theory, Sung et al. (2016) identified four gratifications for selfie posting, along with their association to narcissistic personalities and predictability towards selfie posting frequency. Attention seeking, communication, archiving, and entertainment were all identified as selfie posting motives, with all but archiving showing a strong correlation with narcissistic personalities. Narcissism was also discovered to be a predictor of selfie-posting frequency. These findings support the three motivational categories discovered by Holiday et al. (2016), where individuals who take selfies fall into either the communicator, self-publicist, or autobiographer archetype. These categories correspond with the communication, attention seeking, and archiving gratifications, respectively.

Identifying gratification for posting a selfie is an important variable to understanding how people communicate in a digital age. Being a conscious and intentional practice, selfies are far more complex than simply a photograph taken of oneself. They bend typical societal norms as they focus on photographing the self as opposed to anything happening around them (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017). They are "carefully crafted, taken both as spontaneous and as rehearsed act," (Hess, 2015, p. 1637). Selfies embed their user within the time and space in which they are photographed, associating the user with current surroundings and events. They are intentionally shared with others, where the selfie becomes an evolving part of social media culture, outlasting

time or space in which the photograph originated (Lim, 2016). There is an unspoken rule book and etiquette to be followed for posting a selfie: appropriate angles, poses, filters, time, and place (Lasen, 2015). These expectations set the threshold for the risk of social embarrassment or internet shaming, a danger that affects men and women differently. Women teeter on the edge of sexy versus slutty, while men must adhere to the societal standard of masculinity, as being concerned for one's physical appearance may be considered unmanly (Lasen, 2015).

Previous studies have revealed gender to play a role in social networking activities. For example, females are more likely to use social media sites when compared to males (Kimbrough, Muscanell, & Guadagno, 2013), and are more likely to use visually-oriented social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, and Tumblr (Lenhart et al., 2015). Research has also indicated females are more likely than males to use Facebook for posting public messages and content and for photo sharing (Hargittai, 2007). A recent study by Malik et al. (2015) reveals gender differences in sought gratification for photo sharing on Facebook. Men post photos to fulfill habitual pastime and disclosure gratifications, while women admit to being more cautious about their online privacy and self-disclosure. However, a study by *Selficity* found female millennials to be more likely to post selfies than their male counterparts (Williams, 2014), which contradicts the previously stated concerns about privacy. Considering the preference toward female users and risk factors associated with selfie posting, further research is required to examine gratification differences among male and female selfie posters.

Research Questions

According to uses and gratification theory, "when people throw their identities into mass communication offerings, more often than not they will probably seek (and therefore presumably find) a reinforcement of what they personally appreciate, stand for, and value," (Blumler, 1979,

p. 20). The selfie paradox is an important area requiring further research to understand the ambiguity surrounding the selfie phenomenon, starting with the intentional act of posting itself. Understanding that multiple social media platforms fulfill their own specific gratification, along with the understanding that gratifications may be gender specific, this study investigated the following questions:

RQ1: What type of gratifications are sought by users posting selfies on social media?

RQ2: How do social media platforms influence needs of users who post selfies?

RQ3: How does gender influence gratification needs of users who post selfies on social media?

Methodology

The purpose of this cross-sectional survey research was to obtain a general understanding of the selfie phenomenon using the framework of uses and gratifications theory. Survey research was an appropriate method for this study as it has the potential to gather information from a large number of participants, which can be interpreted to generalize to the selfie-posting population (Creswell, 2014). Several demographic variables were evaluated, including age, gender, and race. Participation was limited to users who are 18 years of age or older and post at least one selfie per week. For the purpose of this study, a selfie must be of only the photographer themselves and not involving any other subjects.

The sample for this study was recruited using snowball sampling through posting the questionnaire to Facebook. In snowball sampling, one subject passes new subjects on to the researcher, who in turn provide more subjects to the researcher, and so on (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). In the context of this study, the researcher shared the link to the questionnaire, where it

was continuously re-shared by participants. Snowball sampling was an appropriate method for data collection as it randomized subjects and was able to branch out to a variety of demographics.

This study was approved by Rochester Institute of Technology's Institutional Review Board, and the questionnaire remained optional, consensual, and confidential. The initial sample consisted of 196 respondents to the online questionnaire, 33 of whom did not complete the survey and 7 participants admitted to not posting selfies, leaving a total of 156 participants and a response rate of 79.6%. The online questionnaire consisted of 22 questions, followed by 52 Likert-Scale items, with answers ranging from 1 to 7 being "entirely disagree" to "entirely agree."

The eight gratifications adapted for this research applied a combination of self-constructed and existing scales supported by previous common themes based on selfie and social media uses and gratifications literature. Among these themes, self-presentation was selected from Diefenbach and Christoforkas (2017), as they discovered self-presentation to be crucial for understanding the success of selfies. Attention seeking, communication, archiving time, and entertainment were adapted from Sung et al. (2016), with support from Holiday et al. (2016), as these four gratifications have been identified as important motives for selfie posters. Habit was supported by Malik et al. (2015), while status seeking and escape were chosen by the researcher to support the original uses and gratification framework of personal integrative needs and diversion needs (Katz et al., 1979).

For this research, these eight themes were defined as follows:

Self-Presentation: The conscious effort to portray and create oneself as a desired persona for an audience (Fox & Vendemia, 2016) through the use of posting staged or crafted selfies.

Individuals use impression management to depict themselves in what they view as positive to achieve social goals and to highlight positive behaviors and attributes. Self-presentation can be controlled and manipulated much more easily in an online setting as opposed to offline environments (Diefenbach & Christoforkas, 2017).

Attention Seeking: Posting a selfie with the intention of seeking admiration from others (Sung et al., 2016). Positive reinforcement and feedback is received through likes, comments, and shares, as selfies aim to portray one's most optimized self-image and showcase one's values and interests.

Communication: Using a selfie to build and/or maintain a relationship. Selfies are highly personal and thus make it easy for one to conveniently disclose information to build relationships (Sung et al., 2016). Selfies can pose as a conversation starter in order to fulfill communication needs.

Archiving Time: Posting a selfie to document a specific aspect of one's life, time, place, or event. Social media has evolved into a user-friendly method to record one's personal life and to reflect on memories (Holiday et al., 2016).

Entertainment: Posting selfie to provide fun and enjoyment, or to escape boredom (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Habit: Posting a selfie as a regular behavior, done almost unconsciously as part of one's routine. Habit can be used for passing time or when one has nothing else to do (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Escape: Posting selfies as a diversion from reality, such as relief from daily routine, to distract from worries, or to release tension (Blumler, 1979).

Status Seeking: Posting selfies to seek and maintain one's personal reputation and to remain credible in a social media setting (Park et al., 2009).

Data analysis was conducted through mean comparison, factor analysis with Varimax rotation, and an independent *t*-test in IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A single variable representing each gratification was created by compiling and averaging the corresponding Likert-Scale items. These new gratification variables were tested for reliability (see Table 1). An independent *t*-test was conducted to compare gratification levels with gender and each individual social media platform (see Table 2).

Table 1

Reliability

Gratification	Reliability
Self-presentation	0.650
Habit	0.770
Archiving time	0.836
Communication	0.807
Attention seeking	0.919
Escape	0.870
Entertainment	0.778
Status seeking	0.855

Table 2

Means Compared

Gratification		Male	Female	Facebook	Instagram	Snapchat
Self-presentation	<i>M</i>	4.04	4.34	4.28	4.34	4.32
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	.79	.756	.801	.743	.733
Habit	<i>M</i>	3.16	3.49	3.51	3.63	3.54
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	1.506	1.534	1.464	1.423	1.451
Archiving time	<i>M</i>	5.13	5.06	5.08	5.18	5.27
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	1.506	1.335	1.421	1.369	1.279
Communication	<i>M</i>	3.84	3.44	3.6	3.64	3.61
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	1.336	1.41	1.429	1.387	1.306
Attention seeking	<i>M</i>	3.45	3.45	3.5	3.76	3.53
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	1.667	1.524	1.569	1.557	1.499
Escape	<i>M</i>	2.56	2.48	2.61	2.55	2.60
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	1.462	1.566	1.606	1.573	1.493
Entertainment	<i>M</i>	4.64	4.78	4.9	4.89	4.82
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	1.33	1.251	1.229	1.11	1.196
Status seeking	<i>M</i>	3.97	3.61	3.73	4.04	3.785
	<i>N</i>	45	111	118	103	105
	<i>SD</i>	1.604	1.427	1.506	1.45	1.462

Factor analysis with Varimax rotation was used to identify the underlying gratifications. The Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. Rejection of the null hypothesis proves that variables are sufficiently correlated (Chetty & Datt, 2015). In this study, the null hypothesis with a significance value of 0.00 was rejected ($p < 0.05$), thus, the presented data was identified as appropriate for factor analysis. Kaiser-Mayer-

Olkin identified sampling adequacy with a KMO measurement of 0.848, above the recommended 0.5 value for a satisfactory factor analysis to proceed.

A total of 11 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were obtained, and these factors explained 69% of the total variance. However, upon analyzing the scree plot, factors 6 - 11 were determined unsuitable for this study and were eliminated. Factors 1 - 5 remained, which explained 53% of the total variance (see Table 3). The factor matrix loadings were then examined to determine the highest loading of each item. Factor loadings above 0.5 were considered significant for this study. Considering this, a total of 29 of the 52 items with a factor loading value above 0.5 were used to construct the five factors for gratification (see Table 4).

Cronbach's Alpha statistic was used to measure internal consistency reliability within each of the five factors. It is accepted that the low limit for Cronbach's Alpha is 0.70 and results above this have good internal consistency (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991).

Table 3

Total Variance Explained

Factor	Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.237	27.379	27.379
2	5.111	9.829	37.208
3	3.414	6.566	43.774
4	2.584	4.970	48.744
5	2.107	4.051	52.795

Table 4

Rotated Factor Matrix-Gratifications

Factor	Items	Factor Loadings	Reliability
Attention seeking	I post selfies to get compliments	0.851	0.944
	Posting selfies boosts my self-esteem	0.833	
	I post selfies so people notice me	0.828	
	I post selfies to know if people find me attractive	0.820	
	Posting selfies makes me cool or popular	0.814	
	I post selfies so people can be impressed with how I look	0.781	
	I share selfies to show people who I want to be	0.779	
	I post selfies to get likes	0.736	
	I post selfies to manage and maintain my online image	0.658	
	Posting selfies makes me feel happy	0.616	
	I post selfies to disclose information about myself	0.566	
Escape	I post selfies to forget about work or other things	0.842	0.870
	I post selfies as a distraction from reality	0.825	
	Posting selfies helps me forget about social or political issues	0.812	
	I post selfies to be someone I am not	0.501	
Entertainment	I like posting selfies	0.780	0.829
	Posting selfies is enjoyable	0.746	
	I like looking at other people's selfies	0.674	
	Posting selfies has become part of my social media routine	0.548	
	I post selfies out of habit	0.512	
Archiving time	I post selfies to document locations I have been to	0.840	0.829
	I post selfies to record my hobbies	0.798	
	I post selfies to document a special moment	0.793	
	I post selfies to document myself, for myself	0.661	
	I post selfies to preserve memories	0.635	
	I post selfies to express humor	0.502	
Communication	I use selfies to encourage communication with friends	0.808	0.811
	I post selfies to stay in touch with friends	0.800	
	I post selfies for social interaction	0.599	

Results

Of the 156 participants ($N = 156$), 71% identified as female and 29% male. The majority of participants were between the ages of 18-24 (56%) and 25-34 (21%), with the remaining 22% being 35 years or older. Degree of education varied primarily between those with some college credit with no degree (28%), bachelor's degree (26%), and high school graduate (21%).

Respondents were mostly either employed for wages (47%) or a student (30%). Most of the participants identified themselves as White (78%), 7% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% as Hispanic/Latino, and 5% as Black/African American. Seventy-six percent of respondents use Facebook to post selfies, 66% use Instagram, and 67% use Snapchat.

To answer RQ1, the five factors, or gratifications for selfie posting, obtained from the factor analysis were labeled by the researcher as follows:

- Factor 1 - Attention Seeking
- Factor 2 - Escape
- Factor 3 - Entertainment
- Factor 4 - Archiving Time
- Factor 5 - Communication

Attention seeking: This factor comprised of 11 items, having the most related items, all pertaining to receiving validation and positive responses from others. This includes items such as “I post selfies to get compliments,” and “I post selfies so people notice me.”

Escape: These four items deal with a diversion from reality, “I post selfies to forget about work or other things.”

Entertainment: The five items in this factor deal with how one may spend their time or what they may find “fun.” Items include “I like looking at other people's selfies,” and “posting selfies is enjoyable.”

Archiving time: These five items act as an online diary or scrapbook; a virtual way to record where one has been through selfies: “I post selfies to document locations I have been to.”

Communication: These three items embrace the selfie as communicative tool to reach out to family, friends, and strangers: “I post selfies for social interaction.”

When comparing means, archiving time ($M = 5.14$) and entertainment ($M = 4.8$) had the highest means among both genders and all social media platforms, indicating that these are two significantly sought gratifications from posting selfies.

An independent t -test showed a significant difference for self-presentation gratification comparing female selfie-posters ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.76$) and male selfie-posters ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.79$) conditions; $t(154) = -2.21$, $p = 0.029$. These results suggest that gender may play a role in gratification sought by posting selfies. Specifically, women post selfies to fulfill their need for self-presentation compared to their male counterparts.

An independent t -test also revealed significant results comparing gratifications sought by posting selfies on individual social media platforms. There was a significant difference for entertainment gratification for Facebook users ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.23$) and those who do not use Facebook for selfies ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.28$) conditions; $t(154) = -2.89$, $p = 0.004$. These results suggest those who post selfies to Facebook are seeking to satisfy their need for entertainment.

Similarly, there was a significant difference for self-presentation gratification for Instagram users ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.74$) and those who do not use Instagram ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.78$) conditions; $t(154) = -3.13$, $p = 0.002$. There was also a significant difference for satisfying needs of habit when comparing Instagram users ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.42$) and non-Instagram users ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.48$) conditions; $t(154) = -2.81$, $p = 0.006$. There was a significant difference for satisfying needs of attention seeking with Instagram users ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.56$) compared to

those who do not use Instagram ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.39$) conditions; $t(154) = -3.60, p = 0.001$. A significant difference was revealed for entertainment gratification when comparing Instagram users ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.11$) and those who do not use Instagram ($M = 4.43, SD = 1.50$) conditions; $t(154) = -2.16, p = 0.32$. Lastly, there was a significant difference comparing status seeking gratifications of Instagram users ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.45$) and those who do not use Instagram ($M = 3.07, SD = 1.34$) conditions; $t(154) = -4.04, p = 0.001$. These results suggest Instagram selfie-posters are choosing this particular social media platform to satisfy their need for self-presentation, habit, attention seeking, entertainment, and status seeking.

Common themes in open-ended responses were also noted as they related to the five discovered gratifications. Participants revealed the social risks of seeking attention by posting a selfie, often ending in selfie-posting remorse. Respondents spoke to the potential adverse effects to selfie posting and the emotional value attached to obtaining likes: “when you think it's a great picture but you don't get many likes. I start to doubt myself,” and “sometimes I start to compare myself to others and I feel ashamed of my own self because I feel like I should look or be like them,” or “when you don't get likes you feel like your picture wasn't as good. I'm constantly checking to see if I get likes.” These sentiments reflect the findings of Diefenbach and Christoforakos (2017), where the same method used to boost one's self-esteem can simultaneously destroy one's self confidence (see Table 5).

Table 5

Gratification Sought Per Social Media Platform

Gratification Sought	Facebook	Instagram	Snapchat
Self-presentation		✓	
Attention seeking		✓	
Communication			
Archiving time			
Entertainment	✓	✓	
Habit		✓	
Escape			
Status seeking		✓	

Many open responses mentioned a form of communication to be the driving motive for their engagement in selfie culture, such as staying in touch with family and friends: “Sharing events with family and friends,” or “Interact with friends.”

Discussion

Findings from this study support the four previously discovered gratifications for selfie posting to social media: attention-seeking, archiving time, communication, and entertainment (Sung et al., 2016). This study contributes escape as a fifth gratification to the body of selfie literature. In his original research, Blumler (1979) studied escape as a diversion or relief from everyday routine through the use of television and other mass media. He hypothesized that “media consumption for the purposes of diversion and escape will favour audience acceptance of perceptions of social situations in line with portrayals frequently found in entertainment materials,” (Blumler, 1979, p. 19). In other words, one will satisfy their need for escape using the media they find to be socially accepted. Applying this concept to the selfie phenomenon, selfie

posters seek a diversion from reality and turn to their smartphones to fulfill that need. Be it to escape boredom or to escape responsibility, posting selfies has become a quick and accessible distraction. As an added bonus, likes, shares, and comments may serve as an extra distraction or escape, working as a conversation starter or begging for response.

Attention seeking is another interesting gratification sought by selfie posters. The world of social media has evolved into a completely customizable representation of oneself. Creating the optimized self allows for control over image, public posts, and self-disclosure. This supports the findings of Holiday et al. (2016), where those who fall in the self-publicist archetype of selfie posters simply want to show themselves in a positive light. These ideals breed the nature of social media into a “beck-and-call” culture; we post to get a response, ideally some form of positive reinforcement or affirmation. Likes and comments provide validation and boost self-esteem. However, one must proceed with caution when posting selfies for attention, as failure to receive a desired amount of comments or likes may leave the poster feeling regretful, devastating their self-esteem.

Archiving time emerged as the gratification with the greatest mean among all three social media platforms and gender. This suggests that selfie posters are using selfies to document themselves, creating an online visual diary of their everyday lives, special events, or places they have traveled to. The rising quality of camera phone capabilities makes documenting oneself easy and convenient, providing the ability to reflect on memories anytime, anywhere. Users can now have a publicly accessible photo archive, and are enabled to immediately share with others. The desire to document and preserve these memories is a driving force to motivating selfie users.

Communication is another gratification sought by selfie posters. A selfie by nature contains personal content. By posting, one is disclosing information and seeking response from

other users. Through actively posting, it can be easy to create and maintain online relationships, old or new, through the use of selfie updates.

Entertainment was the final gratification found to be associated with posting selfies to social media. Participants seek to cure boredom or just to have fun. Platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram apply filters to photos, allowing the individual to try out new looks or to embrace their own humility. Put simply, people just like posting selfies.

The number of female participants (71%) compared to male participants (29%) reflects the selfie culture, as Pounders et al. (2016) had noted, selfie posting is most popular among female millennials. Self-presentation emerged as a gratification more actively sought by female selfie-posters compared to males, further supporting the findings of Pounders et al. (2016). Impression management is a driving force for motivating women to post selfies, where they are empowered by having control over information presented in order to influence the public's perception of themselves (Pounders et al., 2016). Women admit to posting selfies where they appear happy and view themselves as physically attractive, constructing their ideal self. The desire for women to satisfy self-presentation needs over men may have societal implications, as typically women feel more pressure concerning physical appearance. The selfie has become a modern tool to fulfill this need, where the goal is to receive affirmation through likes and comments, ultimately reinforcing one's self-esteem.

When it comes to posting selfies on social media, this study revealed users choose to post to different platforms to satisfy different needs. Facebook selfies fulfill the need for entertainment. Frequent updates allow users to become virtually involved within the lives of those in their social circles. Selfie posters turn to Instagram to satisfy needs of self-presentation, habit, attention seeking, entertainment, and status seeking. This aligns with Instagram's

popularity as a glamorous and visually aesthetic social media. These findings support the uses and gratification framework within modern communicative tools. Users are posting selfies to various social media platforms, each with the intention of satisfying specific needs.

Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

It was the goal of this study to look into motivations for posting selfies, and to compare motivation of selfies posted on three different social media platforms. The findings support uses and gratification theory that users will choose one platform over the other to satisfy particular gratifications, and that users are partaking in selfie posting to fulfill the needs of attention seeking, escape, archiving time, communication, and entertainment. Although this study had planned to compare different selfie gratifications among varying demographics, a major limitation of this study was the lack of male participants. Similarly, the majority of participants fell within the same age range and race, leaving an insufficient number of diverse participants for data analysis. Participants were also only contacted through the use of Facebook. Using other social media sites might have led to recruitment of more diverse participants.

Directions for future studies should look into gathering more male participants and comparing their gratifications needs in relation to posting selfies. Gathering participants from a variety of demographics would also provide insight into how different people may use selfies for different gratifications. One may also consider a qualitative study, interviewing those who frequently post selfies to identify recurring themes. Also interesting about the selfie culture is the captioning that accompanies the post. This study only looked at the act of posting a selfie but did not consider selfies within the context of how the users captioned them. Textual analysis may reveal interesting selfie insight when considering these two collectively. The nature of selfies has

also evolved with the addition of filters. Comparing motives of filtered selfies with those of non-filtered selfies may lead to interesting results regarding the selfie culture.

Conclusion

This study examined the motivation behind users' involvement with the selfie phenomenon. We found that selfie-posters seek gratification of escape, communication, archiving time, attention seeking, and entertainment through their engagement with the selfie culture. We also note that gratification differs among gender, as women actively seek to fulfill needs of self-presentation when compared to men. Social media platform also plays a role in gratification derived from posting a selfie. Facebook selfies satisfy needs of entertainment, while Instagram selfies satisfy needs for self-presentation, attention seeking, entertainment, habit, and status seeking. These results contribute to existing selfie and social media literature with the addition of escape as a gratification sought by selfie posters. We also recognize gender and social media platform of choice play a role in gratification sought by posting a selfie, reflecting the individuality and selectivity of social media culture.

We cannot simply shrug off the selfie as a childish and narcissistic act. Social media has become an attractive and expected communicative tool in which selfies play an integral role. As we turn the cameras on ourselves, we are empowered with complete control to construct an alluring virtual representation of our lives. We choose the angle, the pose, and the appropriate platform for the post. Enabled by choice and power, the selfie yields self-manufactured gratification, obtainable at the exact moment we need them through the click of a button. Perhaps we are bored and need an escape, or a bad day has us craving some positive reinforcement. Either way, the selfie is here to provide an immediate fix.

As technology continues to influence how we communicate, we monitor the methods used to satisfy our needs. The accessibility of selfies has provided a new outlet to satisfy basic needs, where the window of time between need recognition and need fulfillment has become nearly instantaneous. This may indicate the duration one feels satisfied may also come and go just as quickly, further propelling selfie and social media engagement. Love it or hate it, selfies have proven they are here to stay as a socially accepted and prominent outlet for self-expression.

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Appendix A

Survey Protocol

Survey Protocol:**Uses and Gratification of Posting a Selfie to Social Media survey:**

1. What gender do you most identify with:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

2. Age:

- 18 - 24 years old
- 25 - 34 years old
- 35 - 44 years old
- 45 - 54 years old
- 55 years or older

3. Marital Status:

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

4. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or equivalent
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

5. Occupation:

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but not currently looking for work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Retired
- Unable to work
- Other: Specify: _____

6. Ethnicity:

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Biracial
- Other: Specify: _____
- Prefer not to answer

7. What is your current geographic location?

City _____

Country _____

8. Which of the follow social media platforms do you use to post selfies? (Check all that apply)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Other: Specify: _____

9. Approximately how many followers do you have on Facebook?

- I do not have a Facebook account
- 100 - 200

- 201 - 500
- 501 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 50,000
- 50,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 500,000
- More than 500,000: Specify: _____

10. Approximately how many followers do you have on Instagram?

- I do not have an Instagram account
- 100 - 200
- 201 - 500
- 501 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 50,000
- 50,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 500,000
- More than 500,000: Specify: _____

11. Approximately how many followers do you have on Snapchat?

- I do not have a Snapchat account
- 100 - 200
- 201 - 500
- 501 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 50,000
- 50,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 500,000
- More than 500,000: Specify: _____

12. How many selfies do you post per week?

- 1 - 5
- 10 - 20

- 30 - 40
- 50 - 100
- More than 100

13. How much time do you spend per week planning, taking, and editing (manipulate in any way from original photograph) selfies prior to posting them on social media?

- 0 - 5 hours
- 10 - 20 hours
- 30 - 40 hours
- More than 50 hours

14. When did you start posting selfies on social media?

- A month ago
- 6 months ago
- 1 year ago
- More than 1 year ago: Specify: _____
- Other: Specify: _____

15. How often do you check your social media accounts?

- Always online
- Every hour
- A few times a day
- Regularly throughout the week
- Other: Explain: _____

16. What is your motivation for posting selfies on social media?

17. From your perspective, what are some of the rewards for posting a selfie to social media?

18. From your perspective, what are some drawbacks of posting a selfie to social media?

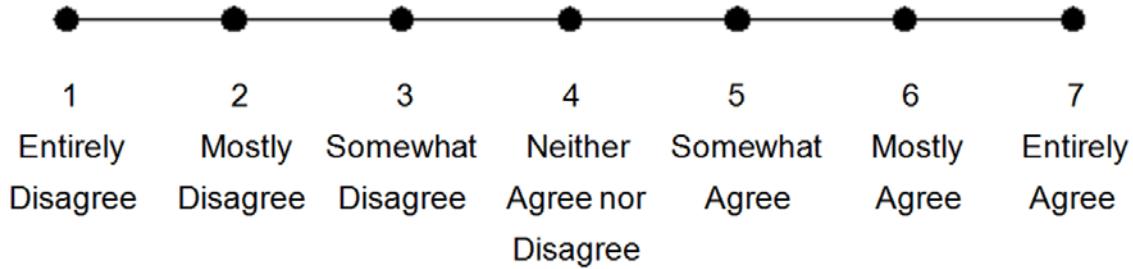
19. What do you believe you learn from other people's selfie posts?

20. Do you prefer to post selfies on one social media platform over another? Specify:

21. In what location(s) do you typically take selfies?

22. Is there a number of “likes” you hope to receive when you post a selfie? If yes, approximately how many?

Please use the following scale to select the number that best represents how you feel about



posting selfies to social media for each statement.

Self-Presentation -

- Posting selfies gives other’s information about me: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Posting selfies allows me to represent my ideal self: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies to share what the average person looks like: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I edit (manipulate original photograph in any way) the majority of selfies that I post: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies to manage and maintain my online image: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- The selfies I post are an accurate representation of how I view myself: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies when I feel happy: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies when I feel sad: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies to express humor: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies to be serious: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies when I feel insecure about my image: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies when I feel confident about my image: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I have particular poses for taking and posting selfies: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- I post selfies because I want people to be impressed by how I look: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Habit-

I post selfies out of habit: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Posting selfies has become part of my
social media use routine: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies because it is part of the social media culture: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies when I have nothing better to do: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Archiving Time-

I post selfies to preserve memories: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to document myself, for myself: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to document locations I have been: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to record my hobbies: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to document a special moment: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Communication-

I post selfies for social interaction: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies when I feel lonely: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to meet new friends: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to develop a romantic relationship: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to stay in touch with friends: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I use selfies to encourage communication with friends: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Attention-seeking -

Posting selfies makes me cool or popular among peers: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post the majority of selfies that I take: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies so people notice me: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to disclose information about myself: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Posting selfies boosts my self-esteem: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Posting selfies makes me feel happy: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I share selfies to show people who I want to be: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to get compliments: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to know if people find me attractive: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Escape -

I post selfies as a distraction from reality: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to forget about work or other things: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Posting selfies helps me forget about
social/political problems: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to be someone I am not: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Entertainment -

Posting selfies is enjoyable: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies when I am bored: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I like posting selfies: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I like looking at other people's selfies: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Status Seeking -

I post selfies to share information with others: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to keep my online profiles active: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to draw traffic to my
social media webpages: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I gain information about others through their selfie posts: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to update followers on what I am up to: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to get "likes": 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I post selfies to manage and maintain my online image: