

SELFIE TOURISM: SHAPING THE WAY WE TRAVEL

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Abstract

The concept of Selfies in the recent times have changed how travellers record their travel memories and experiences. The 'travel selfie' phenomenon requires a more thorough and critical examination. It is not mere a 'selfish' act, but a complex mixture of social, emotional, mobile and technology that is a result of the ongoing convergences of travel, digital culture and communicational techniques. In order to understand how tourism is experienced by and mediated through mobile technology, we have to understand the way the digital tourist photography is manifested. This paper deals with major arguments related to selfie tourism while travelling to new places. Selfie has got its own advantages too, but the disadvantages that it carries along with it, overpowers the pros. The consequences of excessive use of phones for clicking selfies are intense and grave. But there are certain ways to beat the habit of taking selfies too, which has been discussed in detail.

Introduction:

Each time we pack our bags to travel somewhere, first thing we make sure to pack is, our camera and in today's date, our phones that have front cameras. We are aware of the popular term '*selfie*' and its phenomenon. Recognized as the "word of the year" by Oxford dictionary in 2013, the "selfie" is defined as a '*photograph taken of oneself, and uploaded to a social media website.*' Robert Cornelius is the first person, who took what is thought to be the first self-portrait photograph in 1839 using the daguerreotype process, but whether or not it is a true 'selfie' is debatable. (Seiter 2015) In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of selfies posted on online social media. (Hemank Lamba 2016)

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In the early 15th century, Dr. Terri Apter, who is a Psychology lecturer at Cambridge University said that, "*People who had access to self representations were keen to make use of them. In this way people could **control the image projected**, and of course the fact that the image was on display marked the **importance and status of the person represented**.*" (Seiter 2015) Hence, self portraits (selfies) are all about how one person views and defines himself/herself. They are also a way to find out what a person actually is. The concept of '*looking glass self*' is a psychological phenomenon that says that how we see ourselves does not come from who we are in real, instead from how we think others see us.

Now, since, taking a picture (or selfie) is as easy as preparing Maggi and the fact that, it can be shared with thousands of people online at any time, has enhanced the importance of people's opinion and comments for us. A blog by Peter Kaufman says that this change has forced us to invest more time into selfies as part of projecting our identities onto others, "*The more pictures you post of yourself promoting a certain identity—buff, sexy, adventurous, studious, funny, daring, etc.—the more likely it is that others will endorse this identity of you.*" (Kaufman 2014)

Selfie has had its own pros and cons, which would be critically discussed below, so as to get a clear idea of the repercussions of involving with selfies.

Advantages:

- **Selfies are good to capture good memories:** While travelling, we come across many places that are worth being captured. So the urge of capturing them in our cameras comes into scene. We wish to capture all that is worthy of being clicked. These pictures clicked now, during the journey, become memories for the future, which helps us recollect our beautiful past.
- **People take selfies when they feel good about themselves:** Selfies are a way for people to express and show the world how happy they are and how good they feel about themselves. People generally like taking pictures of themselves, when they are happy or something good has happened to them. For example, 'good hair day', 'happy day', etc.

Disadvantages:

- **Selfies are ruining the real motive of travelling and can't make memories:** Travelling is not just about what one sees and does once they reach a new place. It is about how has the place and its culture affected them by observing and talking to the people over there.

Paul Theroux, who is a notable writer and world traveller, said that, while travelling, he refrains himself from taking any images. He said, "...people who take pictures lose their capacity for close observation. Without a camera, you study a thing more carefully and remember it better. Taking a picture is a way of forgetting." (Yates 2016) The travellers who are more concerned for taking selfies, tend to end up missing out on a lot of beautiful things of that new place. Getting that one perfect shot so that it can be uploaded and shared on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, etc in the hope that it will fetch them more likes, deprives them of the ability of living the moment, observing and appreciating while visiting new places.

A Psychology professor at Fairfield University in Connecticut, Ms Linda Henkel conducted two experiments to administer the impact that constant snapping of pictures has on our ability to remember a moment. From her research, Dr. Henkel found out that the participants who clicked the statues, could recall lesser details later, than the group who had spent an equal amount of time looking at the art without the camera. But there were exceptions when one photographer was found to have taken zoomed in pictures of the art, but had no impact on his memory. (Yates 2016)

Two ways have been found in which concentrating on clicking a selfie instead of experiencing a moment affects the memory. First, according to Dr. Henkel, when we take an information, it results in the activation of specific parts of the brain. This process, which is otherwise known as *consolidation*, forms a kind of gelling or mixing together of pieces into their coherent experience, which is a time consuming process. This is what happens when one is in the middle of an experience. (Yates 2016) In simpler terms, when one concentrates on capturing an image rather than experiencing a moment, the neurological information does not reach the 'root' of our brain.

Nonetheless, even the memories that have already been created, are required to be reinforced. This takes place when a particular memory is recovered, which further reinforces the neurons that made it. (Yates 2016) On the contrary, when one stops, looks and clicks, that person is neither engaged with the experience nor, followed it up with thoughts or reactions.

➤ **Risk of hampering of relationships and depriving the interactions with others:** There was a time when asking someone to click us a picture at a new place was a matter of utter awkwardness. However, this question was once considered to be the icebreaker with other travellers and make connections with them who had come from different places.

➤ **Selfies have become a cause for many mishaps and deaths of tourists:** One disturbing trend that has emerged lately is that of clicking selfies at dangerous places and positions. It has proved so disastrous that during 2015 alone, more number of deaths had been recorded while taking selfies than shark attacks all over the world.(Horton 2015)

Taking selfies has become so engrossing that one forgets where they are and what is one doing while setting them up, which at times, ends up in unfortunate results. Instances like, seven youths who got drowned while taking selfies on Mangrul Lake, near Nagpur when their boat tipped over as they were posing in March 2015.(India 2015) Similarly, in the same year, a woman in Yellowstone National Park was gored by an American bison while taking a selfie who was lucky enough to have survived.(Miller 2015) A Japanese tourist fell down a staircase while taking a selfie at the Taj Mahal in Agra who succumbed to his injuries. (Japan tourist at Taj Mahal 'dies after fall' 2015)

India has topped the list of selfie-related deaths in the world. (Gowen 2016) This has been found out from the study conducted by scholars from Carnegie Mellon University and Indraprastha Institute of Information Delhi.(Manning 2016) A selfie related death can be defined as *a death of an individual or group of individuals that could have been avoided had the individual(s) had not been taking selfie.*(Hemank Lamba 2016) According to an analysis, around 76 deaths have been registered in the country since March 2014. The urge to be the most popular in the social circle has been encouraged with the advent of online social networks like Facebook, Instagram, etc. This is predominantly the main reason why people decide to perform risky stunts while taking a selfie to attract more appreciation and approval in the form of likes and comments from their friends online.

➤ **Influence on social life:** People take selfies to show that they have a social life, which can be used as a great way to make their friends jealous. It is often observed that people make use of Social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Sanpchat, etc while travelling, to upload and share photos. According to a report, Facebook registers

the highest, forty-eight per cent photo uploads, while, Whatsapp for thirteen per cent, nine per cent on Twitter, eight per cent on Instagram and five per cent on Snapchat, etc. Hash tags, which are a huge rage amongst the youngsters, has certain categories in accordance to how it is used. Hash tags are classified into *#BeachBrag* (at the beach or on vacations), *#Adventure* (the great corridors), *#CarSelfie*, *#Healthie*, *#Usse*, etc for the convenience of the user.

- **They tend to behave like a social media narcissist:** There used to be a time, when there was no concept of selfies. The term which has been devised newly has become a popular obsession for the teens which is consuming a large chunk of their time. Such as obsession has also lead to several mental and health issues. As a part of this, Psychologists have identified the increase in narcissistic personality characteristics, insecurities, addiction, etc. Selfies might look harmless and moderate, but intemperance might lead to mental and health problems.(Malcore 2015)

So what basically '*narcissism*' is? The word, narcissism is derived from a Greek fable which is about a handsome young man called Narcissus. He fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water.(Malcore 2015) It is characterized by extreme self-centeredness and glorifying of one's own looks and attributes. People start fantasizing about their beauty and attractiveness and tend to seek excessive admiration and attention for themselves. Their behaviour starts becoming very irritating and arrogant. As per the reposts on narcissism, fifty five per cent of millennial (from 20-24 years of age) have taken a selfie and uploaded it on social media. Moreover, seventy four per cent of photos on Snapchat are found to be selfies. Similarly, in every ten seconds, one thousand selfies are posted on Instagram.

Lisa Firestone, a clinical psychologist and author argues that, the advent of Facebook has been a major cause in the remarkable rise in narcissism. Since the past some years, huge number of researches have been undertaken regarding the same and the results show that, narcissism and Facebook have deep connections.(Firestone 2012)

Narcissism, while travelling, escalates to a whole new level. People tend to update pictures, profile photos, etc to gain others admiration and approval. And in this process of self promotion which are not much of use for others, people end up over sharing their pictures so as to feed their desire for more likes. Moreover, they update others on every little movement that they do, from boarding a train with heavy luggage to, having

chai and biscuits at a shanty, they leave no chance to boast and brag about each and everything they do during a trip.

- **Taking selfies is an obsession, which might take the form of addiction:** Clicking one's own photos with the phone cameras are something which has hysterically gained popularity in the last few years. This hobby of clicking pictures, has turned an obsession for quite a many, especially the teens. A glaring example of such a scenario is the story of Danny Bowman, a 19 year old boy from England (Woronko n.d.) who used to apparently click over 200 pictures a day. He did not go out of his house for about six months, during which he incurred many losses and was debarred from school. Due to his constant inability to capture a picture perfect selfie, he tried to commit suicide. But later, he survived.

The American Psychiatric Association has recently confirmed that taking excessive selfies is a mental disorder, and people of such obsession have been named as '*selfists*'. The APA has defined it as, "*the obsessive compulsive desire to take photos of one's self and post them on social media as a way to make up for the lack of self-esteem and to fill a gap in intimacy.*" They have classified the disorder into three levels, namely, borderline, acute and chronic. (Pinoy 2014) Someone who finds himself taking up to three selfies a day but does not post them on social media comes under the *borderline*. Those who belong to the category of clicking and posting at least three images of himself/ herself in a day, are *acute*. And lastly, those of all who cannot resist the urge to take and post up to six selfies a day are the *chronic selfitis*. Danny came under the category of the chronic selfitis. In one of his interviews to UK Mirror, he said, "I was constantly in search of taking the perfect selfie and when I realized I could not, I wanted to die. I lost my friends, my education, my health and almost my life." (Woronko n.d.)

There was another case of a couple who were so obsessed with photos that, they ended up taking a selfie in front of burning Dubai hotel in the background, later got subjected to a lot of criticism by the people. This shows that, people have become so blind for selfies that they surpass all limits of insensitivity and rationalism. (Couple faces criticism for taking selfie in front of burning Dubai hotel 2016)

- **People share selfies to gain social status:** With the launch of online social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Sanpchat, etc, people became crazy with the idea of uploading selfies and pictures, especially when travelling. This would give them a

chance to show their friends and relatives that they are living a life that is more happening than theirs. This would in turn, elevate their status in the social circle. The opinion and comments of others matter a lot for these kind of people. It is because the opinion and approval of others assures them of their attractiveness and popularity.

More than the advantages, there are a lot of drawbacks attached to the selfie, which if not looked after, would lead to serious consequences.

Consequences:

Taking Selfies may not have direct and immediate repercussions, but can lead to various indirect consequences like insecurities, addiction, damaged friendships and relationships, depression, body dysmorphic disorders, etc.

When a photo does not turn out to be the way one wants (with good face profile and proper background, etc) or it does not get an expected number of likes, he/she starts doubting their ability to look good and attractive. As a result, this affects their self confidence and they start looking down upon themselves. Similarly, involving too much in taking selfies makes that person obsessive about it that later, takes the form of an addiction, which becomes really tough for the person to overcome. Moreover, the usage of phone so much for clicking pictures, makes the person with us feel left out and unhappy. Resultantly, it adversely affects the relationship we have with that person.

Due to failure in getting a good picture clicked when they compare with their other friends, many selfie addicts lose their self confidence. And slowly, this thought in particular starts hovering them all the time and their risk of getting into depression is high. Depression! Yes. It might sound silly to certain people of how the fascination with snapping pictures of oneself at every semi-interesting moment of the day could be a cause of depression. But the fact is, there are certain people who have been identified with depression due to the inability to take up a good picture of themselves.

Furthermore, due to the popularity of selfie (in all cases, including travel), people have started viewing themselves as objects for the purpose of use instead of as human beings. Setting the camera in the perfect angle and putting forward the better profile of your face is nothing but, objectifying oneself for the worse.

Selfie Control:

Selfie is an effective way to express oneself on a social platform, only if done moderately. However, it is extremely important for the ones who are obsessed with it, to control their usage by three ways. Firstly, *reducing* the usage of clicking selfies by trying to spend more time interacting offline with people and forming in-person relationships. This would help in two ways. First, it would help to reduce the obsession of selfie, and second is, it would make the relationship stronger with others. Secondly, rethinking about the purpose of utilizing the social media. It should be used to socialize with people and should not merely become a means of self promotion.

And lastly, reflecting over the thought that whether the content that is being shared on the social media has any latent "self" interest or not. (Malcore 2015)

Conclusion:

People indulge in capturing themselves excessively in the form of images due to lack of self gratification. They tend to give different poses with the monument or art (when travelling) as they do not seem to be satisfied with one picture. Such people tend to upload numerous photos on online social networks to get the approval of others in the form of likes, comments, etc. However, it would be much better if, when we reach home, we take our time out and talk about our experiences with family and friends, and ask them about their favourite travel memories. This way they would reminisce those old memories thus, strengthening our bond with them. Similarly, instead of indulging in clicking pictures constantly, it is possible to have great travel experiences by engaging with the environment and by sharing the stories which would help to keep those memories alive.

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