

Attitudes Toward Selfie Taking in School-going Adolescents: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Smartphones have become a necessary evil in our lives. Selfies have become the newest technological fad to take over the youth, due to the wide and easy availability of mobile phones. There is paucity of scientific data on selfies in general, and from our country in particular. This study aimed to analyze the attitudes toward selfie taking, body image acceptance, and narcissism personality traits among an urban school-going population in Mumbai. **Materials and Methods:** Two hundred and fifty-two students of 11th standard, belonging to an urban Mumbai school, were interviewed in a single centric cross-sectional study. Scales used were - attitude towards selfie-taking questionnaire, body image acceptance, and action questionnaire (BIAAQ) and Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). **Statistical Analysis Used:** Scores obtained were computed using basic descriptive statistics as well as computerized statistical software. **Results:** Of the 230 completely filled questionnaires, 54% were males. About 42.6% reported that they regularly clicked selfies of themselves. No gender difference was noticed. On an average, 18.1% girls and 15.2% boys clicked more than 4 selfies/day. The gender difference was statistically not significant ($P = 0.5273$). Difference in mean BIAAQ between the two genders was noticed to be statistically significant, whereas the NPI scores difference was insignificant. **Conclusions:** This study is a pioneering/novel/innovative work in the field of selfies. It gives us an insight into the youth's viewpoint towards selfies, which was positive in the majority of the population. A worrisome aspect is the higher body image dissatisfaction among girls. Behavioral addictions such as selfies need more focused research in the future.

Key words: Adolescents, body image, narcissism, selfie, smartphone

INTRODUCTION

Technology is an indispensable part of our daily life, and it is impossible to neglect its impact on human life.^[1] The advent of technological advances has looked to a new realm of medical disorders termed “behavioral

addictions” which are now emerging as psychiatric disorders for the future.^[2] Mobile phone addiction or smartphone addiction has been reported in literature across many studies worldwide.^[3] It has been noted across studies that adolescents are more prone to

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behavioral addictions than adults and people in middle age.^[4] Smartphone addiction is one of the most common behavioral addictions with over 1.5 billion human beings owning and using a smartphone worldwide.^[5] A study done in South Korea revealed that 11.4% of 10–20 year olds and 10.4% of 20–30 year olds suffer from smartphone addiction.^[6] A meta-analytic study based on studies conducted in India has reported the rates of smartphone addiction to range from 18.5% to 78.8% of people.^[7]

Smartphones are no longer a communication device but serve as a substitute for the home computer and have internet-related access as well as a camera that with its high resolution now substitutes the camera.^[8] A “selfie” is defined as a self-portrait photograph that a person has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and then shared via social media. The word introduced in 2013 has become a household name and is even featured in the latest Oxford English Dictionary.^[9] Even though a rage, the phenomenon of selfie taking has never been studied in India from a scientific perspective. There has been an exponential rise in selfie taking among youth that operates a smartphone.^[10] Certain studies have reported selfie taking being linked to psychopathologies such as grandiosity, narcissism, and body dysmorphic disorder.^[11] Considering the dearth of literature on selfie taking in India, we chose to conduct this research with the aim of studying the attitudes toward selfie taking, body image acceptance, and narcissism personality traits among an urban school-going population in Mumbai.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in an urban school of Mumbai. The school authorities were contacted and explained in detail the need for the study along with its aims and objectives. The same was then explained to parents of the students participating in the study in a general session, and then the study objectives were explained independently to the students as well. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity was given at all levels right from the name of the school not being revealed to the confidentiality with respect to individual students. A sociodemographic proforma was designed to collect basic sociodemographic data relevant to the study and this along with all the scales were administered in a group setting in one session itself. Two of the authors (ED and PS) were present during the session and any queries while answering the scales were attended to. After the scales were administered, a psychoeducational session for the students was held on behavioral addictions. The same was done for parents as well. This was conducted by three authors (ED, PS,

and RD) and this was done to allow the school some benefit for participating in the study. The sessions were purposely held after the scale administration so that the information disseminated in the session did not interfere with the responses given to the scales. The students participating were boys and girls studying in Grade 11. Students whose parents refused participation were excluded from the study. All children participating in the study had to have access to a smartphone which was their own.

Scales administered include the following:

1. The attitudes toward selfie-taking questionnaire: This was a self-designed semi-structured questionnaire, targeted to assess the knowledge, attitude, and perception about selfie taking in youth. The questions were framed by the authors and validated by three senior psychiatrists (NS, SS, and AD) and the scale was administered to a general population of 20 subjects to test the clarity of the questions asked. Questions which were unclear were then reframed, and the final questionnaire was administered to students in the study. The questionnaire had a total of 29 questions and was in English only
2. The body image - acceptance and action questionnaire: This is a 29-item self-report scale, rated on a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 (“never true”) to 7 (“always true”). It has been designed to measure the extent to which an individual exhibits an accepting posture toward negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body shape and/or weight. The scale is internally consistent with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.93 with good construct validity. Scores are significantly negatively correlated with well-established measures of theoretically related constructs such as body dissatisfaction, bulimia, general eating pathology, and general distress^[12]
3. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI): This is a scale used to measure individual differences in narcissism characteristics as described as per Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III. Quick and easy administration with limited choices amidst 40 paired statements, made it favorable for use in this study. The NPI exhibits adequate reliability, construct validity, and internal consistency is reported as high (0.83). The scores obtained range from 0 to 40, with higher scores reflecting higher narcissism.^[13]

The school had a total of 309 students in Grade 9 from which 252 consented to participate in the study and also met our inclusion criteria. Scores obtained were computed using basic descriptive statistics as well as computerized statistical software.

RESULTS

Of the 252 questionnaires administered, 230 were chosen for the final analysis as some of the questionnaires were incompletely filled. Of the 230 students included in the final analysis, 125 (54%) were males and 105 (48%) were female. The mean age for males and females were 15.4 years and 15.7 years, respectively. On examining the type of smartphone used, it was seen that 18 (7.82%) students had an expensive Apple I-Phone while others used phones of various models. A total of 98 students (42.6%) reported that they regularly clicked selfies of themselves. One hundred and one students (43.9%) mentioned that they approved of others taking selfies regularly. The difference across gender between those clicking their own selfies regularly was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.59$; $df = 4$; $P = 0.332$).

One hundred and six students (46.1%) students used three or more of the social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, and Snapchat to post their selfies. On an average, 95 (41.3%) clicked 0–2 selfies in a day while 19 (18.1%) girls and 19 (15.2%) boys clicked more than 4 selfies/day. The gender difference was statistically not significant ($P = 0.5273$). Sixty-three (27.4%) of the population clicked more than 10 selfies a week. 159 (69.1%) of the total group reported that they took selfies preferably when they were looking good or dressed up for a special occasion.

One hundred and thirty-seven students (59.6%) denied being addicted to selfie taking while 30 (13%) confessed to “very often” feeling addicted to selfie taking. Gender differences here too were not significant. Twenty-five (10.9%) of school-going children in the study reported “very often” editing their selfies and using softwares to make their selfies more appealing. Only 7 (3%) revealed that they had tried to achieve a certain body type or look to gain more popularity for their selfie-taking. Further, 60 (26.1%) reported to copying/imitating the selfies taken by famous celebrities.

A surprisingly high number of respondents, (51.7%, $n = 119$), stated they “very often” felt that clicking too many selfies were a waste of time while 54.8% ($n = 126$) said that those who click too many selfies may be insecure about themselves. Exactly 55.7% ($n = 128$) stated that posting too many selfies may be a sign of being too self-involved/self-focused. A high annoyance level, due to a badly clicked selfies, was seen among 15.2% ($n = 35$) of the population. Clicking selfies in public places was revealed in 33.5% of the study population ($n = 77$). Only 30.4% ($n = 70$) felt confident

while posting their selfies online while 19.1% ($n = 44$) kept “very often” checking for the likes and comments related to their selfies on social network sites.

Addressing body image acceptance, we found a statistically significant difference between scores for boys and girls in the study ($P < 0.0001$). A higher score indicated higher levels of body image dissatisfaction and lower score will indicate higher levels of body image satisfaction, that is, inverse correlation. The NPI scores between genders were statistically insignificant [Table 1].

DISCUSSION

Our study, being one of the few in India with regard to selfie-taking in adolescents, brought some interesting findings. The youth in our study had a positive outlook toward the concept of selfies, as well as clicking of selfies. Strong disagreement or a negative outlook toward clicking regular selfies was noticed in a small fraction of the study populations (3.5%, $n = 8$). A study conducted at Google reported that on an average, an adult takes 4 photos or videos a day and clicks 2.4 selfies a day while an average teen takes 6.9 photos or videos a day and clicks 4.7 selfies/day.^[14] Our study showed similar trends showing with 16.5% ($n = 38$) of the youth clicking four or more selfies in a day.

Ten percent of the students in the youth “very often” edited their images using software to make themselves look more appealing and 14.3% copied famous celebrities’ style of coping selfies. The desire to look a certain way can be self-destructive and lead to low, fragile self-esteem.^[15] The presence of body image dissatisfaction among adolescents is high as reported in various studies.^[16] About 26.1% ($n = 60$) of the study sample admitted to copying the poses or styles of celebrities’ and the way they took selfies.

The BIAQQ that reflected a significant difference between the two genders echoed with many other studies. Body-image may be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that represents how individuals think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes.^[17] A recent Canadian study

Table 1: Body image acceptance and action questionnaire and narcissistic personality inventory scores across both genders

Scale used	Scores (mean±SD)		t, P
	Males (n=125)	Females (n=105)	
BIAAQ	108.4±7.33	114.2±8.63	5.5116, <0.0001
NPI	19.15±3.05	18.57±3.93	0.1451, 0.3259

BIAAQ – Body image acceptance and action questionnaire;
NPI – Narcissistic personality inventory; SD – Standard deviation

found that 36–50% of the adolescents from Grade 6 to Grade 10 are not satisfied with their body size.^[18] Subjects of our own study too felt that those who took too many selfies were insecure (54.8%) and/or were self-focused (55.7%). Narcissism, a perceived trait in those who take too many selfies, has been explored in a previous study, stating that higher rate of psychopathology and narcissism was found especially among men who clicked too many of their own pictures.^[19] The study found a relationship between selfie-posting, photograph editing, and narcissistic personality traits. It was suggested that narcissists are more likely to show off with selfies and make extra effort to look their best in the photos.^[20] In our study, the mean NPI scores for the two genders were comparable, and no significant difference was noted. The researchers commented that narcissism is not just a single trait but a confluence of several related qualities, that is, self-sufficiency, vanity, leadership, and admiration demand. Our study was marred by scientific limitations in the fact that it was done in a circumscribed sample and that the findings cannot be generalized to large populations. There is need for further studies in diverse populations to give impetus to the findings of our studies.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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