A STUDY OF IMPACT OF SELF-PORTRAITS (SELFIE) ON SELF IMAGE OF DISABLED STUDENTS STUDYING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Dr. Arvind Sharma*,
Associate Professor & Coordinator,
Department of Mental Retardation, Faculty of Special Education,
Dr. Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University,
Mohaan road, Lucknow-226017 (UP), India

Abstract

Social media, including online social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, have developed at an extreme rate over the last few years (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hesse, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Common usages of social media, and its relative novelty, are related to an emergence of new psychological and social phenomena. Although many studies have investigated individual differences in online social networking, few have examined the recent and rapidly popularized social phenomenon of the “selfie” (a self-portrait photograph of oneself). The objective of this exploratory study was to examine the impacts of selfie on Self image of disabled students studying in higher education. A questionnaire was developed based on previous literatures and a total of 126 students were randomly selected for the present study.

The findings disclosed that there are positive impacts of selfie for students with different disabilities whereby students believe that selfie can increase one’s perception and confidence in self imaging. Its negative impact was also seen on self image of visual impaired students in comparison to students with other disabilities. Few students also reported its negative impact in the form of wasting time and editing photos before posting to social media.

Introduction

Named Word of the Year in 2013 by the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “selfie” has become ubiquitous in the vocabulary of nearly every teen and young adult in the technological world. A selfie is defined as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media” (Oxford Dictionary, 2013). For the youth, the act of taking selfies and overall usage of various social media platforms are an integral part of life. The Millennial Generation’s comfort with social platforms has given this specific age
group a more positive view of how social media might be affecting their lives. Studies, however, link social media use in young adults to various behavior development issues (Noor Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2012). The trend of capturing own images has become a phenomenon of the new culture of the society. The culture which has been gaining popularity as of today, has not only gained the attention of young children, but also the adults and artists alike. Generally selfie has become a popular culture among the young people. It is fun and fascinates the young mind. ‘Selfie’, a popular trend among many is now linked to mental and low self-esteem disorders.

Selfie may bring negative impacts than positive such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or Body Dysmorphic Disorder, selfie obsession. Research suggests according to Briggs (2014) that spending lots of time on social media such as Face book looking at pictures of friends could make women insecure about their body image. The more women are exposed to "selfies" and other photos on social media, the more they compare themselves negatively. More researchers found that the issues of selfie are more involving self-image, self-confidence and self-esteem of oneself. In addition, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) had officially classified taking ‘Selfies’ as a mental disorder. In fact, APA also claimed to name the disorder as ‘Selfitis’ (Sturt and Nordstrom, 2014). These psychological disorders can affect any body and youth with disabilities are not far behind it. Although few studies have proven its positive and negative impact on personality of students studying at different levels but there are lack of studies which shows relationship between disabilities and self image in terms of social media (selfie) on youth with disabilities.

Popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Instagram and so forth have been called as the public display of connection and give people opportunities to satisfy the need to socially identify with others, who share similar interests and are often comprised of their closest friends and peers. 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. With such popularity in a short amount of time since its release, it does not come as a shock to discover that social media has sparked a new trend of sharing oneself as a visual medium in the form of selfies.
Recently, there has been a great deal of literature in the area of social media and the impacts they have on the user's self-esteem and social relationships (Barker, 2012; Forest & Wood, 2012; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013; Seinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). In particular, it is found that female users who base their self-worth on their appearances tend to share more photos online and maintain the largest online networks for social media than men (Stefanoe, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). It has been found that men and women who feel able to express their ‘true selves’ on the internet are more likely to form close relationships. The ability to harness expression of true self into the characteristics of a communication system would certainly have a positive impact on the trust development of a group. Arnett (2000) considers young age appropriate because it marks the developmental period of emerging adulthood in which individuals engage in their most extensive identity exploration in relation to issues concerning appearance and body weight. Hence, this developmental period is true for both men and women. There is also evidence to support the impact of sharing oneself to any social media causes more harm to women's confidence, which assumes that users have a 'healthy' perception of their appearances initially. However, that is quickly deflated by any negative criticisms posted to their uploaded pictures (Toma, 2013).

With the launch of Facebook in 2004, one of the obvious elements of self-disclosure or image construction is the profile photo. This is the default photo allows the user the choice of identifying themselves to the entire Facebook community (Watson, Smith, & Driver, 2006). With the emergence of profile photos, the idea of self-presentation is no longer limited to text-based presentations. The profile photograph is now a central part of online self-presentation, and one that is critical for relational success (Hancock & Toma, 2009). However, the choice to have a default profile photo is not limited to Facebook, but is included in other social media such as Twitter and Instagram.

The appeal of selecting any image and allowing the user to display how they want to be identified with a characteristic or personality fulfils a gratifying need to be liked (Lin & Lu, 2011). Being liked on social media sites is conveyed by the number of likes received from friends and/or peers in Facebook to the frequency of being retweeted in Twitter and the number of heart emoticons received in Instagram following a post or status update.
By having a large number of social media friends leads to higher intensity use of social media as these results in higher amount of feedback from peers. This kind of extensive use of technology could lead to addiction. The study found that use of social media on mobile phones is a significant predictor of mobile addiction. Such explanation could provide a link to the upsurge in selfie popularity to Instagram. In addition, social media addiction not only is harming people personal lives, it is also making organizations more concerned about their employees’ production” (Chou, Sinha, & Zhao, 2010). The network size positively affects social networking site intensity as the larger the social circle enables people to be more active in their respective social networking site to be continuous in their communication to the masses.

Women are conditioned to think of their bodies as the premier status over their emotional state or physical capabilities (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). As a result of living in an objectified culture, women tend to engage in self-policing behaviour that leads them to self-objectify by internalizing how outsiders perceive their physical appearances. Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello (2013) investigated negative effects of self-objectification such as self-harm behaviours, stemming from a result of trauma. Along with the larger size in social media, it can intensify the need to self-disclose with varying levels of information, as it would mean higher feedback from friends and/or peers. This might shed light as to why women during their emerging adulthood stage are active agents in making choices about what cultural models to follow and how to project an image that can further perpetuate the cycle of objectification of women’s and their sense of self-worth through the act of uploading selfies.

One study found that posting pictures on Facebook is positively correlated with an appearance contingency of self-worth. This indicated that people who frequently post pictures to Facebook are more likely to stake their self-esteem in their appearance (Stefanone et al., 2011). It is possible that these members use picture posts as a way to seek validation from others, throughout positive feedback, on their appearance. Validation from others on social media does impact the self-esteem of its users. Positive reactions to profiles on social networking sites lead to increases in self-esteem, while negative feedback lead to declines in self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2006).
Hence, this research investigates the relationship between impacts of selfie on self image of students with disabilities studying in higher education. The aim is to see the relationship of different disabilities on the impacts of selfie. The following research questions are to be answered:

1. What are the impacts of selfie on self image of disabled university students?
2. Is there any relationship between different disabilities and self images of disabled university students with respect to selfie?

Methodology

This research employed quantitative research method. 126 disabled students (only physically challenged, Visual impaired and Hearing impaired) through random sampling were selected among 553 enrolled disabled students from different UG, PG and Ph.D courses of Dr. Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Among 126 disabled students, 79 were male and 47 were female. As for the instrument, questionnaire was developed in conducting this research. The items in the questionnaire include demographic and impacts (negative and positive) of selfie on self image. Questionnaire was self-developed by the researchers. It contained 27 items with positive and negative statements. A pilot test was conducted to check reliability of the Questionnaire. Pilot test revealed a reliability score of .89 which suggested that the questionnaire is valid to be used. Analysis of data includes comparison between two independent variables; gender and disability. Independent T-test was used to analyze the comparison.

Results

Positive impacts of selfie were found in both genders. Significance difference for both genders in different areas like liking selfie (t=3.12, p=.002), prefer to selfie alone (t=2.19, p=.001), selfie with friends (t=3.98, p=.003), friends favouring selfie (t=2.98, p=.003), selfie helps in creating positive perception about oneself (t=4.31, p=.006), feel good when receive compliments on selfie (t=3.89, p=.003) and selfie can boost one’s confidence (t=2.67, p=.006) were also seen. Interesting results were seen in types of disabilities and positive impacts of selfie.
Majority of the blind students (males and females, t=8.95, p=.005) were agree that due to lack of vision their friends’ oral comments boost him/her to post few selfie.

Negative impact were also seen in the form of like to take selfie during spare time (t=6.12, p=.008) and edit photos of selfie before posting them on social media (t=4.92, p=.002) for both genders and types of disability. Students with hearing machine would like to take side selfie so that their face could not be seen straight. Similarly physically challenged students tried to take such selfie where impaired organs could be hidden. Mostly visually challenged students (males and females, t=3.97, p=.005) uses dark goggles before making their selfie by their peer groups.

Discussion

Engaging with social media is proving to be an increasingly important communication and creative activity, especially in the lives of students with disabilities. Social media and youth cannot be separated. It is believed that social media are not just increasingly important in India, but are also all around the world. The findings of this study suggested that almost all university disabled students were experiencing the same impacts of selfie. Social media have become increasingly important in the lives of male and female university disabled students. Because of the prevalence of social media, these groups are increasingly aware of others’ values through access to friends’ posts and profile information. This study was designed to test the effects of social environment and self-presentational goals for a social media on external contingencies of self-worth and, ultimately, concern about others’ perception of the self. Selfies are already the subject of many discussions in popular media. But if we simply scan images tagged as selfie on facebook, or observe people around us taking self-portraits, it is hard to quantify the patterns or systematically compare selfie from multiple cities taken by people who differ in age and gender. Young people have always devoted attention to the presentation of self.

The present research concerns the role of self-presentation on social media. The purpose of this study is to explore the positive and negative impacts of selfie among male and female disabled students of the university. In addition, this study attempts to provide a foundation for understanding the selfie phenomenon and its relationship to disable youth from the usage of
social media. Social media are designed for social interaction and are structured in a way that encourages positive self-presentation. For instance, Facebook users’ profile pages have a dedicated space to describe themselves to others. They can upload pictures and update their statuses for the world to see. Members can provide feedback to other users’ activities as easily as clicking a ‘like’ button on pictures, statuses, and comments. Majority of the content on Facebook is positive in nature (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; relationships (Barker, 2012; Forest & Wood, 2012; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013; Seinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Stefanone et al., 2011).

In terms of the level of social media usage, since the results showed that many of disabled students of the university use social media daily, it proves that selfie indeed give huge impacts to them irrespective to their disabilities. They think that they have to log into social media sites daily because they need to know about the current status of their friends. Both male and female were able to vocalize at least one positive impacts such as in liking selfie, prefer to selfie alone, selfie with friends, friends favouring selfie, selfie helps in creating positive perception about oneself, feel good when receive compliments on selfie and selfie can boost one’s confidence. They are having strength to “get up and try again” or being resilient in everyday challenges. Also, they expressed having fulfilling relationships in their life from friends and family members (Stefanoe, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011; Hancock & Toma, 2009).

Majority participants’ responses gravitated towards personal fulfillment. They accepted certain insecurities within themselves, such as having confidence in their abilities or physical appearances. They placed more emphasis on personal values and ambitions such as pursuing higher education. They declared the importance of instilling empowerment within themselves and being free to pursue whatever they want and not being held back because of their disabilities (Arnett 2000; Toma 2013; Lin & Lu 2011; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Furthermore, this study revealed that instead of attempting to satisfy familial and social expectations on what it means to be a man and woman, participants resisted and worked to promote a sense of self-love within them and accepted that work and career related goals should not be their entire life or identity. Significantly, there are more selfies by women than men.
To conclude, students with disabilities so far have proposed that the selfie among else can function as a means of self-expression, a construction of a positive image, a tool of self-promotion, a cry for attention and love, a way to express belonging to a certain community. We could confirm or reject such claims by inspecting individual selfies photos. Sometimes the claims are made based on outstanding exceptions that catch people’s attention, go viral, and easily become a symbol of the whole phenomenon. Yet such images are not necessarily representative of larger trends. In sum, the results of this quantitative study suggest useful information on the social media usage by disabled students in higher education. It is reported that the different disable students use social media for selfie with different impacts.

Conclusion

The objective of this exploratory study was to examine the impacts of selfie on Self image of disabled students studying in higher education. The findings disclosed that there are positive impacts of selfie for students with different disabilities whereby students believe that selfie can increase one’s perception and confidence in self imaging. Its negative impact was also seen on self image of visual impaired students in comparison to students with other disabilities. Few students also reported its negative impact in the form of wasting time and editing photos before posting to social media.

References


