



Is love related to selfies? Romantic selfie posting behavior and love levels among women and men



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 November 2016

Received in revised form 14 February 2017

Accepted 16 February 2017

Available online 21 February 2017

Keywords:

Romantic selfies

Love

Facebook

Sex differences

ABSTRACT

Although interest in the selfie phenomenon has recently increased, no studies have yet examined the meaning behind posting romantic selfies. In a study involving a total of 584 men and women, we examined whether the amount of romantic selfies on Facebook profiles may reliably reflect love level in a heterosexual relationship, as evaluated using Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale. We found that men's overall Love Scale scores positively predicted quantity of posted romantic selfies. Additionally, in men, the scores of two out of three subscales—Passion and Commitment—each independently predicted the numbers of romantic selfies. In contrast, women's romantic selfie-posting behavior correlated with only one subscale. Our findings provide the first evidence that the link between love level and romantic selfie-posting behavior is stronger among men than that among women. Therefore, our results may highlight key romantic behavioral differences in online social networking in both sexes.

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1. Introduction

A “selfie” refers to a self-portrait taken by oneself using a digital camera or a smartphone to post on social networking sites. The selfie seems to be a new medium of self-expression in the realm of social media, reflected by the millions of selfies that have been posted on various social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. For example, in a sample investigated by Katz and Crocker (2015), 98% of young adults stated they had posted a selfie. Additionally, selfies have been taken by many influential people all over the world, including Pope Francis and politicians such as Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Vladimir Putin. Despite the rapid growth of research pertaining to individual differences in single selfie posting behavior on social media (e.g., Dhir, Pallesen, Torsheim, & Andreassen, 2016; Döring, Reif, & Poeschl, 2016; Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu, & Zhu, 2015; Re, Wang, He, & Rule, 2016; Sorokowska et al., 2016; Sorokowski et al., 2016), empirical research is lacking in the case of romantic selfies (defined as ‘the couple's version of a selfie’). Limjuco and Bautista (2016) discovered that students' attitude and social influence impacted their participation in group selfies. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have been conducted on the meaning of romantic selfie posting behavior, which may be an important source of information on romantic love in couples.

The results of recent studies on the relation between posted pictures and love in romantic couples remain unclear (Emery, Muise, Alpert, & Le, 2015). On one hand, the phenomena of love on the internet seem to be related to different strategies of presenting oneself. In established relationships, people often attempt to manage others' impressions of their relationships and obscure negative aspects (Loving & Agnew, 2001). An act of romantic relationship by internet might be then related to misrepresentation (Lim, Nicholson, Yang, & Kim, 2015; Ross, Rosser, Coleman, & Mazin, 2006), as making a relationship more visible to other people can fulfill different goals, such as enhancing status, obtaining acceptance from others or increasing self-esteem (Emery, Muise, Dix, & Le, 2014). One aim may be more a positive perception of the relationship quality by other people (Emery et al., 2015). In their previous studies (Emery et al., 2014), misrepresentation in relationship visibility was connected to particular personality traits: avoidant individuals showed low desire for relationship visibility, whereas anxious individuals reported high desired visibility. Furthermore, individuals who felt more insecure about their partner's feelings tended to make their relationship more visible (Emery et al., 2014).

On the other hand, sharing information about romantic partners or relationship status by posting relevant information on the internet was found to be an honest signal of relationship quality, as most of the studies concerned mostly relationship quality, not love as it is (Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012; Saslow, Muise, Impett, & Dubin, 2013). For example, Saslow et al. (2013) found that individuals who posted dyadic profile pictures on Facebook reported feeling more satisfied with their relationships and closer to their partners than individuals who did not. Dyadic pictures might then be a marker of closeness, a

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pictorial counterpart to pronouns such as “we” or “us”, often used by people in love to refer to themselves collectively. Thus, the results of the study would confirm existing correspondence between representation on Facebook and real feelings (Saslow et al., 2013).

However, all the above studies have been conducted without specifying a selfie as the object of analysis (e.g., Emery et al., 2014; Emery et al., 2015; Papp et al., 2012; Saslow et al., 2013). Both the structure and the purpose are different regarding selfie and non-selfie pictures, as a selfie is taken with the purpose of being posted on social networking sites, so examining the relation between the amount of romantic selfies and love might bring different results than in the case of pictures in general (see: Sorokowski et al., 2015).

Thus, as the aim of our study was to explain the above inconsistency in the meaning and pattern of romantic picture posting, we decided to examine the relation between the number of romantic selfies and love level in romantic couples. The present study is the first to test whether love measured by Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (Sternberg, 1997) predicts romantic selfie posting behavior in both men and women. In addition to analyzing the results separately for each sub-scale of love (Intimacy, Passion, and Commitment), we distinguished romantic selfies posted by each participant on social media sites.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Our sample included 673 Polish Facebook users (318 women and 355 men). Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their participation in the study. Participants completed an anonymous questionnaire online, in which they indicated whether they were currently in a romantic relationship, with available responses “yes” and “no”. Those who chose “no” were automatically excluded from our study. Participants who chose “yes” instead were asked to indicate their sex (male/female), age (with an accuracy of one year), relationship length (with an accuracy of one month), and sexual orientation [using the Kinsey Scale of 1–7, where 1 represents an exclusively homosexual orientation and 7 is exclusively heterosexual (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948)].

Further analyses were conducted only for people who had been in a heterosexual relationship for at least 3 months (orientation assessed as 5, 6 or 7). In total, we excluded 89 people (7 women and 1 man because of relationship length and 61 women and 20 men because of their sexual orientation).

Thus, final analyses were conducted for 250 women aged 17–49 years ($M = 27.9$, $SD = 6.0$) and 334 men aged 17–59 years ($M = 26.4$, $SD = 6.8$).

2.2. Measurement

As a last part of the online questionnaire, participants completed the Polish adaptation of Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (Sternberg, 1997; Polish adaptation: Wojciszke, 2000), which measured their love towards their romantic partners. The scale has high parameters for validity (e.g., 0.61–0.79 correlation with Rubin Liking and Loving scales) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha for the original version and the Polish version used in our study: Intimacy, 0.91/0.96; Passion, 0.94/0.95; Commitment, 0.94/0.75; overall, 0.97/0.97) (Sternberg, 1997). The Polish version of Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale consists of 36 items. Each of the items refers to one of three subscales: Intimacy (11 items), Passion (14 items) and Commitment (11 items) (Wojciszke, 2000). The Intimacy component pertains to those love experience that are related to emotions: closeness and warmth in loving relationships, e.g., “I have a warm relationship with my partner.” The Passion component pertains to romance, physical attraction, and sexual intercourse; it represents behavioral aspects, e.g., “Just seeing my partner excites me.” The Commitment component pertains to cognitive decisions about starting a

relationship and maintaining a long-term commitment, e.g., “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner” (Sternberg, 1997).

To evaluate selfie-posting behavior, data on two types of selfies were gathered: romantic and single selfies. Following Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com), a “romantic selfie” (referred to as an “usie”) was defined as “The couples' version of a 'selfie'.” We classified a “single selfie” as a selfie of only the participant. The number of single selfies was evaluated as control.

2.3. Procedure

Participants were invited to fill out the online questionnaire. Research assistants from the authors' university volunteered to take part in the project as recruiters. Together with the authors, the volunteers sent their Facebook friends a message containing a request to take part in the study, a short explanation of the study purpose (i.e., “the purpose of this study is to investigate romantic relationships among Facebook users”), a link to complete the questionnaire, and a personal code. Thus, after a participant had completed the questionnaire, his/her responses appeared in an anonymous database under an individually assigned code.

In the next step, we counted the number of romantic selfies and single selfies posted by a participant on his/her Facebook profile during his/her relationship, measured in months. Owing to control individual tendency to take selfies in general (e.g. Re et al., 2016), we decided to collect information on the number of single selfies taken by participants. Those were mostly pictures taken with a smartphone thanks to its self-portrait function, but also pictures of a participant's reflection in the mirror or pictures taken with a web or car camera. We included also the pictures in which other random people appeared in the background—those were mostly photos showing participant on a concert, football game or demonstration.

To standardize the number of selfies (both single and romantic), we expressed both relationship duration and time elapsed from posting the first photo in months. If a relationship began after creating Facebook account, we divided number of selfies by the relationship duration. However, if a relationship had begun before the participant started using Facebook, number of selfies (both single and romantic) was divided by the time elapsed from posting the first picture. Previously, we intended to record the date of Facebook profile creation, but since that information is not available on Facebook, we decided to use the date when the first picture was posted instead. It can be assumed that this date accurately reflects the date of Facebook account creation because the profile picture is usually downloaded at the same time. This way, we obtained a number of single and romantic selfies per month.

3. Results

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics concerning frequency of romantic selfie posting and subsequent aspects of love measured using the Triangular Love Scale, separately for men and women. There

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for frequency of romantic selfies posting, subscales of Triangular Love Scale, and Love Overall score in men and women.

	Women (N = 250)		Men (N = 334)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Number of romantic selfies per month	0.06	0.17	0.08	0.26
Commitment	5.23	1.00	5.32	0.98
Passion	5.51	1.16	5.61	1.10
Intimacy	5.92	1.03	5.89	1.00
Love Overall	5.56	0.89	5.61	0.91

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