



## Full length article

## Do age and gender differences exist in selfie-related behaviours?

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## ABSTRACT

Recently scholars have started examining selfie-related behaviour, with an emphasis on young women. However, little is known about age and gender differences in selfie-taking and posting patterns. To address this gap, an online survey of a sample of 3763 Norwegian social media users was carried out. This study provides the first empirical evidence on how adolescents (aged 12 to 19), young adults (20–30) and adults (31–50) differ in terms of selfie behaviour. Females were more likely to take personal and group selfies, post personal selfies, crop photos and use photographic filters compared to males. Adolescents were found to be more likely than young adults to take own and group selfies, post own selfies, and use photographic filters. Similarly, young adults were more likely to take own and group selfies, post and edit photos than older adults. The predictive effect of age was stronger among women than among men regarding selfie taking, posting and editing behaviour. The interpretations and implications of the study findings are discussed in the light of previous literature.

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## 1. Introduction

Selfies or self-portraits have received global prominence in the last few years (Katz & Crocker, 2015). A selfie is defined as a photo taken by an individual using any hand-held device (e.g., phone, iPad), whether or not the intention is to share it online (Kiprin, 2013). Millions of selfies are shared on different social networking sites (SNS), for example, Instagram hosts 238 million photos with the hashtag #selfie, and over 128 million photographs had #me as the hashtag (Weiser, 2015). Similarly, 193 million public photos and videos were shared on Instagram with the hashtags #selfie and #selfies (Svelander & Wilberg, 2015). According to a recent study in the US, 98% of participants (aged 18 to 24) took selfies, 46% had shared selfies within the past day, and 69% tended to share selfies three to 20 times daily (Katz & Crocker, 2015).

Selfies are very popular among college-attending young adults (Katz & Crocker, 2015) and adolescents (Kiprin, 2013; Senft & Baym, 2015). This is evident from the fact that 96% of young adults (aged

20–23 years; convenience sample) had taken a selfie in the past, and 25% had taken a selfie in the past day (Katz & Crocker, 2015). Similarly, 30% of the total photos shared on different SNS are actually selfies posted by adolescents (Locateadoc.com, 2014). These different statistics clearly suggest that selfie taking and sharing represent one of the dominant forms of content shared in the computer-mediated communication platforms. The different reasons for taking and posting selfies include self-presentation and identification (Katz & Crocker, 2015), feedback from peers (Katz & Crocker, 2015), and experimentation with looks, accessories and environment (Kiprin, 2013).

Previous literature on computer-mediated communication has shown that both age and gender are important dimensions, which affect the way the Internet in general, and SNS in particular are utilised (Dhir, Chen, & Nieminen, 2016a; Dhir, Chen, & Nieminen, 2015a; Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2015; Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016; Malik, Hiekkänen, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016; Dhir & Torsheim, 2016). Similarly, age and gender differences also influence users' attitudes and perceptions of Internet-based activities (Pfeil, Arjan, & Zaphiris, 2009; Dhir, Chen, & Nieminen, 2015b; Dhir, Chen, & Nieminen, 2015c; Dhir, Chen, & Nieminen, 2016b; Dhir, 2016). However, previous literature has not yet examined the possible age and gender differences in the emerging and popular phenomenon of selfie-taking and posting behaviour on SNS. One

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possible reason could be that selfie-related research is a young field and this social phenomenon has only recently become popular. This is consistent with the recent literature that has suggested the need to examine age and gender differences in selfie behaviour and, especially, differences among adolescents and young adults (Nguyen, 2014; Weiser, 2015). Despite the fact that the use of SNS (Dhir, Kaur, Lonka, & Nieminen, 2016; Kaur, Dhir, Chen, & Rajala, 2016; Dhir, Chen, & Chen, 2015; Dhir, Kaur, Chen, & Lonka, 2016) and particularly selfie-taking and posting, has become an important part of adolescents' online self-presentation (Locateadoc.com, 2014), this user group has, so far, not been studied. The majority of the selfie literature has examined young women or single gender samples (Nelson, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; Warfield, 2014); and there is therefore a growing need to examine the selfie behaviour of mixed-sex and age groups (Albury, 2015). Adolescents differ from young adults and other adult user groups concerning their SNS usage patterns (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, *in press*; McAndrew & Jeong, 2012; Pfeil et al., 2009) and associated narcissistic tendencies (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). Consequently, the selfie-posting patterns of different age groups are likely to differ (Sorokowski et al., 2015). In order to gain more knowledge of age and gender differences in selfie-related behaviour and to fill the research gap regarding this topic, the present study examined whether age and gender differences exist in selfie production and posting among three target user groups, namely, adolescents, young adults and adult users. The specific research questions are:

**RQ1.** Are there any differences in the selfie-taking, posting and photo-editing behaviour across the three age groups?

**RQ2.** Are there any gender differences in the selfie-taking, posting and photo-editing behaviour among the three age groups?

**RQ3.** Are potential gender differences in selfie-taking, posting and photo-editing behaviour moderated by age-group (gender  $\times$  age-group interaction)?

## 2. Background literature

### 2.1. Age differences

Limited prior literature has indicated significant age differences in selfie use behaviour. Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu, and Zhu (2015) for example observed that young people, in contrast to older people, are more likely to take selfies. Selfies may help young people to fulfil their narcissistic goals during adulthood (Weiser, 2015), similar to SNS use (e.g., Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Mehdi-zadeh, 2010). The limited literature on selfies and young adults suggests that the age variable does not moderate the effect of narcissism on the selfie-posting pattern (Weiser, 2015). This suggests that, due to increasing SNS engagement among adults from all age groups (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2014), they are equally likely to share self-promoting photos on SNS. Nguyen (2014) observed that young women (18–29-year-olds) share selfies on Instagram to receive positive feedback (in the form of “likes”) and also delete shared selfies in the wake of possible negative criticism. Similarly, Nelson (2013) observed that young females tend to use different hashtags, such as #me, #self and #selfie, to attract more “likes” for their selfie post, but delete the tags once the objective of obtaining more “likes” has been achieved (Nelson, 2013). In addition to this, young women are typically worried if they are unable to attract sufficient “likes” and they are likely to delete the shared selfie if it does not achieve its objective. Warfield (2014) noted that young women (aged 16–28 years old) often practice “policing” with selfie-taking and posting,

e.g. the quality of a selfie is decided based on the location, lighting, posture and accessories. This is consistent with theories on “conduct of conduct” which outlines the norms, rules and guidelines concerning the rightful act of any individual or organization (see Burroughs, 1959; Foucault, 1976). Other findings have shown that age is negatively correlated with self-posting frequency (Weiser, 2015), with young adults having little concern about how selfie-taking and posting practices might affect their future situation (Katz & Crocker, 2015). In the context of adolescents, the limited literature suggests that 16–17-year-old adolescents engage in gender “policing” for selecting the ideal photo from the selfies they have taken (Senft & Baym, 2015). Gibbs, Carter, Nansen, and Kohn (2014) suggested that selfie posting in some instances has a negative impact on the self-presentation and social capital of adolescents, e.g. a selfie at a funeral could present them as thoughtless, irresponsible, selfish and narcissistic.

### 2.2. Gender differences

Most recent selfie research has indicated that both males and females utilise selfies for self-presentation reasons and for the identification of gender (Katz & Crocker, 2015). However, gender differences exist in the way self-presentation is made through selfies; for example, Qiu et al. (2015) observed that females are more likely than males to take selfies. This is consistent with previous literature on online self-presentation, since women tend to present themselves as attractive and part of a social group (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008). Albury (2015) observed that selfie-taking and posting is a gendered process, e.g. young women are often inappropriately targeted, scrutinised and condemned because of their provocative selfie-posting. This is also consistent with Burns (2014), who states that society is fine with viewing women as objects of consumption. However, in comparison, young boys are not subjected to similar scrutiny or surveillance. This is in line with Williams and Marquez (2015) in that people tend to practice negative feedback or simply withhold feedback (i.e., ignoring online activity, no likes, etc.) for those who violate the gender code (see Anderson, 1999) or gender role stereotypes (see Rudman & Glick, 2001). Albury (2015) also observed that gender differences exist in the tactics and languages used for describing selfie-posting practice. Cao and Halloran (2014) noted that women are more likely to take selfies that are personal in nature compared to men. Poe (2015) found that higher self-esteem among college-attending females is likely to result in more selfie posts. Similarly, Nguyen (2014) observed that selfies enable young women to experiment with their look and project themselves as more attractive. Furthermore, boredom and peer pressure also motivate young women's tendency to post selfies.

The use of SNS has resulted in increasing levels of social comparison among people, which has given rise to narcissism (Poe, 2015). Previous literature suggests that women tend to post more selfies (personal, group and with partner) compared to men, but the relationship between selfie-posting and narcissism was stronger among men compared to women (Sorokowski et al., 2015). Fox and Rooney (2015) found that self-objectifying men tend to spend more time on SNS and frequently edit photos (e.g., to enhance their attractiveness) before posting, that more narcissistic and psychopathic men tend to share edited photos and frequently post selfies, and that lack of filtering and impulsive posting of selfies on SNS help psychopathic men to attract their peers. Weiser (2015) observed that leadership or authority has a higher level of association with selfie-posting frequency among women, whereas among men, it first and foremost shows an association with entitlement/exploitation.

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