



Travel selfies on social media as objectified self-presentation



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Travel selfies are fabricated to disseminate desired impressions to others.
- Appearance surveillance is positively associated with self-presentation.
- Appearance dissatisfaction is positively related to travel selfie manipulation.
- The number of travel selfies posted on social media serves as a moderator.

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ABSTRACT

While disseminating self-related information and travel selfies via social network sites, many tourists strategically adjust photographic images to manage their impressions. With a sample of Korean female tourists, this study aims to examine the underlying nature of strategic self-presentation behaviors characterized by women's personal efforts to edit and package their travel selfies posted on social media webpages. The results of this study indicate that several elements of self-objectification, including appearance surveillance and appearance dissatisfaction, are closely associated with female tourists' strategic self-presentational orientation. This study suggests different management implications to help tourism practitioners successfully distribute desired destination images using their clienteles' strategic self-presentation behaviors.

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1. Introduction

With the wide dissemination of personal mobile devices, taking a 'selfie', defined as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam" (Oxford University Press, 2015), has become a ritualistic and routinized practice among tourists (Lo & McKercher, 2015). While posing in front of a landmark, most tourists take travel selfies to constitute the concrete proof of 'I've been there', which transform intangible experience into tangible reality (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). A variety of social media channels also enable tourists using mobile devices to instantly generate, convey, and share their travel knowledge and experiences, including travel selfies and photographs (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). While spreading those travel memories via online social media, many tourists strategically choose self-related information and intentionally manipulate photographic images to present themselves to their friends (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013). According to

Goffman (1959), strategic (or selective) self-presentation—often referred to as impression management—is defined as a purposeful process for packaging and editing the self to distribute positive impressions to others. The advent of several innovative mobile applications like Instagram and Photoshop, which allow users to enhance the quality of photographs and manipulate their outer appearance in travel selfies, has substantially promoted the strategic self-presentational phenomenon (Hancock & Toma, 2009).

Earlier research (e.g., Aubrey, 2006; Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000) revealed that women are more sensitive to having others' look at their appearance than men. The objectification theory provides a holistic picture for understanding how women treat their appearance as objects that are evaluated by others' perspectives (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). A large proportion of women who are engaged in self-objectification, which results from internalizing sociocultural beauty ideals, habitually monitor their appearance and perceive shame about their physical selves (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Self-objectification is also known to lead to several problematic outcomes like depression, eating disorders, and self-harm behaviors (Calogero, Davis, & Thompson, 2005).

Despite the omnipresence of previous studies separately

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focusing on diverse aspects of self-objectification and self-presentation, there has been limited research exploring the developmental processes of strategic self-presentation, which may be dependent upon levels of self-objectification. While proposing the hyperpersonal model of computer-mediated communication (CMC), [Walther \(1996\)](#) presented an intriguing topic for research by implying that people with higher levels of self-objectification are more likely to engage in strategic self-presentation behaviors in order to gain approval and support from others. In this regard, it seems reasonable to postulate that travel selfie editing behaviors fall within the boundary of different consequences of self-objectification. The most important goal of this study is to illuminate the underlying nature of strategic self-presentation behaviors, which are characterized by personal efforts to manipulate travel selfies on social media. In order to reach this goal, we will examine how several elements of self-objectification are conceptually associated with strategic self-presentation.

Travel selfie behaviors have not, so far, been noticed, nor have they been studied in detail by tourism scholars although taking selfies is no longer just a fad. Regardless of who disseminates the photographic information, travel photographs play a substantial role in the formation and circulation of destination images ([Lo et al., 2011](#)). This is because the nature of tourism is closely associated with tourists' visual experiences, which constitute travel memories concerning a destination ([Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014](#)). Based on study results, we will discuss different management implications that help tourism professionals better understand their clientele's self-presentational behaviors and successfully disseminate favorable destination images using social media.

2. Literature review

2.1. Self-objectification

The objectification theory is based on an important premise that women commonly view their outer appearance as objects which are constantly monitored and evaluated by others ([Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997](#)). The habitual exposure to objectifying experiences encourages women to engage in self-objectification, which is known as an outcome of adopting others' attitudes toward external appearance ([Tiggemann, 2005](#)). Previous studies (e.g., [Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello, 2013](#); [Kim & Ward, 2004](#)) suggested that contact with different types of visual mass media like magazines and music videos featuring thin beauty ideals which facilitate women in observing their appearance in sexualized ways contributes to the development of negative appearance images. [Calogero et al., \(2005\)](#) also provided empirical evidence supporting the idea that individuals' internalization of those media ideals acts as a significant antecedent factor in determining their degrees of self-objectification.

Self-objectification describes a psychological process demonstrating how women develop an objectified appearance consciousness ([McKinley & Hyde, 1996](#)). A sizable body of earlier work (e.g., [Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998](#); [van Diest & Perez, 2013](#)) indicated that self-objectified women tend to continually monitor their own bodies and subsequently have negative feelings of their outward appearance. As illustrated in [Fig. 1](#), [Fredrickson et al. \(1998\)](#) stated that self-objectification characterized by habitual appearance monitoring plays an important role in predicting several appearance concerns including appearance shame and appearance dissatisfaction. Furthermore, previous studies (e.g., [Calogero et al., 2005](#); [Fox & Rooney, 2015](#)) revealed that those psychological consequences of self-objectification lead to the prevalence of different undesirable behaviors and mental health risks.

While developing the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS), [McKinley and Hyde](#) utilized three different elements comprising body consciousness—body surveillance, body shame, and appearance control belief—to theorize women's objectified appearance experiences. Among these, body surveillance and body shame have been identified as core features comprising the self-objectification process. Appearance surveillance constantly occurs “to ensure that women comply with cultural body standards and avoid negative judgments” ([McKinley & Hyde, 1996](#), p. 183). This habitual monitoring of outward appearance urges women to be aware of appearance dissatisfaction and impairs their self-worth ([Frederick, Forbes, Grigorian, & Jarcho, 2007](#)).

Appearance shame represents women's negative feelings about their outer appearance, resulting from a lack of success in adopting the sociocultural standards of ideal feminine appearance, which are impossible to completely attain ([Aubrey, 2006](#)). Feelings of shame about appearance are commonly believed to be a typical moral emotion in that women regard their failure to control their appearance as serious wickedness ([Noll & Fredrickson, 1998](#)). In this sense, [McKinley and Hyde](#) emphasized that appearance shame characterizes negative feelings not just regarding the appearance, but also regarding the self. Moreover, [Tiggemann and Lynch \(2001\)](#) noted that the degree to which a woman perceives appearance shame is commensurate with the magnitude of her internalized societal standards of ideal appearance.

2.2. Travel selfie editing as strategic self-presentation

A large proportion of social media users intentionally share personal profiles to generate desired impressions by using a variety of strategic self-presentation techniques ([Rui & Stefanone, 2013](#)). Previous studies on online dating (e.g., [Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006](#); [Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008](#)) indicated that many people make self-presentation decisions to attract preferred potential mates' attention by means of deceptive self-presentation strategies such as disclosing exaggerated information and posting manipulated photos on their private webpages. [Tooke and Camire \(1991\)](#) also revealed that male college students were willing to inflate their generosity and resources, whereas females engaged in strategic self-presentation to show their physical appearance as more attractive than it really was.

According to [Walther \(1996\)](#), individuals' effort to fabricate their images can be more accurately viewed through the hyperpersonal model of computer-mediated communication (CMC), which demonstrated that various types of strategic self-presentation behaviors lead audiences to misperceive the actual conditions. Different situational and personal features function as important factors in determining the extent to which social media users control impressions. Most importantly, people tend to engage in strategic self-presentation to enhance and maintain their self-esteem, which is attributed to others' positive responses and compliments ([Leary & Kowalski, 1990](#)). Anticipated beneficial consequences encourage social media users to purposefully fabricate their images. Specifically, many people have a belief that probability of acquiring preferred outcomes, including others' approval and support, increases when desirable impressions are circulated through online channels ([Kim & Lee, 2011](#)). [Rosenberg and Egbert \(2011\)](#) also stressed that the need to develop favorable self-identity motivates strategic self-presentation behaviors.

The concept of strategic self-presentation has been popularly applied to better understand the textual aspects of CMC, in that various text-based presentations are more editable and malleable than non-textual forms of online communication ([Walther, 2007](#)). However, innovative progress in information communication technologies has reshaped strategic self-presentation behaviors.

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