



Fatal Selfies: Understanding India's Selfie Epidemic

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Introduction

In 2010, when Apple released the front-facing iPhone camera, the selfie phenomenon became a mass movement across the globe as the self-portrait was made possible through this application. The term "selfie" refers to a "self-portrait," which is a picture of oneself that is typically taken with a mirror or a camera held at arm's length. This has gained momentum with the arrival of Digital cameras, the internet, and the pervasiveness of social media platforms have all contributed to the widespread popularity of snapping and sharing selfies.

There was a shift in the change of technology which was speeded up by application of social media like Instagram that encouraged the people to take pictures constantly and apply their filters and editing applications to make them appear better. The use of smart phones enabled spontaneous and easy to capture and share photos as compared to the traditional self-portraits that required tripods and timers. The selfie stick was invented by Hiroshi Ueda in 1980, yet it failed to perform well commercially, partly because women were embarrassed to take a photo of themselves. Later it was modernized by Wayne Fromm who perceived its opportunities on a global scale (Venema, 2015 & McAlone, 2015).

A selfie, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, is "a self-portrait that is typically uploaded to social media. However, recent definitions also take into account the idea that selfies are "consciously created, modified, and shared with others to varying degrees" and acknowledge the photographer's importance in the picture, since the photographer's body or face is the primary focus. This expanded conceptualization acknowledges that selfie-related practices include a variety of actions related to taking (preparation,



staging, posing), editing, and posting photos, as well as viewing (browsing) and assessing other people's selfies through "likes" and comments. Despite the widespread usage of social media for selfies, there is growing evidence that using social media might have negative effects.

The term "selfitis" or "selfie disorder" has evolved into a serious illness in recent years. It is defined as an intense fixation with using a mobile device to take selfies. After doing extensive research, academics at Nottingham Trent University and the Thiagarajar School of Management in India have acknowledged "selfitis" as a valid mental illness. Photo albums of events, parties and family get-togethers are constantly uploaded in the social nets and couple photos are also uploaded depicting the idealistic bondage (Salsone & Stein. 2020). Travel selfies are a form of journalizing of the travels and more and more fitness persons are capturing self-portraits of themselves in the course of the exercises to record their progress or motivate others. Even capturing meaningful events and social life moments have already become a part of Selfie, and they have become a constituent of the Indian space of contemporary social manifestation. Selfies are popular in India; they are usually taken during weddings, parties, and festivals to keep memories and encourage social connectivity.

A report published by NDTV in 2018 stated that drowning was the most common cause of the 259 deaths, followed by accidents involving transportation, like taking a selfie in front of an approaching train and falling from heights. Electrocution, weapons, and animals are additional causes of mortality associated with selfies.

Social Media and validation

A report published in February 2022 in the Economics Times A Deloitte report released on Tuesday predicted that by 2026, India will have 1 billion smartphone users, with rural areas driving the sale of internet-enabled phones. In 2021, India had 1.2 billion mobile subscribers, of which approximately 750 million were smartphone users. It is expected to be the second-largest smartphone producer within the next five years. This significant demand is expected to emerge primarily with the deployment of 5G, which will account for 80% of all devices (about 310 million units) by 2026. 5G is expected to become the most widely used mobile technology because of its numerous applications, including high-speed gaming and remote healthcare.

A report by 'Data for India' the global coronavirus pandemic has boosted technological adoption in India. Between 2020 and 2023, phone usage increased from 70% to 85% among adults. Children and teenagers are driving the significant growth in phone use. In 2020, one in every six children aged 5 to 14



had recently used a mobile phone; by 2023, this had increased to nearly four out of every six. Teenagers are now more likely than older adults to have recently used the internet. Social media platforms have become the most popular source of selfies and users have been posting millions of selfies on a daily basis. The platforms have offered an edited experience in which users can be viewed in an idealised form, and they frequently use photo-editing tools and filters to make them appear more attractive.

Platform	Average number of Selfies per day
Instagram	45,000
Snapchat	300,000
Facebook	100,000

The necessity to validate the selfies with the selfies can lead to a cycle of posting and getting verified. It can result in the fact that the person is obsessed with social acceptance instead of self-development and real relations. Besides, the necessity to remain the same beautiful image and be consistent may cause anxiety and the feeling of the absence of something, of missing out (FOMO), as people have the desire to be that beautiful and perfect life that is promoted through social media (Team, 2015).

Understanding Narcissistic Behaviors in Social Media Environments

Narcissistic people, more than anybody else, feel compelled to be the centre of attention, even if it involves indulging in inappropriate, awkward, or bizarre interpersonal behaviours. This tendency can be related to the issue of obsession with clicking selfies, even risking one's own lives. The more narcissistic you are, the more likely you are to participate in exhibitionist behaviours online, which will only reinforce your narcissism. There are studies that show that social networking sites boost our self-esteem and individuality, if only temporarily.

In a report published by Lokniti - Centre for the Study Developing Societies (CSDS) the percentage of smartphone users has significantly increased compared to the usage of laptops or desktop or tablet. Due to this change, narcissism became a common occurrence, marked by excessive self-focused advertising and widespread celebrity adoration. Self-presentation changed to quantifiable metrics like friend numbers, likes, and the ubiquitous #selfie with the introduction of Web 2.0. Personal identity was essentially transformed into "social currency" as a result of this transition, which could be traded for



attention or social standing. As a result, the compulsive behavior of posting and frequently monitoring social media is fueled by the need for adoration. Three intertwined psychological and technological processes—visual self-objectification, algorithmic social comparison, and technology-driven communication—are used by social media platforms to promote and magnify narcissistic behaviors. When taken as a whole, these processes show how online narcissism develops as a dynamic, context-dependent behavior that is driven by both personal tendencies and the structural layout of digital platforms.

The self-presentation theory that evolved out of the study in social psychology, analyses the elaborate processes that individuals undergo in order to effectively provide and convey the ideal image that people would like to be known about them. This theory examines the basic drive and reasoning behind presentation of oneself in social circumstances to gain a better insight into the processes of impression management. The relevance of self-presentation theory is much evident in this digital era and when we are discussing the effect of selfie-culture. Sociologist Erving Goffman first developed the idea of self-presentation theory in his groundbreaking 1956 book ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’. Goffman was the first to develop a particular theory about how one presents oneself, which laid the groundwork for what is today known as impression management. This theory includes a range of tactics people use to influence how others see them. Self-promotion is one of them. It is the practice of emphasizing one's own strengths, accomplishments, and abilities in order to project competence and capability. Making oneself seem likeable to others by using compliments or flattery, usually in order to win their favor or approval is another technique. Exemplification or showing one's own moral rectitude or commitment to win others' respect and admiration is also a practice towards self - promotion. Intimidation, meaning the use of a perception of authority to coerce people into doing what one wants and presenting oneself as weak or in need in order to get help or compassion from others is known as supplication are also ways to maintain impression online (Murphy, 2024) .

Selfie Deaths - An Indian Scenario

The unprecedented proliferation of digital technologies as well as high-speed internet has radically restructured everyday human communication. Despite the democratization by these innovations of interaction and time-spatial compression, dynamic effects on the psychosocial dimension have come with it (Venema, 2015). The existence of this digital space is largely premised on the high volume of selfies production and sharing which has been so normalized and embedded in day-to-day life that it hardly raises the question of how the practice has influenced behaviour, thinking, and taking risks.



People, especially teenagers, now use selfies as a potent means of self-expression since cellphones and social media are ubiquitous. They go beyond simple conceit. Selfies frequently assist young people in exploring their identities, maintaining friendships, and feeling accepted by their peers. Meenakshi Gupta, a psychologist in Ahmedabad, provides a clear explanation of this stage: "Adolescence is a time of identity exploration. They are always questioning 'who they are', how they appear or if they fit in with the recent trends'. A selfie helps kids develop a sense of self and gives their appearance substance. This at times costs them their lives.

Sl No.	Date	Description
1.	11th Mar 2026	Man killed while taking selfies with elephant at Bengaluru's Bannerghatta park
2.	11th Feb 2026	Man electrocuted to death, minor burnt while taking selfies on moving train
3	25th Oct 2024	Labourer stomped by elephant in Maharashtra during selfie attempt
4	16th Feb 2024	Man killed after entering lion enclosure for photo at Tirupati Zoo
5	17th Nov 2023	Man fell from bridge while taking picture in UP's Saharanpur
6	22 Nov 2022	42-year-old died falling into ditch while taking cliff selfie
7	20 Aug 2022	Delhi tenant beat landlord with hammer, took selfie with body
8	8 Apr 2022	16-year-old electrocuted on train engine by high-tension wire
9	12 Jul 2021	11 people died taking selfies at 12th-century Jaipur fort
10	21 Feb 2021	21-year-old killed by wild elephant in Chhattisgarh attempting photo
11	12 Jan 2021	Teen electrocuted by high-tension wires after climbing train
12	19 Nov 2020	14-year-old died of electrocution on train engine in Tamil Nadu
13	31 Dec 2018	Student slipped into waterfall taking selfie at Odisha picnic spot
14	11 Jul 2018	Two died bleeding; passersby filmed instead of helping



A similar scenario is seen in other parts of the world as well. According to a report published in NDTV in October 2024, two social media influencers, Aline Tamara Moreira de Amorim (37) and Beatriz Tavares da Silva Faria (27), were tragically drowned in Brazil after their packed motorboat capsized. The incident took place off the coast of Sao Paulo, at an area known as the Devil's Throat. According to a 2016 Carnegie Mellon University study, since March 2014, there have been 127 "selfie deaths" worldwide. At Oregon's South Jetty Park Beach, Aurora Sheffel was standing on a log with companions when she unexpectedly fell, was trapped beneath the log, and drowned. The event happened in 2016. DaMontez Jones unintentionally shot himself in the chest in St. Louis that same year. After falling from a Norwegian cruise line in the Bahamas, a woman sustained injuries. All three victims were taking selfies (Bates, 2018).

The Filtered Reality

Selfies give people the freedom to represent themselves in a way that goes beyond the concept of beauty. Using social media, individuals with different backgrounds, body colour, colour, gender, and identities get the chance to share their personal images and stories (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017). Through this self-expression, one can conceivably have multitudes of users defying and disagreeing with the definition of beauty that has been driven by popular media in a rather one-dimensional manner. Movements that are inclined to promote individuality, introduce acceptance based on body positivity, natural look, and cultural diversity are likely to use selfies. But this has another angle too.

According to a recent survey by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, selfies are responsible for the surge in young people seeking plastic surgery, which led to a 10% increase in nose jobs, a 7% increase in hair transplants, and a 6% increase in eyelid surgery in 2013 over 2012. According to the survey, 58% of participants reported an increase in cosmetic surgery and "injectables" among patients under 30, indicating that the widespread use of social media is lowering the age at which people undergo plastic surgery. (Datta, 2023 & Vats, 2015). Their practices are inclined to focus on the socially desirable qualities of the skin smoothness, slim bodies or ideal shapes of faces. This is not only capable of giving unrealistic ideals of beauty but also comparison, dissatisfaction of the self-image and discouragement in the self.

The theory of technological determinism is worth mentioning here. A sociological theory known as "technological determinism" holds that technology is both the catalyst for and the engine of society's growth. The idea was first proposed by American social scientist Thorstein Veblen and is regarded by many theorists, notably European philosopher Karl Marx, as the distinguishing feature of contemporary



society. Fundamentally, technological determinism recognizes that our actions and behaviors are influenced by technology (JWU, 2025). This viewpoint has been discussed for decades in the fields of science and technology studies, sociology, and media and communication studies. Urgent considerations concerning how non-human forces are influencing our lives are raised by these digital systems' information-curating algorithms, social interaction-structuring platforms, and attention-grabbing user interfaces. This justifies the growing popularity of taking selfies with the emergence and increase in the number of social media users. However, the detrimental effects of technical advancement are not a product of the technology itself, but rather of people's improper use of it. The selfie deaths and the tendency to take life-threatening risk for clicking selfies is one such example (Almakaty, 2025).

The OTHER Story

The year 2020 saw how coronavirus struck the world. People all around the world were forced to stay inside their homes and maintain social distance (Seidman, 2020). Home quarantine was imposed on the affected ones. Karnataka residents under house quarantine have been asked to give the state government selfies every hour. Medical Education Minister Dr. K Sudhakar informed reporters that the government announced that all individuals who are under house quarantine must send selfies to the government every hour. This is to be done via a mobile application. Failure to do so, teams would approach such persons, and they will be subject to be relocated to quarantine camps built by the government (Kidwai, 2020). The National Jal Jeevan Mission, under the Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India, is organizing the "My Tap, My Pride – Story of Freedom Selfie Video Contest" throughout India to increase the impact of this transformative project. Participants are encouraged to use their home tap water connection to take a selfie or make a film on "Story of Freedom with Tap and Water" as the subject. The Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA), in association with MyGov India initiated a selfie contest to involve the public and raise awareness of scientific warehousing techniques. The Ministry of Defence organized a similar contest on the occasion of independence day. Selfie with India handloom was also initiated. While there is a pressing need to address the detrimental effects of selfies, the government can embrace this trend to foster a sense of connection and patriotism among Indian citizens.

Conclusion

There has been an increasing interest among scholars in the psychological implication of selfies particularly on the overuse and sharing of the same on chronic mental health. These findings concluded that self-presentation online may play a role in low self-esteem, social comparison and anxiety. Such pre-



emptiness may even trigger identity and self-concept inquiries within the social space in highly technological cultures where millennial generations have grown up (Gupta and Pooja, 2016).

Selfies are becoming the 21st century reality. Certain reality checks are important but which cannot be avoided altogether. This culture can be taken care of with the aid of different agencies and regulatory bodies. At least, there should be proper regulatory measures in checking such kinds of practices. It is not to halt or cancel the cultural shift and progress of selfies but attempt to create a boundary within which the selfie craziness may be put to a check. It may be an activity towards a more improved society in the youthful generation.

The mental health issue which has now been proved is directly related to excessive obsession of clicking selfies must be addressed too. Proper teaching about digital literacy is required. Digital literacy not only will boost job opportunities or narrow the digital divide gap or empower women and other marginalized sections of the society but can also lower the issue of selfitis. We need to give citizens the skills and self-assurance to utilize it if we are to genuinely create a "Digital India". Educational institutions, mobile-based learning, the public-private partnership and the use of digital ambassadors all can contribute to this.

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