



Vol. 14, No. 2, 2020

DOI: 10.2478/jgp-2020-0013

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Digitized technology and evolving selfie obsession among University of Port Harcourt students: A gendered culture?

ABSTRACT. Digitization is a prime globalized ideology in the 21st century high tech revolution. It essentially deals with automation of manual process to make room for easy documentation and sustainable data regime. Africa is an emerging digital domain with many of its young generation becoming keen lovers of Information Technology (IT), and many of the youth population fast becoming internet devotees, social and new media addicts. One of the trending fantasies, among the numerous exploitations and innovations of the new technology is selfie. **Selfie** is simply a self-photograph of a person's portrait by himself. This is possible by the use of smartphone or digital camera held out at arm's length by the person taking the snapshot. Presently, there is craze for digital identity among African youths. It is against this background that undergraduate students at the University of Port Harcourt were sampled purposively for deployment in this study. This study utilizes questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as instruments for data gathering in order to determine whether the use of selfies is more common to the male or female members of the African digital society. Finally, the study is guided by Uses and Gratification theory and Symbolic Interactionism Theory.

KEYWORDS: digitization, technology, selfie, obsession, gendered culture

Introduction

Digitization is pivotal aspect of the technologies of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). It is in fact a driving force of software technology. Africa, particularly Nigeria, is an emerging digital region with many of its youths and young-at-heart population becoming keen lovers of Information Technology (IT), others are devotees of the internet world, while yet many others are social and new media 'soft' addicts. Digitization, dig-

italization and digital information are three concepts that usually appear within same or similar technological domain. Digitization deals essentially with automation of manual processes into digital formations or creating digital formats of physical objects. Digitalization is about leveraging digital technologies and digitized data so as to transform business processes, while Digital information is that which is stored up in digital/electronic form ready to be manipulated or used by means of digital tools. Digital technology emanates from the fundamentals of logic. Digitization started off in the 1990's and by the early twenty-first century Africa has caught the swirling wind of digital technology: this was evident in the ready acceptance and adoption of digitalized mobile phones in the continent. For instance, "In 2011 Africa overtook Latin America to become the second biggest mobile market in the world after Asia, with 620 million mobile connections by 2011 alone. This has ensured that a lot of great innovation and creative ideas have emerged from the African continent" (Digital Skills Global, 2020, p. 1).

African digital culture is an emerging, evolving and developing digital revolution that explores and applies digitization process in the place of age-long analogue or paper file routine in business, government and official works. John Mancini (2015, p. 3) has said that "paper clogs up processes. Paper creates disruption to smooth information flows. Digital processes require digital information." Nations who take advantage of evolving technology will become more competitive in the global economy. Technology is a sophisticated system which can power up our country and facilitate the fixing of usually ailing economy. Until we allow digitization to really disrupt our 'business as usual syndrome' in our ways of thinking, communicating, business transactions and living, and until we allow digital revolution to prop us up the box, we may not actually come to know how to do things differently.

African nations with their potentially huge macroeconomic system are responsively adapting to digital operations, since that seems to be the way to go in the twenty-first century and onwards. For instance, Nigerian government gave until 2015 for all television houses and programmes to go digital. This is sequel to UN's Geneva's 2006 Agreement which set 17th June, 2015 as a dateline for countries using analogue television transmission to switch over to digital transmission. Digital technology is a pervading culture which transcends every aspect of life. According to Floyd (2015), in the preface to his book, 'Digital Fundamentals', "Digital technol-

ogy pervades almost everything in our daily lives. For example, cell phones and other types of wireless communications, television, radio, process controls, automotive electronics, consumer electronics, aircraft navigation—to mention only a few applications—depend heavily on digital electronics” (Floyd, 2015, p. 9). Floyd further stated that “A strong grounding in the fundamentals of digital technology will prepare you for the highly skilled jobs of the future” (Floyd, 2015, p. 9). He also noted that “As digital information, the signals are not subject to real-world analogue interference. Real-world physical problems have no effect on the television signal when it is digitized” (Floyd, 2015, preface). From the ongoing discourse it is therefore deductible to forecast that Africa’s digital future holds much hope for its fast-pacing technological strides, especially when its youths’ ingenuity is adequately harnessed and appropriated.

Self-smart photographing: A brief historical review of selfie

Selfie is a photoshoot of a person’s portrait taken by oneself. Modern selfies are usually in the digital format. This is possible by the use of smart-phone, photo electronic device such as webcam or digital camera held out at arm’s length (with or without a selfie stick) by the person taking the snapshot and routing this photo to loved ones or the general public via the New- or social- media. Selfie could be taken to keep memory of any event in a person’s life, e.g., to mark a birthday or graduation ceremony. More importantly, it is majorly useful as a digital communication via major online social media platforms such as the Facebook and Instagram. Mary Bellis, in an online article stated that:

Selfie is the slang term for self-portrait, a photograph you take of yourself, usually taken using a mirror or with a camera held at arm’s length. The act of taking and sharing selfies has become widely popular due to digital cameras, the internet, the ubiquity of social media platforms like Facebook and, of course, because of people’s endless fascination with their own image (Bellis, 2020, p.1).

To further lay emphasis on the status of this emergent technological advancement of taking photography of oneself, Bellis noted that ‘the word “selfie” was even chosen as the “Word of the Year” in 2013 by the Oxford

English Dictionary, which has the following entry for the word: “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website” (Bellis, 2020, p. 1).

Selfie's history is however traced to Robert Cornelius (an amateur chemist and photography enthusiast from Philadelphia, U.S.A.), who probably took the first photographic shot of his own image all by himself in 1839 (Bellis, 2020, p. 1). Robert Cornelius wrote on the back of the self-taken image “The first light Picture ever taken 1839” (The Public Domain Review, n.d). Understandably, selfies belong to the generation of earliest photographs taken of humans, although there was no online transmission of the selfie at the time. Also, in 1914, a 13-year-old Russian, Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna was said to have taken self-portrait ‘using a Kodak Brownie box camera (invented in 1900) and sent the photograph to a friend with the following note, “I took this picture of myself looking at the mirror. It was very hard as my hands were trembling.” Nikolaevna appears to have been the first teenager to take a selfie’ (Bellis, 2020, p. 1).

There is a claim by Australia as being the originator of digital (modern day) selfie. It is said that “in September 2001, a group of Australians created a website and uploaded the first digital self-portraits onto the internet. On 13 September 2002, the first recorded published use of the term «selfie» to describe a self-portrait photograph occurred on the Australian internet forum (ABC Online)” (Bellis, 2020, p. 2). The anonymous poster (probably a drunk) wrote the following, along with posting a selfie of himself: “Um, drunk at a mates 21st, I tripped over and landed lip first (with front teeth coming a very close second) on a set of steps. I had a hole about 1cm long right through my bottom lip. And sorry about the focus, it was a **selfie**” (Bellis, 2020, p. 2). However, a twist to the argument of who originated selfie emerges from the claims of Lester Wisbrod, a Hollywood cameraman of being the first to “take celebrity selfies, (a self-taken photo of himself and a celebrity) and has been doing so since 1981” (Bellis, 2020, p. 2).

These Three Research Questions were devised to direct the proceedings of this study:

1. Is Selfie making more appeal to students of the University of Port Harcourt than conventional photographs?
2. Do female students of the University of Port Harcourt take Selfies more than their fellow male students?
3. Are more youths into Selfies than adults?

Purpose of the study

The study aims to ascertain the attitude of male and female students of University of Port Harcourt toward Selfie indulgence and digital culture. The Study also aims to find out the degree of involvement of male students at the University of Port Harcourt in relation to the female members of the same Institution. This study also sets out to determine whether or not the students of the University of Port Harcourt are getting obsessed with this exciting digital culture known as selfie. The study also sets out to find out the degree of awareness of selfie as a trendy socializing force within the University of Port Harcourt community.

Theoretical framework for the study

This study is hinged on Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and Symbolic Interactionism Theory. 'Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) is an audience-centred approach that focuses on what people do with media, as opposed to what media does to people' (David, 2016, p. 1).

Cynthia Vinney (2019) asserts that the Uses and Gratification Theory is credited to the works of Jay Blumler & Elihu in 1974. She traces the origin of Uses and gratifications to the 1940s 'as scholars began to study why people choose to consume various forms of media.' According to her, the few decades that followed after the 1940s had researches on gratification concentrate on 'the gratifications media users sought.' Conversely, the 1970s had researchers shifting their focus to 'the outcomes of media use and the social and psychological needs that media gratified' (Vinney, 2019, p. 1). In her submission, 'Uses and gratifications theory asserts that people use media to gratify specific wants and needs. Unlike many media theories that view media users as passive, uses and gratifications sees users as active agents who have control over their media consumption' (Vinney, 2019, p. 1). In order to drive home this theory as it relates to media users and the gratification they get; it is important to understand the underlying principles that drive media users as explained thus:

Uses and gratifications theory relies on two principles about media users. First, it characterizes media users as active in their selection of the media they consume. From this perspective, people don't use media passively. They are engaged and motivated in their media selections. Second, people are aware of their reasons for selecting different media options. They rely on their know-

ledge of their motivations to make media choices that will help them meet their specific wants and needs.

On the basis of those principles, uses and gratifications goes on to outline five assumptions:

Media use is goal-directed. People are motivated to consume media.

Media is selected based on the expectation that it will satisfy specific needs and desires.

Media influence on behaviour is filtered through social and psychological factors. Thus, personality and social context impact the media choices one makes and one's interpretation of media messages.

Media are in competition with other forms of communication for an individual's attention. For example, an individual may choose to have an in-person conversation about an issue instead of watching a documentary about the issue. People are usually in control of media and therefore are not particularly influenced by it (Vinney, 2019, p. 1).

Explaining the pivotal role of the theory in relation to media technologies, Vinny emphasises the importance in research on uses and gratifications theory as it aids in "understanding people's motivations for choosing media and the gratifications they get out of it" (Vinney, 2019, p. 1).

To bring it down to this study, people must be seeing selfie as a medium to express themselves to their world as well as a means of entertainment. This aligns with Peirce's assertion that "the Uses and Gratifications Theory is based on the idea that media audiences are active rather than passive, meaning they do not only receive information, but also unconsciously attempt to make sense of the message in their own context" (Turney, n.d., p. 2).

The second theory undergirding this study is Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Otherwise referred to as symbolic interaction perspective, symbolic interactionism constitutes a key framework of the sociology theory. Ashley Crossman (2020, p. 1) asserts that 'this perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and build upon in the process of social interaction.' Although symbolic interactionism traces its origins to Max Weber's assertion that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world, the American philosopher George Herbert Mead introduced this perspective to American sociology in the 1920s' (Crossman, 2020, p. 1).

In his work 'The Socialization Process in a Brazilian State-Owned Company,' Roberto Aylmer (2019) relays the origin of The Symbolic interaction-

ism theory (SIT) to the 'seminal work of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), based on Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) and John Dewey (1859–1952) (ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.). He credits the coinage of the term to one of Mead's student known as Herbert Blumer (1900–1987). Aylmer makes reference to Ashworth's 1997 claim that 'Mead assumes that symbols develop the mind, and they are used as means for thinking and communicating' (ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.). To complement the source of this theory, the reference below however lays credence to Mead's pivotal role in its evolution:

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered a founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it (LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). Mead's student, Herbert Blumer, coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that you learned that books are good or important in the interactions you had with family, friends, school, or church; maybe your family had a special reading time each week, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort (Symbolic Interactionist Theory, 2012, p. 1).

A deeper insight into the Symbolic interaction theory is evident in Todd Spencer, Brandon Burr & Daniel Hubler (2019) work titled: *Problematic Bed Time Media-Use and Couple Sexual Satisfaction*. In their work, Spencer et al. (2019) made reference to Schenk and Holman (1980) explanation that 'the meanings derived from social interaction theory provide the foundation for evaluation of self, other people, and objects' (as cited in ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.). Spencer et al. (2019) also relayed to (Blumer, 1969) claim that 'individuals ascribe meaning to everyday reciprocal interactions with others and their environment' (as cited in ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.).

They further simplified this theory through their reference to Aksan et al. (2009); Blumer (1969); Schenk and Holman (1980) explanation that "Symbolic interaction theory posits that our interactions with others and our environment provide the foundation for evaluation of self, other people, and objects" (as cited in ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.).

This goes to show that the Symbolic interactionism theory has its focus on human relationship, especially among individuals within a community or society. Thus people use language and symbols as means of communication to make a meaningful living hence “communication—the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon” (Symbolic Interactionist Theory, 2012, n.p.). In sum, we can deduce from the various views above that symbolic interactionism theory is centred around human behaviour and the meanings we derive from our interaction or environment, especially through the use of language and symbols. It has to do with the way we read meaning, the way we learn as well as interact.

Below are some ideas promoted by Symbolic Interactionists:

1. Humans are not products of society, but rather the creators of society. They define their environments and shape their own behaviour.
2. All of society is a series of interactions. Therefore, to understand human behaviour, social psychologists should make human interaction their main focus of study.
3. Self-concept is the result of how a person thinks other people view him or her based on the messages he or she receives (Symbolic Interactionism Theory online, 2019, p. 1).

Therefore, it goes right to state that selfie connotes a symbolism of self-concept and acceptance that comes through as people react or respond to another's pictures posted online in social media. It is a kind of image-selling and personality canvassing or advertisement to the public of whoever cares to look-at-and-appraise.

African digital culture and Nigerian youths: Empirical review of relevant literature

It seems that the craze for identity parade, social window-(s)hopping in the digital space and participation in the online community created in the social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Reddit, Badoo, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Medium, Instagram, Snapchat, WeChat, Flickr, Google+, Pinterest, MySpace, etc, has ensnared large youth population of Africa urban and sub-urban settlements and trapped them in the maze of

selfie digital culture. Hand-held personal digital agents such as iPhones, android and smartphones are specialized for selfies photographing and can carry out online transaction through global network to send your pictures to friends and relatives via social media platforms. Therefore, selfie has come to be essentially online phenomenon. Without gainsaying, the development of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) has been a tremendous quantum boost to Africa's technological drive.

According to Mourdoukoutas (2017, p. 2), the key to Africa's achieving its own digital revolution has been innovation at every step, with engineers adapting technology to suit the specific needs and dynamics of the continent instead of the other way around. About 80.8% of Africans own a mobile phone, according to 2016 data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations agency for information and communication technologies. This is a 10% jump from 71% in 2014. The Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, said the number of active mobile phone lines in the country rose to 144 million in December 2017. This showed an increase of 2,731,273 lines, from 142 million recorded in November 2017. The commission said the active lines moved to 144,631,678 in December compared to 141,900,405 in November 2017 Mourdoukoutas (2017, p. 2). The report said the number of fixed wired/wireless in December was 139,344 as against 137,190 in November, showing an increase of 2,154 lines, and the number of Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) was 70,926 in December, while it was 61, 488 in November—an increase of 5,977. NCC disclosed this in its monthly Subscribers Operator Data (SOD) posted on its website (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2-3).

Mobile phones coupled with Internet access have allowed governments to put their services online and digitize their records. Rwanda bills itself as the continent's leader in complete digitization. For the past 15 years, the country has been working to digitize its education, health care and economy, and now it is pushing to be Africa's first cashless society in the public sector; it is already paying its government employees electronically. Mourdoukoutas (2017) has linked Africa's technological ascension, in part, to submarine Internet cables lining the continent's coasts. He noted that Internet access has become more affordable and has increased in quality since the first cable in 2002, and that high-bandwidth undersea cables enabled countries to upgrade from 2G to 3G technologies, and even 4G/LTE in Addis Ababa and Nairobi. GSMA foresees 80% of the African

continent being connected to 5G internet networks by 2022 (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3).

Africa remains the fastest-growing mobile phone market in the world, and is on track to have 725 million smartphone users by 2020, according to a 2016 report by the Global System for Mobile Communications Association or GSMA—a trade body representing the interests of mobile operators worldwide (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3). The majority of cell phone users in Africa are not using smartphones. Across seven countries—Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda—only 15% of respondents reported having a smartphone in a 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center, a “fact tank” based in the United States that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. Instead, until recently, many Africans used “feature phones”—lower-cost mobile phones with limited capabilities (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3). According to GSMA, mobile services accounted for 6.7% of the continent’s GDP in 2015, largely due to their ability to stimulate financial development (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3). For example, farmers can now, by sending a message to a code, find out market prices for crops before going to market, says Ernest Acheampong, a research analyst at the African Technology Policy Studies Network, based in Nairobi. Mr. Acheampong told Africa Renewal: “Mobile phones have really changed the face of how we do business in Africa” (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 3).

Many a mobile phone in use in African, including Nigeria are feature phones that have internet facilities in them. The internet platform has made these phones endeared to the youth population, who find it easy to get into social media space for interaction and socialization with loved ones and friends. It enables these young folks to seek out and to belong to an online community that best suit their personalities and interests, e.g. Tea Party Community—an online dating-focused community provided by Badoo social network. The cell phone has contributed invaluablely in transforming and transporting Africa into digital sphere, because it provides internet platform which is both easy and convenient to access, anytime and anywhere there is connection. To add to a conscious speedy digitization and digitalization process, some African nations are running a technological race of digitizing both their economy, finance, power, media and broadcasting, security systems and the public services.

Valentine Obi, the Managing Director/CEO of eTranzact International Limited, in a symposium organized at Nigeria-South Africa Chamber of

Commerce, Lagos, Nigeria, advocates the joint efforts of the government, mobile phone makers and marketers in making smart phones available and affordable and adaptable to rural communities to ensure the use of mobile technology system in the advancement of the people collective economy and individual potentialities.

Speaking on the development of smartphones in west Africa especially on how it relates to one's status, Valentine Obi remarked that 'in year 2000, I bought a cell phone for N156,000 and, rather than being a device for communication, it was a device to show status symbol' (Innovation Village, 2015, n.p.). He however observed that from day to day, Nigerian users are migrating from feature phones to smart phones. (Innovation Village, 2015, n.p.).

Youths of Nigerian society happen to readily fall in love with mobile applications on phones, which make it easier for them to adapt to emerging digitized culture: every communication and messaging, including socials, is easily carried out via handset phone. It is becoming commonplace to see primary and secondary school children, especially from the high and middle socio-economic class to be in possession of at least a feature phone. Some have two at a time. Therefore, it is safe to assert that apart from computer system, mobile phone drives our modern technological culture and it easily defines the lifestyle and social preferences of Nigerian youth. This is where selfie's socializing sensation makes a bold statement. Precisely, the advent and availability of mobile phones with built-in internet applications has been solely responsible for the frequent and large-scale online communications and exchange among Nigerian youths with their counterparts nationally and globally.

Gender and selfie culture: Do more women take selfies than men?

It is possible that different cultures and peoples have not same gender experience in how they adapt to selfie technoculture. There could be different folks in different geographical locations with different gender understanding and practice of selfie culture. According to Sparks (2015, p. 1), "Young British men share twice as many selfies as women the same age, it can be revealed, with over a third of males vainly posting five or more self-portraits a week. There are around eleven million 18- to 30-year-olds in the UK and they posted a billion selfies in 2014, according to smart-

phone maker HTC, which polled 2,000 people on their habits. The average person in that age group posts over 100 selfies a year. But men are seemingly twice as vain as women” (Sparks, 2015, p. 1).

Sparks, continues, by saying that the main reason for men to take selfies was to show off or attract the opposite sex, the survey revealed. A quarter of men polled share selfies to make current or previous partners jealous, and one in ten did it to make themselves more desirable to potential partners. In comparison, half that number of women take selfies to make ex or partners jealous (just 13 per cent), and only one in 15 (seven per cent) take pictures to make themselves more desirable to potential partners. The main reason women take selfies is to share what they're doing with friends (35 per cent) and to record memories (26 per cent). But men and women are equally as likely to share selfies to show off (19 per cent) (Sparks, 2015, p. 1). He further gives detail of the gender parity in the outcome of the research thus:

As well as taking more selfies, men are far more likely to show off their bodies than women—three quarters (76 per cent) of male selfies are shots of their body, compared to less than half of womens' (45 per cent). Women are more likely to share facial selfies (55 per cent) whereas men are most likely to show off their chest (20 per cent), followed by their torso or six pack (17 per cent). However, 12 per cent of women who are posting selfies of their bodies admitted to revealing their breasts. Almost as many have taken “hot dog” shots of their legs (11 per cent) and over a quarter of a million women in the UK have channelled Kim Kardashian's “selfie”, with one in 20 women sharing shots of their bottom (six per cent) (Sparks, 2015, p. 2).

Sedgewick, Flath & Elias (2017) in the abstract to their study which was published online on 21 April 2017 give further details of the diverse ways the male and female gender utilize the features in phones to manipulate their selfie to suit their purposes.

When taking a self-portrait or “selfie” to display in an online dating profile, individuals may intuitively manipulate the vertical camera angle to embody how they want to be perceived by the opposite sex. Concepts from evolutionary psychology and grounded cognition suggest that this manipulation can provide cues of physical height and impressions of power to the viewer which are qualities found to influence mate-selection. We predicted that men would orient selfies more often from below to appear taller (i.e., more powerful) than the viewer, and women, from an above perspective to appear shorter

(i.e., less powerful). A content analysis was conducted which coded the vertical orientation of 557 selfies from profile pictures on the popular mobile dating application, Tinder (Sedgewick, Flath & Elias, 2017, Abstract).

Consequently, the research showed a gender difference in the use of selfie indicating that “men’s selfies were angled significantly more often from below, whereas women were angled more often from above. Our findings suggest that selfies presented in a mate-attraction context are intuitively or perhaps consciously selected to adhere to ideal mate qualities. Further discussion proposes that biological or individual differences may also facilitate vertical compositions of selfies” (Sedgewick, Flath & Elias, 2017, Abstract).

Furthermore, the research revealed that “selfies exhibited in online dating profile photos were predicted to vary by vertical camera angle depending on the sex of the individual. Our results revealed that profile photos of men and women users of the mobile application, Tinder, exhibited opposing vertical biases; the camera’s perspective was presented more often from below for men, and above for women. These findings simultaneously demonstrate a mechanical bias of selfies within a mate attraction context, as profile photos were not only chosen, but also taken by the Tinder user” (Sedgewick, Flath & Elias, 2017, n.p.).

Dhir et al. (2016), carried out a study titled: Do Age and Gender Differences Exist in Selfie-Related Behaviours? According to them, scholars in recent times have started studying behaviours that are selfie-related and they lay emphasis on women, but much is not known when it comes to differences in age and gender as relates to selfie-taking and posting patterns. In the bid to address this gap, they carried out an online survey comprising 3763 Norwegians who are social media users. The study, which span various categories of person: adolescents of age 12–19, young adults from age 20–30, and adults of 31–50 however helped to offer the first empirical evidence on how these three categories of people or age group behave differently in relation to selfie.

The results of the study show the following:

1. ‘Females were more likely to take personal and group selfies, post personal selfies, crop photos and use photographic filters compared to males,’
2. ‘Adolescents were found to be more likely than young adults to take own and group selfies, post own selfies, and use photographic filters,’ ‘Young adults were more likely to take own and group selfies, post and edit photos than older adults.’ Finally, ‘the predictive effect of age was

stronger among women than among men regarding selfie taking, posting and editing behaviour' (Dhir et al., 2016).

Is selfie a digital obsession or a mere trend? Is there any medical or psychological proof of selfie obsession?

Selfie is a welcome digital and technological phenomenon because of its online advantage, easy-to-produce and share mechanism, simplicity of operation, aesthetic appeal, timesaving and less-expensive production. Selfie is fast becoming a universal digital phenomenon and is therefore trendy. Youths as well as adults, professionals across the urban and semi-urban divides, males as well as females, people of all occupations and social class across board have come to be associated directly or indirectly with selfie revolution. However, abuse could be a common snare, especially when too much time and attention is given to selfies at the expense of other more important issues of life and business.

Selfie lovers and enthusiasts need self-discipline so as to avoid obsessive or compulsive behaviour or personality disorder or perfect pose problem resulting from ideal cisgender female body syndrome. A student who regularly and indiscreetly does selfie at a time the fellow should be studying or attending to class work is already in for trouble and, therefore, raises a counselling concern. The fellow should be referred to a counsellor or psychologist for possible help. The fellow is already distracted, and attention deficit to real and more meaningful business is obvious. The concern for the mental health of selfie users is raised by Bellis (2020) when she noted that:

medical authorities have begun to associate the taking of too many selfies as a potentially unhealthy sign of mental health issues. Take the case of 19-year-old Danny Bowman, who attempted suicide after failing to take what he considered the perfect selfie. Bowman was spending most of his waking hours taking hundreds of selfies everyday, losing weight and dropping out of school in the process. Becoming obsessed with taking selfies is often a sign of body dysmorphic disorder, an anxiety disorder about personal appearance. Danny Bowman was diagnosed with this condition (Bellis, 2020, p. 1).

Bellis' observation calls for caution for the mental state of selfie users to be checked when such obsession on how perfect they look takes toll on their social lives or academic performances.

Methodology for the study

The research design for this study is ex-post facto design and phenomenological model (of qualitative research). This method utilizes interviews, observation and surveys to gather information from subjects. Phenomenology is highly concerned with how participants feel about things during an event or activity. The goal of the phenomenological method of research is to describe how any one participant experiences a specific event.

Population of the study, sampling technique, instruments for data gathering and administration of the instruments

The study's population consists of all the male and female students at the University of Port Harcourt who were available to respond to the twenty-three-item questionnaire titled, "YOU AND SELFIE INVENTORY", and all those who were gathered for different Focus Group Discussion. They are drawn ex-post facto from forty-four academic departments in the University of Port Harcourt. Content and face validity of the instrument was carried out. Purposive sampling technique was used to determine those that make up the sample for the study. Two hundred male and female students (102 males and 98 females) of the University of Port Harcourt were pooled as sample size for the study. Their age ranges are: 16–18years, 19–22years, 23–26years, 27–29 years, 30+ years. Those who were taking selfie at the time were selected together with those who are prone to doing selfies. The researchers administered the research instrument to the respondents personally and collated the responses personally, also. Faulty responses were sorted out and discarded. Three hundred and sixty questionnaires were given out, of which two hundred and twenty-two questionnaire scripts were retrieved.

Method of data analysis

Simple percentage (%) was used to analyze the data collated from respondents to the administered questionnaire. Five Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sections were also involved in the study. Analysis of data was in response to the Research Questions raised earlier in the work. Thus:

Research Question 1: Is Selfie making more appeal to students at the University of Port Harcourt than conventional photograph?

Table 1. Shows the percentage rating of responses of students at the University of Port Harcourt on whether the prefer taking selfies to conventional photographing, as contained in items 1–10 of the questionnaire

S/N	Items	Number of Respondents			Number of Respondents			Remark
		Males		Females		No Resp.		
		Yes	No	Yes	No			
1	I like selfie	79 (77%)	22 (21.6%)	1 (0.98%)	95 (96.94%)	3 (3.06%)	-	77% male students and 96.94% of female students like selfie: this is high stake. More females than males like selfie in the University of P.H.
2	I cannot do without selfies	59 (57.8%)	38 (37.25%)	4 (3.92%)	78 (79.60%)	17 (17.35%)	3 (3.06%)	57.8% of male undergraduates cannot do without selfie, while more female students (79.60%) cannot do without selfie
3	To me, selfie is a lifestyle and a fun	72 (70.59%)	12 (11.76%)	18 (17.64%)	62 (63.27%)	11 (11.22%)	25 (25.5%)	70.59% male says selfie is a lifestyle and fun; 63.27% female undergraduates accepts that selfie is a lifestyle and fun
4	I take selfies often	58 (56.86%)	38 (37.25%)	6 (5.88%)	77 (78.57%)	18 (18.37%)	3 (3.06%)	More females (78.57%) take selfies than males undergraduates (56.86%)
5	I prefer a particular selfie pose/angle	52 (50.98%)	17 (16.66%)	33 (32.35%)	36 (36.73%)	29 (29.59%)	33 (33.67%)	50.98% of males says "yes" to certain selfie pose, while 36.73% of females prefer certain selfie pose

6	I have favourite filter to edit my selfies	41 (40.19%)	60 (58.82%)	1 (0.98%)	45 (45.91%)	12 (12.24%)	41 (41.83%)	40.19% males edit selfies with certain filters, while 45.91% of females edit their selfie.
7	I have not visited photo studio a long time because of selfies	71 (69.6%)	13 (29.4%)	18 (17.65%)	50 (51.02%)	29 (29.59%)	19 (19.39%)	69.6% male students have not gone to photo studio a long time, while 51.02% females have not patronized conventional photographers because of selfie.
8	I think that selfie is an indispensable technological innovation	46 (45.10%)	16 (15.68%)	40 (39.22%)	40 (40.82%)	22 (24.45%)	36 (36.73%)	45.10% male says that selfie is vital tech innovation. 40.82% females accent to the same opinion of selfie's technological relevance
9	I don't print my selfies: I send them online	14 (13.72%)	80 (78.43%)	8 (7.84%)	62 (65.26%)	20 (20.41%)	14 (14.29%)	Only 13.72% males send their selfies online, while 65.26% females send their selfies online
10	I take conventional photos in addition to selfies	40 (39.2%)	45 (44.11%)	17 (16.67%)	25 (25.51%)	60 (61.22%)	13 (13.27%)	39.2% males take conventional photos in addition to selfies; 25.51% females take both selfies and conventional photos
Total Scores		532	341	146	475	221	187	

Research Question 2: Do female students of the University of Port Harcourt take Selfies more than their male counterparts?

Table 2. Shows the percentage rating of responses of students of the University of Port Harcourt on whether female students do more selfies than their male counterparts, as contained in items 11–19 of the questionnaire

S/N	Items	Number of Respondents						Remark
		Males			Females			
		Yes	No	No Resp	Yes	No	No Resp.	
11	Selfie is effective means of communication to male and female students equally	61 (59.80%)	34 (33.33%)	7 (6.86%)	68 (69.39%)	15 (15.31%)	15 (15.31%)	69.39% of females says that selfie is effective communication channel, while mere 59.80% males says the same
12	Female students send their selfies to the social more than male students	61 (59.80%)	34 (33.33%)	7 (6.86%)	68 (69.39%)	15 (15.31%)	15 (15.31%)	59.8% males send their selfie to the social media, while 69.3% females do likewise
13	Males take selfies when the need arises, while females take selfies whenever they look good	21 (20.59%)	34 (33.33%)	21 (20.59%)	55 (56.12%)	19 (19.39%)	24 (24.49%)	56.12% female undergraduates take selfies more often than only 20.59% males who take selfies based on need

14	Males students more than females' welcome selfies as necessary technological culture	57 (55.88%)	28 (27.45%)	17 (16.67%)	60 (61.22%)	19 (19.39%)	19 (19.39%)	55.88% males see selfie as necessary tech culture, while 61.22% females regard selfie as important tech culture
15	Female students take selfies more than male students	90 (88.24%)	4 (3.92%)	8 (7.84%)	54 (55.10%)	24 (24.49%)	20 (20.41%)	55.10% females agree that more females do selfies than males, while 88-24% males say that more females take selfie than males do
16	Female students are getting obsessed with selfies more than male students	68 (66.67%)	14 (13.73%)	20 (19.61%)	43 (43.88%)	38 (38.78%)	17 (17.35%)	66.67% males admitted that females are getting obsessed with selfie, while 43.88% females admit so
17	Taking selfies hold more advantages for females than for male students	55 (53.92%)	42 (41.18%)	5 (4.90%)	55 (56.12%)	35 (35.71%)	8 (8.16%)	53.93% male says that selfies benefit females more; 56.12% females admit that assumption

18	Female students more than males need to be counselled on control over selfie indulgence	53 (51.96%)	28 (27.45%)	21 (20.59%)	47 (47.96%)	20 (20.41%)	31 (0.32%)	More males (51.96%) than fewer females (47.96%) accept that female students more than males need counselling on selfie
19	Female students understand the concept and culture of selfie more than male students	96 (94.12%)	4 (3.92%)	2 (1.96%)	44 (44.89%)	37 (37.76%)	17 (17.35%)	94.1% males and 44.89% females claim that females understand selfie thing more
Total scores		476	308	108	494	222	166	

Research Question 3: Are more youths into selfies than adults?

Table 3. Shows the percentage rating of responses of students of the University of Port Harcourt on whether youths are comparatively more into selfies than adult members of society, as contained in items 20–23 of the questionnaire

S/N	Items	Number of Respondents						Remark
		Males			Females			
		Yes	No	No Resp.	Yes	No	No Resp.	
20	Youths take more selfies than adults	91 (89.22%)	6 (5.88%)	5 (4.90%)	65 (66.33%)	21 (21.43%)	12 (12.24%)	89.22% males and 66.33% females claim that selfie is more of youth thing than adults
21	Smart phones and androids have done more harm than good to youths	46 (45.10%)	43 (42.16%)	13 (12.75%)	56 (57.14%)	27 (27.55%)	15 (15.31%)	57.14% females and 45.10% females admit that smart phones and android phones are engaging the youths badly
22	I admit that selfies can be distracting to the youths more than the adults	69 (67.64%)	27 (26.47%)	6 (5.88%)	63 (64.29%)	25 (25.5%)	10 (10.20%)	67.64% of males and 64.29% female students admit that selfie can distract the youths much more than adults
23	I sincerely think that students of the University of Port Harcourt really need some counselling on the use of selfies	71 (69.6%)	14 (13.73%)	7 (6.86%)	52 (53.06%)	30 (30.6%)	16 (16.33%)	69.6% males and 53.06% females insist that Uniport students need counselling on the use of selfies, generally
Total scores		277	90	31	236	103	53	

Analyses of response from five Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Participants at the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were derived from 6 departments of the University of Port Harcourt. These include: Department of Theatre and Film studies, Department of Music, Department of Geography and Environmental Management; Department OF Pharmacy AND Pharmaceutical Technology; and a cluster of students from Accounting Department; and Biochemistry and Technology Department.

The researchers used focus groups to derive answers from the query of this research "whether selfie is a gender issue." Five groups were conducted with students from four departments, and another group was a mixed-up of two departments. The discussions took place between August 7th and September 10th, 2018. Participants were a mixture of both gender to create room for divergent views and reactions from the students. Discussions were video-recorded and later transcribed and documented for analysis. The discussions were anchored and moderated by one of the researchers at different instances.

Number of participants in the various focus groups varied, ranging from 4–14 students, of both gender ranging from year one to final year students, and graduating students. These students were mostly those who are interested in taking selfies. Focus group was open with the question: "Which gender like taking selfie the most and why"? This is to create a forum for interaction between the male and female students and to cite examples of those who are engulfed in this practice.

Selected responses from Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

These responses here are a selection from the focus groups which reflect the opinions of the students regarding the issues raised in this research.

In responding to the question of which *gender takes selfie the most and how frequent* they take it, their responses vary.

Female: "Both male and female take selfie but the female takes more because we like pictures, it comes to us naturally."

Female: "There's one of my friends, his name is Steve, whenever we are taking selfie, Steve must join us, he's a male."

Generally, the males say they rarely and a few take it often, while the female take it spontaneously. Females' responses: "everyday, anytime," and "whenever I see anyone appreciate my looks, I would just take a selfie to see a full view of myself." Male's responses include: "Occasionally," "It's like a spirit, it comes," "not as the female who take it as a habit." Another female consent to this assertion: "Selfie is not planned. It's an act that actually happens impromptu. Like you just finished dressing and you just feel like let me just take it, and you already have a good phone; ... that's why it's often."

Question: Why do you like selfie?

Female: "I enjoy it and I feel happy whenever I take a selfie of myself. I feel it's very beautiful more than when someone else takes a photograph of me."

Female: "When we just have fresh make-up, instead of waiting for some time, sweating and everything, and your face becomes oily, at that moment when it still looks fresh, we like to snap."

Female: "It's stress free, it can be taken anytime, it has no time boundaries, you don't pay any photographer to snap you."

Other females say it's "for fun", "selfie is a way of self-love, self-acceptance, and for memory sake, you know we may not see ourselves again but at least, we would tag each other on Facebook".

They all agree that they can take as many pictures as possible and select the best pictures and use filter to their desired image.

Responses by males include: "We take selfie for posterity sake," "the cost of snapping pictures make us take selfie," "for fun," "We do it, so it doesn't seem we don't belong." While another male added that a lot of students indulge in selfie due to the recent development in social media and online, social charting networks and platforms.

Both male and female agree that *selfie is an advantageous technological innovation*; reasons include:

Male: "Personally, I like taking pictures. I have a picture at every stage of my life. For me, that technology is a plus, for others it's a distraction."

Female: "I think selfie is a good innovation because through that you see yourself, how you have advanced, how you changed, positively or negatively. It will help your self-worth, in the sense that people see themselves; it helps them to reflect on who they really are. Many women out there suffer from inferiority complex and I think it's a way to show them that they are beautiful."

In response to *What they do with their selfies*, reactions differ: Both sexes agree they post them online. Male: "I post them to the social media." Female: "I post them to the world to see how beautiful I am, then I get 'like' from it. I also get money with it."

According to this female, the more 'likes' she gets, the more she makes money. Another female remarked that she won cash from an online holiday contest in her pharmacy school, she says: "I got a cash prize: The pictures were posted on our Facebook page, people voted on the pictures. Whoever got the highest vote got the prize."

Another female says, "If you usually post your selfie pictures on social media, you update people on where you are or what you are up to at the moment." Both genders agree that they rarely visit a photo studio and rarely print their selfie pictures.

In response to the question whether *taking selfie has become a culture among students and if it's a gendered culture*. They agreed it has become a culture among students, and that males and females practice selfie culture. A female observed that they take selfie to capture the moment because: "You don't need anybody to help you capture the moment; you can just take your phone and click the picture. So, I think the girls, the female folk does it more than the male. Generally, it's for everyone." Another female explains why it has become a culture especially among the females since they like taking selfie when their make-up is fresh on their faces because they are very conscious of their faces coupled with the fact that selfie may help hide unpleasant body features like "big tummy", "the K leg," and "fat body," and "to show a new environment."

In response to the question *whether selfie has become an obsession among students and a distraction to their studies*, females reactions include: "We like fun... it's in our gene. We can't escape it, so that's why it is more with us. It's not liked an obsession per se;" "It's not an obsession, it's something that gives you joy. If you were to be young, you would love to take it every day, just go with the trend;" and "young people love what is trending."

In responding to the query *whether older people take selfie*, the students agree that older people also take selfie but not as rampant as youths do. They give reasons why younger people indulge in selfie more than adults.

A female student responds: "we are young people, we are youths, that's what trends on social media. Sometimes we want our friends to see us. Sometimes we want them to say, okay, look at how good we look, and we want them to say 'you are looking good...' We are young people, so, we

want them to know we are here, we are there. Maybe when we go out, we just want to put the picture for them to comment 'I was there'."

Another female responds that when a group of friends wear a dress by one designer, they would take a selfie: "We snap and tag the person that so, so, so person made this dress!" "It brings customers to her."

Another female comments: "Young people love fun, young people love keeping exciting moments, so you want to see elderly people like mothers that have children and businesses to take care of taking selfie, they do that, but it won't be as much as young people that, when they are with their friends, they will just say 'let us take this.'"

A male student argues that older people take selfie because they have good phones.

A female argues that selfie can be taken on the dying bed: "I took selfie with my dying dad before he gave up," and she captured the moment for future reference.

Discussion of findings

Selfie has 'inherent' limitation of taking mostly the upper body and, especially the face, and not the full image or view of the individual.

Findings show that the males don't really have any intentions for taking selfie but for fun while the females take it to keep a memory, to save online and update their pictures on Facebook, to socialize, document history in pictorial form. Also taking a good selfie requires a good phone, with features and Apps that can help in good editing of pictures. For some, distraction and obsession are relative terms since they feel taking selfie is a personal attitude and requires personal discipline.

Both genders agree that some students, especially females are obsessed with selfie and are easily distracted by it as they take it in class even while lectures are going on. Their advice varies, for some females, students should continue taking selfie while others advised that it be minimized, and controlled, and others advice that they face their studies which is their primary obligation on campus.

Summary, conclusion and recommendation

This study has discussed selfie as an emerging culture among students in Nigeria's University of Port Harcourt. This study has established that the

female gender engages in selfie more than the male gender. This study has used questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD) to assess the attitude of students at University of Port Harcourt towards selfie, and the findings show that although both males and female persons, mostly undergraduate students, enjoy taking selfie, some students are obsessed with it and are distracted from their studies. This study therefore recommends that caution should be taken by students so that this technological advancement in the 21st century would be a culture that should enhance their social lives without a draw back in their academic career.

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Appendix

Selfie pictures from focus group discussion (FGD)



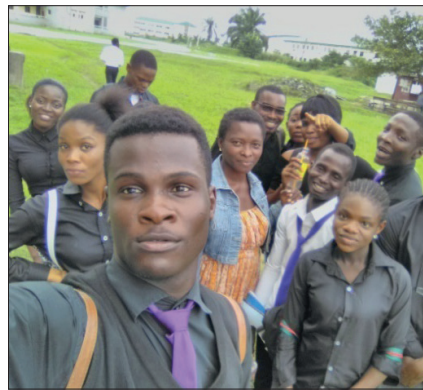
Selfie of FGD with students of Accounting Dept., & Biochemistry and Technology Department (August 7, 2018)



Selfie of FGD with graduating Students of Dept. of Theatre & Film Studies (August 14, 2018)



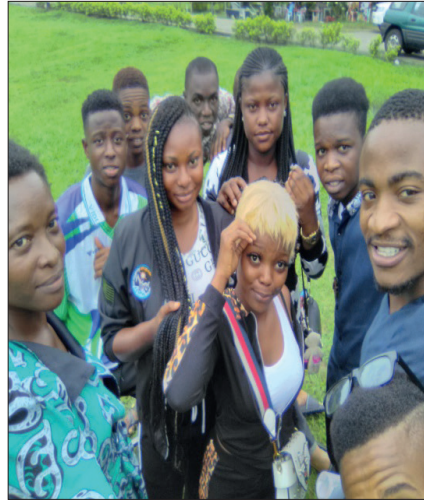
FGD with graduating students of Geography & Environmental studies (August 30, 2018)



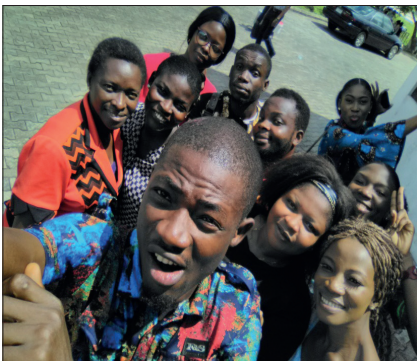
FGD with students from Music department (September 4, 2018)



Selfie with students of FGD from Pharmacy Dept. (September 10, 2018)



Selfie with another set of students of University of Port Harcourt (August 6, 2018)



Selfie of FGD with graduating Students of Dept. of Theatre & Film Studies (August 14, 2018)



Selfie with overexcited handful of students of University of Port Harcourt (2018)