

A Systematic Review of the Impact of Selfie Activities on Body Image Concerns

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The term selfie refers to a self-portrait taken using a smart phone often done for the purpose of posting on social media sites (SNSs) (Qiu et al. 2015). Contrary to traditional media, social media users have the ability to easily control their images; selfies are often carefully posed for, selected, and even edited before posted on social media to be viewed and responded to by peers and family members (Chae, 2017; Mingoia et al., 2019) as well as by strangers. Selfie activities can lead individuals, especially young women, to become preoccupied with their appearance. This attention can result in negative perceptions, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors regarding their bodies (Cohen et al., 2017). The present study is a content analysis of the growing body of research on selfie activities and their impact on body image.

Method

To identify studies for this analysis, a search was performed using the Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Premiere databases with the terms “selfie” or “selfies.” Only English-language peer-reviewed studies were included; non-peer-reviewed studies or studies without original data were also excluded. The search strategy generated a total of 755 results (Web of Science: $n=293$, PsycInfo: $n=156$, Academic Premiere: $n=306$). In accordance with the PRISMA guideline (Moher et al., 2009), we removed duplicates ($n=485$), screened by abstract ($n=190$), and finalized a list of articles containing at least one measure of selfie activity and at least one measure of body image concerns as an outcome. These selection criteria led to the retention of 21 articles.

Findings

Research Strategy and Participants. Fourteen articles reported survey studies and seven studies reported experimental designs. Most studies had only female participants ($n=14$) and most recruited undergraduate student samples ($n=9$). Participants were recruited primarily from Australia ($n=6$), U.S. ($n=4$), or China ($n=4$).

Measurement of Selfie Activities. A few studies reported measuring a single selfie activity using a single measurement item ($n=4$) such as the frequency of selfie posting or total number of

selfies uploaded to social media. Most researchers ($n=17$) measured several dimensions of selfie activities such as selfie posting, selfie investment, selfie manipulation (Modica, 2020), selfie posting, selfie viewing, selfie editing (Wang et al., 2019), and selfie taking, sharing, photo investment, and photo manipulation (McLean et al., 2015).

Body Image Concerns. The process of selecting/editing selfies or attending to others' responses to posted selfies resulted in self-objectification, increases in appearance concerns, (Wang et al. 2019) as well as peer comparison (Chang et al., 2019) and body dissatisfaction (Loneragan et al., 2019). Positive feedback concerning a selfie can increase selfie-posters' body or facial satisfaction (Coulthard & Ogden, 2018; Wang et al., 2018) but high investment in selfie feedback can also increase body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness (Butkowski et al., 2019). In addition, viewing others' selfies, particularly idealized and manipulated selfies (Kleemans et al., 2018), resulted in negative effects on viewer's body image.

Theories Utilized. Self-objectification theory ($n=7$), social comparison theory ($n=7$), and self-presentation/impression management theory ($n=6$) served as key frameworks in this body of research.

This study sheds light on the different operationalizations of selfie activities and related body image outcomes. The selfie phenomenon is still a relatively new activity that offers substantial research opportunities for scholars interested in understand how participation in social media impacts young adults and adolescents.

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