Netnography of the Self in Selfies

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Abstract:- Since last twenty years, human race has experience digital revolution. This revolution has three major dimensions i.e. penetration of internet in society, growth of social media and social networking and growth of mobile (smart) & wearable technologies. with quick surge in technologies, an idea of 'selfie' has emerged and transformed.

In sociological terms, the emergence of 'selfie' can be located in domain of new culture that transformed representation self, social relationships, social interactions and social consumptions. The study adopts quantitative and qualitative Netnography techniques to explore and describe sociologically relevant theories to grasp this phenomenon of selfie. For this purpose, the study adopts dramaturgy, sociosemiotic and dialectical frameworks. Based on descriptive diagnostic explorations the study provides sensibleness for symbolic utilization, discursive stratagems, communicative representations and performance tactics with reference to (re)presentation of self within various social interactions and social order. This research aimed to understand selfie behavior in social networking sites (SNSs). The research was conducted on the basis of the functional theories of attitude, verified self-presentation attitude, and self-expression attitude that affect selfie behaviors (i.e., taking selfies, posting selfies, and taking selfies for fashion product exposure). The moderating effect of satisfaction toward one's appearance was identified. Self-presentation attitude exerted a significant effect on the number of selfies posted and those uploaded for fashion product exposure. When satisfaction toward one's appearance was high, self-presentation attitude increased the influence of the behaviors of posting selfies and uploading selfies for fashion product exposure. Self-expression attitude also significantly influenced the number of selfies taken due to the moderating effect of satisfaction toward one's appearance. The rise of digital and visual communication has brought an increased focus to the places that people occupy. While places are created through various meaning-making processes, one way of establishing the meaning of a place is by inserting oneself into spaces by taking selfies. The places depicted in selfies may reflect a desire to associate oneself with the place, to make a statement challenging that place or the dominant meaning associated with it, or to create new meaning concerning the place and the self. Drawing on the concepts of Third space and heterotopias, we proffer a framework for the practice of taking and sharing selfies that depict a place. We argue that people colonize points in space to reproduce, counter, or mix the meanings of places. People then both draw from and contribute to the construction of places and are motivated to "place" themselves to provide alternative or personalized perspectives of these places but also to represent their self.

Keywords:- Selfie, Presentation of Self, Dramaturgy, Technology and Society, Social Fact, Selfies, Place, Space, Place Making, Third Space, Self-Representation, Heterotopias.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 'selfie' has a long past but short history, the term 'selfie' was officially incorporated in Oxford English Dictionary in 2013 defining a selfie as "*a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social mediawebsite*" (BBC News, 2013). The media, culture and society at large have smoothly adopted this social fact, opening an avenue for sociological inquiry. The first self-portrait is accredited to an American photographer Robert Cornelius, whocaptured his own photo on 10 August 1893 (Karwowski, Brzeski, 2017). But the term 'selfie' is can traced back to 2004 when Flickr, a social media platform used the word 'selfie' to label digital pictures of & by an individual (Shah & Tewari, 2016). Google (2016) reported 24 billion selfies on the google photo platform and 93 million selfies are captured by Android devices per day. Selfies, digital images characterized by the desire to frame the self in a picture taken to be shared with an online audience, are important reflections of the contemporary self. Extant psychological research on selfies has taken a anthologizing view of the phenomenon, focusing on its relationship to narcissism. Selfies are public reflections of the way we view and present ourselves, an intriguing combination of inward and outward looking. Their pervasiveness has been facilitated not only by networked technology and devices such as front facing cameras and selfie sticks, but also by the internalized social conventions that make the capture and sharing of self-images desirable and acceptable.

Émile Durkheim, a French sociologist coined the term 'social fact' which consists of ways of behaviour, thinking and feeling that are external to an individual. These social facts have their roots in coercive power that exercises control over a particular individual (Durkheim, 2016). Social facts are representations and actions. In other words, social facts can be viewed as a thing that members of society do very similarly because of communal socialization or because of influence exert over them to do common action. Based on

such theorization, one can view 'selfie' as a social fact that presents communally socialized ways of portraying self through social media, the internet and digital mobile devices. Gabriel Faimau (2020) classified definitions of selfies into three major groups i.e. socio- technical, socioesthetic and socio-culture. Conceptually, the selfie is embodied in technological developments. The socio-technological definitions focus on technical aspects like the kind of cameras, phones, platforms etc. used for taking and sharing a selfie. This perspective provides an understanding of selfies as self-portraiture created using smart devices (mostly with front-facing cameras) (Hess, 2015) aided with photo-editing application/software and shared on a variety of social media (Shah & Tewari, 2016). In this sense, the selfie features the spatial corporeal self that is filtered through digital algorithmic applications and devices destined for social media platforms. Selfie also creates contested spaces within the human-techno relationship because of the construction of self through technological mediation that influences identity and socialvalues.

Psychological research on selfies has emerged as a vital and growing sub-field. Psychology research has explored motivations for selfie-posting age and gender differences in posting selfies and self-esteem based effects of selfie posting Much of this research has frequently taken an anthologizing perspective on the phenomenon, focusing on the relationship between narcissism and posting selfies. In particular, by focusing on extremes of high selfie posting behavior and viewing the activity in an excessive, individualistic, and decontextualized manner, psychological research may be obscuring some of the most interesting aspects of the phenomenon. Indeed, like Internet and social media consumption itself, psychology research has linked selfie production to shallow relationships, lack of intimacy, loneliness, anorexia, risks to mental health, and a general lack of mental well-being.

The second category of definitions focuses on the socioesthetic dimensions of the selfie. Many scholars perceive the selfie as a reflection or continuation of self-portraiture in Western Art after the renaissance (Zhao & Zappavigna,2018). Selfie, in such a sense, is about creating self-image through defined aesthetic parameters of posing and composition. The creation of self-image demands creativity in terms of posing, composition, managing bodies, expression of emotions and storytelling. such a category of definition emphasizes the image of the body and compositional narratives portrayed through artistic styles of poising. This means selfie provides a visual clue of orchestrated artistic demands fulfilled through the choice of moments, context and styling reactions.

Recent psychological research has begun to offer more nuanced views of the selfie phenomenon. For example, find that the measures of narcissism are "significantly and positively correlated with" the posting of selfies on social media sites, and also that the "link between narcissism and selfie posting is stronger among men than women". However, another study found that posting selfies is a fairly common practice on social media sites, becoming "a typical

way of communicating with others" and generally not related to narcissism picture-coding scheme for selfies presents a psychological framework for image content analysis of selfies. The authors included facial expressions and position of the self as variables and categorized location as public or private. Their study emphasized the importance of context for representation in selfies. These results, along with the shifting definition of selfies, point to a dynamic and complex phenomenon which is increasingly embedded in contemporary communications.

Another category of definitions i.e. sociocultural definitions views selfie as cultural conditioning of behaviour selfie-taking and selfie sharing. The selfie in this sense can be considered a cultural rite. Scholars like Sontag (2001) considered photography as a widely accepted social rite as a defence against anxiety or a tool of power. Though Sontag criticized photographic culture her logic provides interpretations of photography as a social rite. As per Goffman (1979), photography re-orients human capacities of displaying/presenting self that frames one's behaviour in accordance with societal expectations cumulating into social life. Such display in photography is dialogic, the photographed and viewer both are embedded in the manner of unfolding socially located events. Drawing on this theorization, Michael James Walsh and Stephanie Alice Baker (2017) argued that the selfie is a social practice as it captures the inter-acting self. Such inter-action is potent enough to not only provide acts involved in visual communication but also depict the selfie as an icon of transformation. As a social rite/practice selfie can be considered as a meaning-creating process of re- presentation of self-produced within the realm of inter-personal relations that governs power dynamics between the "object" of looking and gazing "subject" (Pham, 2015). Thus, the socio-cultural rite/practice of selfie depicts the construction of an inter-acting structure that includes not only selfie taker but also situations, spatial information, social media/networks and selfie-recipient.

The objective of this paper is to describe important sociological approaches used or being used by sociologists that can provide sociological understanding of selfies. For this purpose, the study adopts dramaturgy, sociosemiotic and dialectical frameworks. Based on descriptive diagnostic explorations the study provides sensibleness for symbolic utilization, discursive stratagems, communicative representations and performance tactics with reference to (re)presentation of self within various social interactions and social order.

II. SELF IN SELFIE

The adaptation of the 'selfie' by human society is not spared by social coercive forces and taboos associated with it. Within journalistic discourse, a huge amount of literature is available that provides insights about feeling guilty while 'not uploading selfie'. Many popular reports describe that people rationalize their behaviour of taking selfies with qualifiers linked with occasions, locations, 'ironies', etc. sociologically, this mainstream practice of taking, uploading and sharing selfies has its roots in culture and social control.

Social control in adopting the 'selfie' practice has been exercised through technology; as self-portrayal is done on & through the digital medium. It is known that physical or computational technology affects the structure of life worlds, selfie is not spared from such expression. Historically, people used to create and share self-portraits and photographs. Advancement in technology (especially digital technology) has liberated the art of self-portraying and popularized it among the masses. Many sociologists believed that such technological advancements have the potential for liberating art and humanity from their demand for labour. The liberation from labour and embarrassment of creative aspects can be achieved from 'technological rationality' (Marcuse, 2013).

The selfie expresses rationality of its own which is potent enough to influence human lives. Social media platforms, digital cameras, mobile (front-facing) cameras, the internet etc. offers bi-dimensional social control i.e. control by technology and control by culture. As selfies are not only captured but also shared with other members of society. Such sharing is shaped by the social relations of an individual with significant or generalized others, social institutions and social structures at large. Therefore, the image that is shared is not an individual act, it's a social act. The presence of an individual on social media is derived from identity (popularly known as ID) created through information digitally stored. This identity on the internet 'forces' an individual to do certain 'work' on a daily/regular basis to ensure that presence of an individual is seen by other in a way other wants to see that individual. Applying Snow & Anderson (1987) theory of "Identity work" on selfies points to an unexplored process of expressing identity that is a purely innate process as a social process. A selfie that is taken and shared is designed and curated in a manner that presents a specific kind of identity of an individual that further shapes impressions held by others.

By locating it in a specific public place, one that combines history, education, and culture, we embed our understanding of selfie taking in a broader, more cultural, and more social direction than past psychological research. Respectfully extending the museum scholarship emphasis of and we bring a deepened psychological perspective to the contextualized phenomenon of the museum selfie. We begin our investigation with a look at several relevant theories. First, we extend a Lacanian "mirror stage theory" perspective taking its interlinked notions of self-image, maturity and visual development in a technological direction. We consider whether the hall of mirror effects of our devices might reveal something about the regressive possibilities of contemporary adult identity. Does selfie taking, studied in context, act merely to elevate the self, or to provide a complex amalgam of self and setting, as suggest in their contextualized study of travel related selfie taking? In summary, our perspective seeks a cultural viewpoint on selfie taking, considering it to be a set of social practices intimately linked to the most intimate of pursuits: identity work.

A well-known sociologist Erving Goffman theorized impression management in terms of an individual's (re)presentation of self as per expectations of other members of society or something defined as a "good impression". Such impression frames self-presentations in images shared on social media also. Another well-known theory regarding the representation of self comes from C.H. Cooley that describes the process of "crafting self" as per imagination what others will think of "me" as if one is looking at the mirror and where society is act as a mirror to which an individual holds him/her self. the study grounds itself in such micro-sociological perspectives on two intriguing social processes i.e. selfie-taking and selfie sharing in the context of self-presentation and construction of identity.

➢ *Self (re)Presentation in Selfie: dramaturgic approach*

A variety of theoretical lenses can be employed to study selfies. Dramaturgy perhaps can be considered the most sociologically relevant framework. this framework interprets selfie as an outcome of subjectivity, self-(re)presentation and performativity of self in sync with societal expectations. The central concern that arises while understanding selfie through this approach is how selfie culture influence understanding of the self?

Looking at selfie through a dramaturgic lens allows linking selfie with self-presentation on the internet. Walsh & Baker (2017), drawing on classical arguments of Goffman (2021) perceives that selfie intensifies the transformation of public-private social life. According to Goffman's interpretation, the face is considered as an image of self-delineated through socially approved attributes and a positive social value that an individual effectively claims for him/her 'self'. This is because the face is diffusely located in the flow of events that is encountered by an individual and which is manifested only when such events are interpreted for appraisals. Face transports meanings, a person's involvement in a specific situation and thus it is a key resource used collectively in culture to manufacture the self. Thus, the selfie adds value to communication and inter-action rituals offering an opportunity to selfie producer to (re)define the self through the face or facial expressions (Walsh & Baker, 2018)

Selfie cannot be unplugged from online expectations, marking presence online and online interactions. A constructed public pressure to inter-act over the internet is inevitable. Such a scenario accelerates the expectations of society for appearance in an acceptable manner demanding technical skills. In the digital world, individual construct his/her existence by creating boundaries using symbols of keyboards (Markham, 2016). Another theoretical strand observed in the dramaturgical approach to understand selfie is the production of body images (Dutta et al., 2018). The formation of body images through selfie is inseparable because selfie not only performs but also produce self.

As a performance, a selfie locates the self in an extraordinary moment theorized as the "euphoria of arrival" by Lilie Chouliaraki (2017). In this sense, the selfie is viewed as a platform to proclaim "I am here". Such proclamation presents subjective ("I" am here), existential (I "am" here) and locative (I am "here") dimensions. In such performance denotes arrival connotes survival. Thus, the selfie entails an

existential (I "am" here) dimension where the arrival of self transpires within a specific space claiming locative (I am "here") dimension.

This also implies democratization of self (re)presentation and therefore self is always a protagonist of every selfie enunciated through performing self within space & time with materials and networked existence, experience of this can be located among any or each of these elements.

Self (re)presentation through dramaturgic is manifested through self-objectification i.e. individuals visualize and treat themselves as an object that can be viewed and evaluated based on societal standards of appearance (Rollero & Piccoli, 2017). Such perception is used a lot in recent socio-psychological studies related to selfie behaviour, narcissism, psychopathy, body dissatisfaction, body perceptions, idealized beauty standards, etc. these studies directly infers that selfie behaviour reinforces objectification of the self. Here the self is visualized as an object placed for constant monitoring (against societal standards) and scrutiny. Individuals immerse themselves in such self-objectifying culture and gradually internalize this perspective, learning to see & value themselves based on social validations (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). According to such cultural (re)making of body image is prime force of self (re) presentation for fulfilling others' expectations.

Psychological impression management theory posits that people are inclined to create and share impressions of themselves which are biased in the direction of their desired identities. Similarly, the sociologist emphasized the importance of self-presentation strategies to control impressions of the self, often also highlighting the role of factors and contexts external to the individual and a range of other researchers have described and analyzed the self-presentation related motives that individuals bring to their digital communications. The portrays selfies as effective outlets of self-definition, creative forms of self-fashioning, and therefore powerful means of self-expression. In "extended self" perspective, selfies represent digital possessions that play an important role in establishing and signaling identity. A recent investigation by found that "consumers were motivated to post-selfies to convey a positive self-image". Findings from this study also revealed that desired images included looking happy, having fun and projecting a positive physical appearance.

Scholars like Katharina Lobinger and Cornelia Brantner (2015) questioned the authenticity of self in a selfie as a selfie is considered to be a "staged" performance that contains inauthentic poses. Although the presentation of self is motivated by narcissism, several scholars argue that selfie allows the development of personality and exploration of identity as selfies are intended to validate the best self of an individual.

➢ *Socio-Semiotic approach: selfie as communication:*
The grasping reality of selfie through the Socio-Semiotic approach allows for investigating inter-subjectivity and communicative structure embedded in selfie-taking and

meaning-making processes associated with it. Humans are connected through language and every social role defined by such interconnected relations uses language. Social roles are combinatory by nature i.e. every individual in society has multiple roles that are defined by the language of culture. The socio-semiotic approach views selfie as meaning generating process that includes the formation of social relationships on the internet. In this sense, the selfie presents a new language by itself that articulates social relation formation. As per Zhao and Zappavigna (2018) selfie is different from other photographic genres because of the selfie is potent to enact inter-subjectivity and possibilities for a variety of perspectives to be created & shared among creators and viewers.

- The level of appearance satisfaction will moderate the effect of self-presentation attitude on the number of selfie shooting.
- The level of appearance satisfaction will moderate the effect of self-presentation attitude on the number of selfie posting.
- The level of appearance satisfaction will moderate the effect of self-presentation attitude on the fashion product exposure behavior.
- The level of appearance satisfaction will moderate the effect of self-expression attitude on the number of selfie shooting.
- The level of appearance satisfaction will moderate the effect of self-expression attitude on the number of selfie posting.
- The level of appearance satisfaction will moderate the effect of self-expression attitude on the fashion product exposure behavior.

Considering selfie as novel communicative language allows selfie creator to narrate his/her story and re-imagine him/herself as part of the larger society. Further, the selfie suggests the technologization of self-wherein the materiality of the self-configures its identity (Wargo, 2017). Identity formation does not happen in silos; it takes place within the context of a relationship network or culture where an individual need to "connect". Therefore, selfie serves as an identity formation tool within social networks by considering selfie as a meaning generator, it becomes important to grasp the kind of meanings generated by selfies from the socio-semiotic viewpoint. Semiotic systems are organized around ideation (understanding of culture by an individual), inter-personal (actions of an individual facilitating social relationships) and textual (actual communication process among individuals) functions (Urban, 1981). Selfie can be considered as a visual message that operates in all three functions. Self in a selfie in this sense a) represents an understanding of culture (ideation) b) enacts social relations and c) textual information with/within the image.

➢ *Dialectical approach: selfie as a critique*
Chouliaraki (2017) used selfies of migrants as evidence for testimonial narratives linked with their journey which demands ethical responses. Through this approach, a selfie can be understood as a trace of the self, found in well-connected environments. The connectedness here can be

human as well as automated. There exists a dichotomy between the sociotechnical and socio-culture dimensions of the selfie. Through a dialectical approach, a selfie can be viewed as a bridge between these dimensions that unpacks ethical & political aspects of the selfie that poses questions related to identity, expression/voice/tone and the 'otherness' on the internet.

The application of such an approach provides critical insights into 'how' narratives are formed through a selfie. Narratives emerging from selfie provide social propositions which are negotiated between selfie taker and selfie viewer. This process of negotiation includes the transformation of ethical & political responses toward social propositions. In this sense, the selfie becomes a socio-political narrative by itself demanding moral responses from the larger society. This approach allows to observe selfie as discursive practices with power dynamics. Such practice depicts how social propositions, testimonials, or narratives embedded in selfie makes sense in comparison with substantive response revealed through visual clues.

Many dialectic theorists focused on ethico-political dimensions of selfies in terms of sexual objectification where bodies are reduced to an instrument to entertain & please others. The major argument comes from Jesse Fox and Margaret Rooney (2015) that states people are socialized within such sexual objectifying culture and this forces them to internalize the objectification of bodies. Following such a proposition, many feminist scholars viewed the power dynamics of technologized sexism where selfies are observed as a tool for extending sexist ideas, patriarchal constraints and maintenance of objectification of female bodies. On the other side, the selfie also represents decentralized political actions against a variety of discriminations experienced by an individual where visually is accompanied by discourses. Thus, a selfie can facilitate resistance and disassociation with or against established political discourses.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The dichotomized view of selfies as authentic expressions of identity and self-absorbed distortions persists throughout most of the scholarship on the topic. Carbon (2017) positions selfies as artifacts in a long history of self-portraits in art while Wendt (2014) more cynically sees them as parodies of portraits in the social media age, exemplified by artificial poses such as "duck face". Jones (2002) argues that the selfie is an inflated performance of the self. Similarly, Levin (2014, p. 20) describes selfies as "portraits of the self in the act of self-portrayal," emphasizing the practice rather than the outcome. Wendt (2014) emphasizes that visual social media encourage selfie-taking, animating users to create infinite versions of themselves through selfies, and keep users continuously engaged with images of themselves. Others conceptualize selfies as means of communication that afford a transformation of a personal experience into a shared one.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Cultural psychology has long had "an affinity" with ethnographic methods based in a combination of participation and observation (Miller et al., 2003). Because our study is interested in a multidimensional, dynamic, complex, and contextual understanding of the selfie phenomenon, we found the use of ethnographic methods entirely appropriate to our psychological investigation. We used ethnographic methods to collect data on museum visitors and their selfies in North America, Europe and South America, and extended this approach into the online realm with the method of netnography. We briefly describe these approaches and their use in our study in the following section.

V. ETHNOGRAPHY AND NETNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is the established and venerable technique of cultural investigation which originated in the field of anthropology. Netnography is a specific adaptation of ethnography designed to maintain ethnography's cultural approach and apply it to the study of online social interactions and experiences (Kozinets, 2015). Found useful in a range of studies in social sciences fields (Bengry-Howell et al., 2011), including psychology (e.g., Orsolini et al., 2015) netnography "links to a human consciousness project most closely aligned with gestalt psychology, cyber-psychology, and the anthropology of consciousness" (Kozinets, 2017, p. 382). Netnography adds novel procedures and research practices to the traditional routines of anthropology (Kozinets, 2002) that include locating sites and topics using search engines and handling large digital datasets with a combination of automated and manual techniques (Kozinets, 2015).

VI. CONCLUSION

It is known that selfie culture is widely accepted across the globe for the last two decades. Numerous social scientists have attempted to grasp this reality from a variety of theoretical and philosophical perspectives. The dramaturgic approach allows viewing the self in a selfie as a performing self while inter-subjectivity, communicative and meaning-making processes can be grasped through a socio-semiotic approach. The dialectical approach reveals the moral and political dynamics of the selfie.

Selfie is clearly, a multi-disciplinary phenomenon that requires theoretical innovation. The aforementioned approaches provide promising ground for sociologists to develop innovative inter-disciplinary theoretical frameworks that are more concrete in their sociological nature. Relying on classical theorists like Durkheim, Cooley and Goffman, the presentation of self through selfies can be grasped. The study briefly demonstrated possibilities of approach that can open avenues for further micro-sociological research in this domain. Conceptualizing selfie-taking and posting as identity work, this chapter explores selfies taken while travelling. Using an ethnographic research approach, it investigates what travel selfies posted on Instagram depict and to what extent they support the travelers' and social media users'

quest for the extraordinary. Diving deep into the data but also scanning the phenomenon more broadly, it identifies specific travel selfie genres that inform how travel selfies are constructed to elevate the self and satisfy its social media audience. The findings illustrate a great desire to express individuality but also show conformity with social media and specifically Instagram conventions. While selfies are often considered idealized forms of self-representation, these idealizations can affect the reading and understanding of places. Selfies are thus not only a means of self-representation but contribute to the public discourse about places. They result from people placing themselves somewhere in the world and, in the process, contribute to a larger understanding about the places we inhabit and how we create, challenge, and maintain meaning around places and also how we represent ourselves. We argue that selfies, specifically Third space selfies, like many other online practices, temporarily colonize places, marking them as a familiar place.

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