

‘The Good, The Bad, The Ugly’ of Selfies: Redefining the Self and Surveillance Practices?

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Abstract

As the world sees a surge in the use of selfies, with India not being an exception, the article examines the way in which selfies behaviours are viewed both in academic literature and the popular culture. Selfies are all at once seen in a negative light, dangerous and responsible for causing a risk to life as well as promoting self absorption and narcissism on the one end and at the same time looked upon as a potent force for empowerment of the marginalized sections. Does the neoliberal discourse point towards the commodification of the self? By celebrating the selfie taking behaviour's which may be also be seen as surveillance mechanisms, does the unsuspecting consumer get normalized in a web of power relations, unwittingly serving the interest of corporates? Or does Coveillance hold promise for the selfie enthusiasts even as they willing give up their once cherished personal space?

Keywords: Coveillance, Empowerment, self-presentation, Selfie, Surveillance

Today selfies are an all pervasive phenomenon and have become a powerful medium for selfexpression and representation. Selfies are photographs of the self, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam, and either at arm's length or on a reflective surface such as a mirror. as recently entered the mainstream sufficiently to be added to dictionaries (e.g. Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2015). Some scholars (e.g. Lasén & García, 2015; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011) have focused on the performative use of selfies and the role this plays in perceptions of self-presentation. Others (e.g. Lasén, 2015) have examined how selfie posting entails three functions necessary for public display: presentation, representation, and embodiment. This, Lasen (2015, p.64) suggests is because selfies are forms of online presentation in front of mixed audience of strangers, acquaintances and friends. They are gendered personal and public representations and performances of the self for oneself and for the others."