

SCIENTIFIC EDITOR

Eunika Baron-Polańczyk

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University of Zielona Góra

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Eunika Baron-Polańczyk

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REVIEW

Sławomir Koziej

Erik Bratland

Zielona Góra 2019

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THE SELFIE PHENOMENON. THE POLISH-CZECH-GERMAN PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

There are differences in respondents from three countries. They can be considered on many levels. However, the groups studied differ in different ways. The most often selfies are posted on the network by the respondents from Germany, the least often by the respondents from the Czech Republic. And the frequency of posting is similar to posting photos. The respondents from Germany do it the most immediately, the Czechs do it the latest. However, photo editing with graphic programs and filters is dominant among the respondents from Poland, while the Czechs do it the least often. The respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic do not like or post pictures taken in intimate situations (sporadically only), while every fifth respondent from Germany does it. Tracking their photos on the Internet is declared by all the respondents, the least often by the Czech respondents, while around 50 percent of the German and Polish respondents do it. Why is this happening? I have several theories on this subject, which are studied and analysed. I hope that I will be able to present their results soon in a more comprehensive study.

Key words: selfie, differences and similarities in Poland, Czech Republic, Germany.

Selfie

It would seem that the beginnings of the so-called „selfie” are not too distant times, when smartphones began to be massively available. Is this really the case? Before moving to the rest of the article, let’s explain the very concept of „selfie”, which became the word of the year 2003 in Oxford dictionaries. According to the dictionary, selfie is: „A photo taken of oneself, usually with a smartphone or webcam, and shared via social media” (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2018). In the note we can read that occasional selfies are acceptable, but publishing new photos every day is not

necessarily the case. This word of 2013 has evolved in the world, has become an element of youth slang in social media, it also functions in Poland.

Why do we take selfies?

As B. Wendt writes, we deal here with the myth of Narcissus described by McLuhan, our inherent fascinations with a mirror reflection, and in the era of the media this reflection becomes a selfie. Narcissistic personality disorder according to the „DSM V Psychiatric Classification Diagnostic Manual” (2013) is a well-established pattern of behaviour and emotional responses associated with a sense of superiority (visible in fantasies or behaviour), the need to be admired by others and a lack of empathy, appearing in early adulthood and in various contexts” (A. Wenta, N. Łątkowska, 2017, p. 178). Those who take a selfie experience increased pleasure, even a kind of „numbness” more intensely than others. These types of users seem to be addicted to what they do, which is why they publish their pictures many times (sometimes several times a day) (B. Wendt, 2014). In the opinion of A. Wenta and N. Łątkowska: „people who achieve high scores on the scale of narcissism experience dissatisfaction in partner relations, because the feeling of strong envy and constant devaluation makes it difficult or impossible to give love to others. Narcissism is both a psychological and a cultural phenomenon (...). At the individual level, it is a personality disorder characterised by excessive interest in oneself. Narcissistic people care more about their image in the eyes of others than about their own emotions and feelings. They express the need for seduction and manipulation in order to gain power and control over others. Narcissistic people suffer from a lack of sense of self, experience emptiness and meaninglessness of life” (A. Wenta, N. Łątkowska, 2017, p. 177).

Instagram even designed a special platform that allows one to engage in the images one makes, generate conversations with oneself, communicate with other users, evaluate their selfies (via likes). Perhaps we believe that Facebook or Instagram are necessary for us to become unique to others, but also to ourselves. Through images posted on social media, we meet the need to document our existence, stylize our own Self. Through selfies we try to show that we are significant, we leave a trace behind. Looking at our image, we confirm ourselves, in some sense we meet our needs, desires and dreams. As B. Wendt writes: „for most of us one selfie is not enough. As if we were trapped by the bait of ourselves, we produce an endless series of self-portraits with different looks and hashtags (#). Tagging practice (#) is part of the self-promotion strategy, allowing the individual to rise above the anonymity of most users. As a consequence, we lose ourselves in the program of possibilities and do not realise that this program changes our self-awareness” (B. Wendt, 2014, p. 45).

To sum up, we become strengthened, amplified, and at the same time isolated by our selfies, as if we could not free ourselves from Instagram or Facebook. The layers of information or additional data that we add to our selfies often change depending on our mood, making it difficult to be decoded, read by others, sometimes by ourselves. By creating our own world through selfies, we create our own temples that only we understand and that exist thanks to likes (virtual likes) – everything virtually. We cannot „be” in the real world, we are afraid of it, but we love the virtual, idealized world, in a sense it is safe, by pressing a button or removing anything from our own account we can restore balance in our opinion.

Where did the idea for research come from?

The subject of selfie is known to me as a phenomenon, but I'm interested in the question: why do people devote so much time and attention to such photos? Why are they obsessed with taking self portraits in various places, circumstances, poses, even in very intimate situations? And they don't keep these photos to themselves, but they make them public, encourage others to like them. Is it a need to exist, a narcissistic personality described earlier, or does it have a deeper meaning? Many researchers have tried to answer these questions, but I will be interested in something else.

People have numerous reasons to use social media, sometimes it is a way to free themselves from accumulated emotions, a way not to get bored. When a person logs in to their Facebook or Instagram account, where they post a selfie, the first thing they do is look at how many likes they have got. Such „enhancements” become addiction over time. Generally, according to many theories, selfie is an indicator of low self-esteem or social position. Browsing social media, where interest in one's own profile is negligible in the eyes of its owner, he/she may feel exclusion or loneliness, which will be reflected in real life. On the other hand, the more „bold” selfies one posts, for example, nudity selfies, or „tuned up” ones with some graphics programs, the more likes, shares, places in the ranking the selfie gets and its author has a false sense of uniqueness and value. Whether he/she knows about it, looks deeply inside oneself, or satisfies narcissistic desires – that is another matter.

I made three groups of people the subject of my research. It is a group of students and young people from the Czech Republic, Poland and Germany. The Czech group consisted of 110 people (N = 110), and their testing was possible thanks to Zuzanna Truhlářová¹, a researcher at the University of Hradec Králové. The Polish group of respondents consisted of 95 people (N = 95), I conducted the research myself. The group from Germany numbered 90 people (N = 90) and

¹ Zuzana Truhlářová, Ph.D., Institute of Social Work, Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Králové.

the study was possible thanks to a close member of my family who has lived and worked in Germany for many years. Sampling was intentionally random, I was interested in young people between 20 and 28 years old, without choosing them according to their place of residence, without separating them by gender, although the majority were women. So in the group there were people living in cities, in the countryside, single, in relationships and having children. Before the tests or after the tests, I did not make any selection: who takes a selfie and who does not, I was interested in the phenomenon itself and its scale. Why did I choose Germany and the Czech Republic as a comparison with Poland? All three countries are in the European Union, Germany and the Czech Republic are Poland's neighbours, access to social media is similar – therefore the question arises: will the results of my small research be comparable or similar? If there are differences – what can they relate to? The study was conducted using the diagnostic survey method, survey technique, and the tool was an extensive survey questionnaire. For the purposes of this article, I used only some of the questions from the prepared tool.

This is a small study, the topic itself is interesting and worth deeper research, which I will try to do later. The main purpose of my research presented here was to find answers to the following questions:

- how many individuals in the surveyed group take selfies and post them on social media?
- how much potential satisfaction/dissatisfaction with life results in taking a selfie?

Of course, each such survey is declarations of respondents, so the results of my research should be treated as a small pilot study. In my opinion, this is an interesting topic, worth describing and reflecting on the phenomenon of selfie.

The results of my research

As I mentioned, I studied young people from Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. The number of subjects is as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of subjects

Countries examined	Poland	Czech Republic	Germany
N	N = 95	N = 110	N = 90
Value	100%	100%	100%

Source: the author's own development.

What is the support of family and relatives of the respondents? To find out the size of this support, I asked to specify its level in the scale of 0 to 6 points,

where 0 meant no support, and 6 the maximum support. Then I averaged the value for respondents from a given country and referred to the correlation of low / high support and posting selfies (Figure 1).

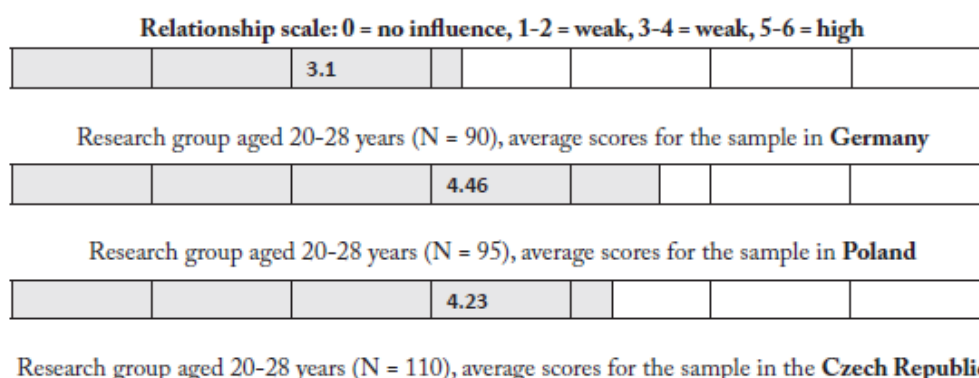


Figure 1. The relationship between parental impacts on the subjects' childhood and their current perception of life in Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic

Source: the author's own development.

The averaged results indicate that the greatest support from parents in childhood was received by respondents in Poland (average score: 4.46), similar was in the Czech Republic (4.23), and the smallest in Germany (3.1). Regarding the relationship scale, support in Poland and the Czech Republic was high, but low in Germany. As I mentioned earlier, these were only the declarations of the respondents. However, similar results of Polish respondents and our southern neighbours may result from similar cultural patterns, family attachment and the resulting values. Does this translate into the frequency of taking selfies? (see: Table 2).

Table 2. Linking low/high sense of quality of life in relation to felt parental support in childhood. Global values categorized into low, average and high ranges

Sense of quality of life		Study groups		
		Poland	German	Czech Republic
Level of global sense of quality of life in relation to childhood and parental judgment	Low	10	20	12
	Average	35	32	45
	High	55	48	53
Total (Σ)		100	100	100

Source: the author's own development.

Parental support in childhood is important for our further actions in life. If we have not been positively strengthened as children, we can look for compensation in adult life, e.g. by strengthening (likes) under our selfies. The data obtained differ, both in the lowest and the highest feelings. It can be concluded that this does not correspond perfectly to the results of the strength of relationships of parental impact on the subjects in childhood to the current perception of life (see the tables above). But the differences are minimal, the respondents from the Czech Republic were slightly lower in both high and low values. What can this be caused by? I can assume that the indices of the duration of the marriages of parents in the studied groups may be relevant. It is true that the lowest rate is found among the respondents from Germany, but this does not necessarily result in a lack of support for children in such families. Perhaps the single mother devoted more time to the child, trying to compensate for the lack of a partner, or for example grandparents or other relatives.

So what is the frequency of taking selfies by the subjects? (see: Table 3, 4, 5, 6).

Table 3. Frequency of taking selfies by the subjects in percentages

Study groups				
Frequency		Poland	Germany	Czech Republic
How often do you take a selfie?	Several times a day	18	28	7
	A few times a week	40	36	23
	Occasionally	40	35	45
	Never	2	1	5
Total (Σ) 100				

Table 4. Time of posting a selfie on social media profiles in percentages

Study groups			
Frequency	Poland	Germany	Czech Republic
I post it immediately	18	25	3
I do not post it	38	40	7
After some time	44	35	80
I do not know	0	0	10
Total (Σ) 100			

Table 5. Selfie edited with graphic programs in percentages

Study groups			
	Poland	Germany	Czech Republic
Yes, I edit photos with graphic programs	54	45	33
No, I don't edit photos with graphic programs	23	25	24
I occasionally edit photos with graphic programs	23	30	43
I do not know	0	0	0
Total (Σ) 100			

Table 6. Taking a selfie in an intimate situation in percentages

Study groups			
	Poland	Germany	Czech Republic
Yes, I do	0	18	3
No, I don't	90	36	82
I do it sporadically	10	45	15
I do not know	0	1	0
Total (Σ) 100			

Most often selfies on social networks are posted by the respondents from Germany, the least often by those from the Czech Republic. But if we take into account the frequency of posting, i.e. combine daily and weekly selfies on FB and Instagram, the Czech respondents do it the least often (30% in total), the Polish respondents (58% in total) do it more often, and those from Germany (64% in total) do it the most often. This may be due to the need, maybe some complexes, to be noticed, or what I described earlier: some elements of narcissistic syndrome. The frequency of posting selfies also differs in the three countries. The respondents from Germany (25%) do it the fastest, then those from Poland 18%, and the Czechs 3%. The Czech respondents wait some time before posting their selfies, as much as 80 percent of them. The German and Polish respondents reach a lower value by half (44% and 35%, respectively).

Editing photos with graphic programs, where special filters are used, is similar for all the respondents, however the Czechs use it the least often. The Polish respondents dominate in this ranking. More than a half declare they improve their selfies. Perhaps this is due to low self-esteem, maybe they think

that in this way they will attract more attention, or there is some other reason. In free conversations with the Polish respondents, I learned that the use of graphic programs results from the need to highlight some details of the anatomical image, or they need to remove something from the frame, add a background. Sometimes it is a matter of fashion, e.g. vintage photos. Taking selfies in intimate situations largely differentiate the subjects. The Polish respondents declare that they do not take such pictures, only sporadically (10%). The Czech respondents take 3 percent of such pictures, and only 15 percent do so occasionally. The Germans differ the most in this study. 18 percent of the respondents admit to intimate photos, and 45 percent to sporadic performances. Perhaps it is a matter of morality and approach to nudity. In Germany, there is no resistance among young people to be naked, e.g. in swimming pools or saunas. In Poland, this is met with resistance, probably the same is in the Czech Republic. That would explain these differences, although they may arise from other premises. In the first place, the Polish respondents mention the fear of their families seeing these photos. So they point to cultural patterns and fears of family evaluation (Table 7).

Table 7. Tracking selfie likes on social media in percentages

	Study groups		
	Poland	Germany	Czech Republic
Very often	48	58	23
No, never	12	5	74
Sometimes	40	47	3
I do not know	0	0	0
Total (Σ) 100			

Source: the author's own developemnt.

Since so many respondents take a selfie, sometimes in intimate situations, they edit photos with graphic programs, it seems natural that they follow likes under their photos. What are the results in the examined groups? The respondents from Germany show the most interest – 58 percent. 48 percent of the Polish respondents are interested in the likes and 23 percent in the Czech Republic. Sporadically, the respondents from the Czech Republic (3%) declare interest in their posted photos, the results in Poland and Germany are similar, respectively 40 and 47 percent. So why do they follow likes under the photos? It can be a matter of self-appreciation, self-esteem, or some other reason. The Polish respondents emphasise that the greater the interest and „liking” of their photos, the better the mood, to which they are sometimes addicted. In a hypothetical situation of lack of interest, they

would feel uncomfortable, as one of the respondents said: „it would probably mean that there is something wrong with me”! They often treat a photo posted on social media as a part of themselves.

Conclusions from own research

There are differences in the respondents from the three countries. They can be analysed on many levels. However, the study groups differ in different ways. Most often, selfies are posted online by the respondents from Germany, the least often by those from the Czech Republic. And the frequency of posting a selfie is similar to posting photos. The respondents from Germany do it the most immediately, the Czechs do it the latest. However, photo editing with graphic programs and filters is dominant among the respondents from Poland, while the Czechs do it the least often. The respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic do not like or post pictures taken in intimate situations (sporadically only), while every fifth respondent from Germany does it. Tracking their photos on the Internet is declared by all the respondents, the least often by the Czech respondents, while around 50 percent of the German and Polish respondents do it. Why is this happening? I have several theories on this that are being studied and analysed. I hope that I will soon be able to present their results in a more comprehensive study.

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