Selfie in the opinions of respondents in the Polish-Czech borderlands

Abstract

This article deals with the selfie phenomenon among a significant percentage of young people. The main objective of my research took the form of questions:  
— how much of the study group takes selfies and posts them on social media?  
— how much does possible satisfaction/lack of satisfaction with life result in taking a selfie?  

Research strategy: two groups of students: from Poland and the Czech Republic. Purposive random selection. The research method is a diagnostic survey, the technique is a questionnaire, while the tool is a survey questionnaire consisting of extensive 15 questions.  

I found it interesting to compare the two groups of respondents, that is, young people from Poland and the Czech Republic. I tried to find out why they do so and whether it is due to, for example, satisfaction with life. I tried to look for differences on both sides of the border, if any.  

Keywords: selfie, intimate selfie, Czech Republic, Poland.

Introduction

Can a person in the modern world be lonely? This rhetorical question, in an era of globalism, is not entirely unfounded, as can be seen in the plethora of publications on the subject. Social media, i.e. any social network, such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, You Tube, Instagram, Reddit and others that rely on internet connections and communicate with each other's users, have been under
sieve, especially in times of pandemonium. According to Chip magazine’s 2018 data, Facebook alone has nearly 22 million users in Poland, and had nearly 3.5 billion page views (Zimowska, 2020). These figures never decrease, they are constantly growing. If a service is in temporary trouble, in a moment another one appears and its users grow to skyrocketing proportions. We use these media not only by connecting through a computer, but we do so via phone, tablet and other devices with Internet access. Facebook alone had 2.32 billion active accounts in 2019 (Kulik, 2020).

Despite the vast reach of social media around the world, billions of people online, many people feel a lack of social interaction. There is growing talk of a phenomenon: loneliness online, in relationships, in friendships. As Dwornik writes,

A recently published study by The Big Lunch organization found that as many as 83% of Britons between the ages of 18 and 34 feel lonely. This is a shocking high number. Especially when you consider that, as researchers at the University of Oxford calculated, on average we have 155 Facebook friends. There are no studies that show how many young Poles feel lonely, but experts acknowledge that the number is increasing every year (Dwornik, 2020).

People with hundreds of friendships in the virtual world don’t really have anyone to turn to in a moment of need. Even if some of these friends are family, sometimes the closer ones. What influences this? After all, we can be in the virtual world at any time, around the clock, why do these quantitative relationships, not translate into qualitative relationships, face to face? Moreover, if one were to track the time spent on social media, the number of messages sent, received, commented on, then one would get the impression that a person has a “lush” social life. We converse, flirt, meet new people, make friends virtually, and yet something is missing, something is captivating us, something we long for, and we visualize these needs, moving them into the realm of dreams.

Perhaps the culprit is consumerism. We want to have what is advertised, quickly and effortlessly. In the modern world, we are incapable of waiting patiently. Human relationships, on the other hand, require time, energy input, and listening to what another person has to say to us, not just our monologuing. Any video on YT can be sped up, slowed down, looped and turned off at any time, just like conversations on any instant messenger. Videos on YT can hold the viewer’s attention for up to a few minutes, then they are turned off. In real life, in real contact, this is not possible. And our habits, mannerisms sometimes make us reluctant to just take our time with someone, because the meeting will not last 3 minutes, but may last longer. The prospect of spending an afternoon talking with an aunt, for example, can cause great anxiety and aversion to such contacts. This can apply not only to family meetings, but to any meeting.

There is also a view, regarding self-realization. This causes a certain attitude, such our action that we do not allow the voice of others to judge what we do,
to criticize us. Our choices, are our decisions, we don’t consult them with any-one, we don’t allow it. In a moment of real contact, if we were to talk about something from our life, some decisions we have made, then the interlocutor could refer to it, criticize it, question it, want something from us, put us in an awkward situation from our point of view. This would put us in an uncomfortable situation that we do not want, do not accept. That’s why we prefer not to interact at all, so as not to experience that. And we reach a point in our lives when our successes no longer please us, because we have no one to share them with. As Aronson used to say, humans are social creatures (Aronson 2009), so we subconsciously expect acceptance, positive reinforcement.

Over time, we notice that the messages coming from social media are super-ficial, because, for example, graduation results in a so-called “paw up” from friends, the birth of a child – also a “paw up”. We are sad, something didn’t work out for us – another “paw up” or “smiley face” from friends. We perceive the shallowness of these messages. In addition, when we are currently happy or un-happy, we are not interested in our friends’ social media narrative about their problems or joys, we would like them to focus on us, on our feelings. All these experiences result in our frustration, withdrawal, sometimes depression. We have acquaintances, and it’s as if we don’t have them. We feel that these acquaintances are very superficial, they lose their value to us.

**The story of the selfie**

It can be surmised that the origins of this phenomenon go back to the early days of the mirror or other objects in which one could view oneself while satisfying one’s narcissistic needs. The selfie itself is a relatively new phenomenon in social media, as I wrote earlier. Despite the huge number of selfies sent to the media and social networks, it takes a lot of research to understand the phenomenon. As researchers in Poland have written, the frequency of selfie posting is related to the personality of the social media user (Sorokowski & All, 2016). Many psychologists have looked into studying this phenomenon in relation to personality precisely, as well as the gender of the performers. Thus, the results of a paired test study (1 and 2) conducted by Sorokowski & All showed that female participants in the study declared sending and publishing significantly more selfies and group selfies than men (Sorokowski & All, 2015). Despite the fact that most social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have been launched in the last decade, hundreds of millions of people around the world participate in them. According to 2020 figures, FB has more than 1.6 billion daily active users (Ahlgreen 2020).
There are several aspects of selfie culture, among which, the most popular one concerns narcissism. Also recognized are:

— the feminist aspect (stripping off masculinity)
— the devalorization aspect (sexualization)
— the aspect of cheapness and mediocrity (Kopciewicz, 2016, p. 78).

The author writes that the selfie culture for today’s teenagers is the need to be in the center, to make one’s presence known, to expose oneself for others and in the foreground, and consequently to arouse admiration, appreciation, interest. The narcissistic aspect I mentioned leads to certain behaviors that may appall others, especially a generation unaccustomed to crossing moral boundaries, the boundary of shame. The fact that young people participating in this global culture take selfies is one thing, but we have masses of people who accept it, watch it, participate. Participation consists of logging on to social networks, judging the selfies posted there, sending each other addresses, what’s more spicy or “daring” photos. So we have selfie creators as well as recipients. Modern selfie culture is a place, an area where one can expose one’s body, one’s privacy and subject it to the judgment of others without any consequences, brakes. In this world, the weaker, the uglier and the different, who are not on track with cultural patterns of appearance, fashion, leisure activities or taking challenges, sometimes dangerous for those taking a selfie, are treated without any discount.

The ease with which we can take a photograph means that we can take a picture at any time in our lives and at any moment in time. Social media is even “flooded” from time to time with photos of the food we eat, every moment of our children growing up—including defecation, dozens or hundreds of photos of events, gatherings we attend. It’s also moments captured in strange poses, facial expressions, grimaces, hand and foot positions, etc. Social media and sites are flooded with millions of photos, which creates a kind of conglomerate and a new phenomenon, as well as its reception.

**Man in the world of virtual Leeds**

If one refers to the psychological definition, one can learn that the concept of need is “a state of lack in the organism of something that is necessary for its life” (Szewczuk, 1979, p. 204). Okon adds that the state of lack in the body is usually the impetus for action to satisfy the need and make a change in the body (Okon, 1992). Does this interpretation really give us a determinant for the answer to the question of what a need is? In subsequent years, attention has been paid to motivation, or in fact the motivational process, as an element of need. Murray wrote that need is “an operating physicochemical force in the brain that
organizes perception, and specific groups of autonomic, verbal and motor, imaginative responses in order to change a situation of tension”. The characteristics of needs according to Murray are:

— a specific tendency of an individual’s activity
— a typical set of motor, verbal, autonomic and imaginative reactions
— specific direction of attention and interest
— specific emotions
— specific reactions (Murray, 1938).

What is the world of virtual needs? As Professor Dabrowska writes, it is important to be able to distinguish between the real and the virtual, regardless of which reality seems more attractive (Dabrowska, 2020). The Web gives us opportunities to explore numerous virtual worlds, when we enter them, we are moderators in these worlds, we can become whoever we want. With each passing year, the development of technology brings more and more possibilities in this regard. We are not limited in the virtual world by any prohibitions, orders or moral norms. Being, for example, a virtual driver, we can break the law, cause collisions, flee the scene of an accident, fail to render assistance. Sometimes such behavior is even rewarded by game developers or participants being online. We are anonymous in this world, hiding behind “avatars”. But if we were to commit an offense virtually that could endanger someone in the real world, then we are subject to prosecution by the law, although this has less effectiveness and frequency than in the real world.

In addition, the network makes it possible to be in a group, admittedly virtual, but still a group. We are safe in such a group, that’s how we feel: accepted, we can even take on some challenges, tasks as a group. Look for a girlfriend/boyfriend, try to hurt someone. This gives us a sense of agency, power, which can be addictive. In the real world, we are a “gray individual”, listening to mom or dad, teachers, we don’t have a relationship with the school group (class), or even the group isolates us. In the virtual world, we are the ones who deal the proverbial cards, we have something to say. Which world will a young person prefer? Or an older person, on the Internet finding a group of people who like what they like, have similar opinions, pursue similar goals?

The world of virtual needs is no longer the predictions or pipe dreams of SF writers. It is the reality of many people around the world, who sometimes enter disease states and require treatment, usually long-term. They cause many unpleasant consequences, including death. This problem is being recognized and opportunities are being sought to solve it, although with varying success. In Poland, the symptom of addiction is seen in children, adolescents and adults alike. The paths to a solution are so far non-existent, one can only read advice for parents, in various media, on how to deal with this challenge, which is most often limited to the statement: limit young people’s use of the net.
Being fit

It has been known for a very long time that the body is a kind of commodity that is desired, while the owner of an attractive body, becomes a well-liked, accepted person. Many psychological experiments have been carried out, where people with an attractive appearance were more likely to be chosen, indicated, as partners, employees, friends. It has also long been known that very many people would like to please others, to arouse interest, desire. Koscinski writes, for example, about newborn babies, who are more likely (longer) to observe faces considered pretty.

Before the era of the selfie, one’s “shortcomings” were corrected in the portraits that matchmakers and matchmakers showed to potential spouse candidates, and one covered up one’s appearance by various means, sometimes drastic ones such as a corset. It is only since around the 20th century that the body has gained special attention, thanks to fashion, health and the very rapid development of cosmetic companies, and consequently, advertisements for cosmetics, beautifying the body. The rash of advertisements has one message: the products on display prevent the aging process, and are suitable for all ages and genders. We have a cult of youth, of attractiveness. Therefore, many people make an effort to meet these social demands, to stay on the wave of a beautiful body for as long as possible, especially women. It’s not just cosmetic surgery offices, but dental offices, beauty studios, increasingly fashionable passes to gyms, yoga classes and exotic dances. An indicator of this approach is becoming photographs of how we are changing, that effort is not alien to us. Taking photos with attractive people, children, during beauty treatments. All this is supposed to have a message: I am not old/old, I take care of myself, look at the photo. Many photos are “corrected” with programs that slim us down, add tan colors, cover up flaws. We buy clothes that are fashionable, go on diets, show physical activity. More and more often the slogan is said: old age is in the head, and the body must be taken care of here and now. This also puts pressure on each of us to look younger and more beautiful, to please others, to have a well-groomed body. Employers are also making this assumption, with many job advertisements requesting a photo, preferring a young age and appearance.

Research

I made the subject of my research two groups of people. These are a group of students and young people from the Czech Republic and Poland. The Czech group consisted of 110 people (N=110), and it was possible to survey them thanks to Zuzanna Truhlářová, a researcher at the University of Hradec Králové.
The Polish sample group consisted of 290 people (N=290), and I did the research myself. The selection of the sample was purposely random, I was interested in young people, between 20 and 28 years old, with no choice of place of residence, and no separation by gender, although the majority were women. Thus, in the collected group there were people living in the city, in the countryside, single, in relationships and with children. Before the research itself or after the research, I did not make a selection: who takes selfies and who does not, I was interested in the phenomenon itself and its scale. Why did I choose the Czech Republic (Czech Republic) as a comparison with Poland? These countries are in the European Union, the Czech Republic is Poland’s neighbor, access to social media is similar – therefore the question arises: the results of my research will be comparable or similar in both countries? If there are differences – what might they be about? The study was done using the diagnostic survey method, survey technique, and the tool was an extensive survey questionnaire.

The main goal of my research was to find answers to the questions:
— how much of the study group takes selfies and posts them on social media?
— to what extent does possible satisfaction/lack of satisfaction with life result in taking selfies?

Of course, any such study is the respondents’ declarations. Respondents about themselves I asked respondents how often they take selfies.

Table 1
Frequency of taking selfie in respondents, percentage data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups studied</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several times a day</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several times a week</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own research.

One can see differences between the respondents. More frequent selfies both daily and weekly are declared by respondents from Poland. The question is, why? The answers can be many, from the additions from Polish respondents I learned such reasons among others: because I like it, because: I do, it’s necessary to save moments, it improves my mood for the whole day, I do it for myself in my old age when I live, for my boyfriend, on FB, on Insta, because I’m pretty, etc.
If these are the reasons for posting these hand-held photos, why do we have differences between those studied in Poland and the Czech Republic? Perhaps it could be due to cultural context, prudery, or childhood experiences. In general, the community of young people from Poland is more likely to take a selfie, both in frequency: several times a day and: several times a week. The total is 54 percent (Poland) to 27 percent in the Czech Republic. The difference is significant. In an attempt to figure out the reasons for these differences, I related the frequency of taking a selfie to support from parents during childhood. This is shown in the chart below.

| Study group 20–28 years old (N = 290), averaged ratings for the sample in Poland |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  |                  | 3,1              |

| Study group 20–28 years old (N = 110), averaged ratings for the sample in the Czech Republic |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  |                  | 4,23             |

Relationship scale: 0 = no impact, 1–2 = negligible, 2.1–4 = weak, 4.1–6 = high.

Chart 1
The strength of the relationship of parental influences on respondents during childhood on current perceptions of life in: Poland and the Czech Republic

Source: own study.

Intimate Picture

There has long been a debate, including over legal restrictions on photos in an intimate situation. What kind of photo can be considered intimate, and what kind is not? What is intimacy anyway? As Kopalinski writes, intimate means as much as “strictly personal, confidential, secret, close, intimate” (Kopalinski, 1989, p. 234).

A distinction must be made between intimacy and pornography. What is intimate is not necessarily pornographic, but sometimes it can be. Lew-Starowicz dispels these doubts as follows, assuming that pornography is:

content that exposes sexuality, sexual organs, sexual reactivity, various forms of sexual contact with the omission of any context, dehumanizing intimacy and relationships, performed and distributed with the aim of causing sexual excitement in the recipient (Lev-Starovich, 2020).

Matters of intimacy as well as pornography have been addressed in Poland by the Constitutional Court. The interpretation of the Constitutional Court, which emphasized that “the sphere of intimate life is covered by full protection,
while the protection of private life is subject to certain limitations justified by legitimate interest” (Judgment of the SO in Warsaw, 2018). Since this is the TK’s interpretation, this entails criminal liability.

Article 191a of the Criminal Code introduces two types of crimes – the crime of intentionally recording the image of a naked person or a person in the course of sexual activity, carried out through the use of violence, unlawful threat or deception for this purpose, and the crime of intentionally disseminating the image of a person with the above-mentioned characteristics without his consent. Both crimes are punishable by imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years (Infor 2020).

Taking an intimate photo, depending on the context, is therefore not taboo, but neither is there social consent for such photographs. A large part of society is ashamed of such shots, moreover, it never takes them. Not even for their own use or their own archive. Others, on the other hand, take such photos of themselves, and even quite often, and see no problem with it. But once we have such a photograph, a selfie, it takes courage to post it on a social network, so that others can observe the photo. Not everyone has such courage. Hence, sometimes closed forums are created for close friends, where only they can view the photo, or are restricted by the age of the observers entering there.

But we also have a job market, where sometimes applicants are asked to take a photo in, for example, a swimsuit. This is forbidden by law, but how do you recruit a model for a collection of, say, lingerie or swimwear?

So how do respondents approach the issue of intimate photos?

Table 2
Taking a selfie in an intimate situation, percentage data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups studied</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Czech Republic (RCz)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I do not perform</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I occasionally perform</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own research.

Of those surveyed who said they post selfies on social media, the vast majority in both countries do not take such photos. Almost one in five do so occasionally (Poland) and one in seven in the Czech Republic. Rather often, 3 percent of respondents in the Czech Republic and 5 percent in Poland admit to taking
photos in an intimate situation. I did not ask respondents whether they post such photos online, that was not the purpose of my research.

I collated all respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic who declared they occasionally take such photos and frequently take photos (total: I take + occasionally take photos). I correlated these responses with respondents’ declarations about seeing themselves as attractive people.

Table 3
Strength of association of respondents declaring taking intimate photos with seeing themselves as an attractive person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of strength of extreme feelings</th>
<th>Contingency ratio “C”</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>C=0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faint</td>
<td>0 = C0,1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>0,1 ≤ C ≤ 0,3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0,3 ≤ C ≤ 0,5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>0,5 ≤ C ≤ 0,7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>0,7 ≤ C ≤ 0,9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>C=1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own research.

In people who had a negative self-image, there is a correlation such that in adulthood they are more likely to choose to take intimate pictures. The dominant contingency coefficient is “C” in the high and very high ranges. One can speculate that if they had a greater sense of self-acceptance (physically, intellectually), perhaps there would be less desire to take intimate photos of themselves in adulthood?

In the modern world there is pressure to look nice, to be young, slim, attractive and sexy. These are the attributes that get the most coverage in the mass media, arousing interest. Where we don’t look, there the ads tempt with attractiveness, sometimes veiled nudity, or outright nudity. Being “cool” is a kind of social pressure. But not everyone is determined enough to flaunt their nudity. These are very private and very intimate issues. In both respondent groups,
Selfie in the opinions of respondents in...

childhood, elements of that childhood, parental support, seeing themselves—it has a bearing on who they are now, how they act, although if asked directly, they would probably deny it. In respondents from the Czech Republic, the strength of this relationship in the statement (high + very high + full) is 89 (out of 100), while in respondents from Poland it is 76 (out of 100). This is not a very big difference, but it indicates that in respondents from the Czech Republic, the relationship is more pronounced.

**Summary**

Differences can be seen in the surveyed respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic. They can be considered on many levels. Nevertheless, the studied groups differ in various respects. The most frequent selfie is posted online by respondents from Poland, the least in respondents from the Czech Republic. And the frequency of posting selfies is similar, to posting photos. Respondents from Poland are the fastest to do so, the slowest from the Czech Republic. For that, processing photos with programs and graphic filters is dominant in respondents from Poland, least used in respondents from the Czech Republic. Tracking their photos online is declared by all respondents, the least done by Czech respondents, while in the neighborhood of 50 percent is declared by young people from Poland. Why does this happen? I have several theories on the subject, which are being researched and analyzed. I hope to be able to present their results in a more extensive study soon.

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Krzysztof ZAJDEL


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Selfie w opiniach respondentów z pogranicza polsko-czeskiego

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy zjawiska selfie wśród znacznego odsetka młodych ludzi. Główny cel moich badań przyjął formę pytań:
— jak duża część badanej grupy robi sobie selfie i zamieszcza je na portalach społecznościowych?
— na ile ewentualne zadowolenie/brak zadowolenia z życia powoduje sięganie po selfie?


Słowa kluczowe: selfie, selfie intymne, Czechy, Polska.