The “Selfie” Trifecta: Cell-phones, Social Media, and Self

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Abstract

Recent innovations made to mobile technology and the exponential growth of social media has cultivated a unique social behavior that encourages a new public behavior of self-expression and presentation. Social media sites (SMS) such as Facebook and Instagram have integrated mobile technology with their social media platforms to allow users access without a computer or Internet. Cell-phone users who have the ability to take photographs on their device now have the opportunity to share these photographs instantaneously to their network of followers. Among the masses of photographs uploaded on a daily basis, self-portraits, or “selfies,” have populated the web and affected both the photographer and the audience of these images. These selfies have revealed new behavioral activity that is best understood according to research by Goffman (1959) and Berger & Luckmann (1996). The theories of social construction of reality and presentation of self have provided insight towards analyzing how a member of social media sites can craft their identity through a selective process and other photo posting habits. This study seeks to analyze the recent trends of selfies empirically by an online questionnaire and personal interviews. Data from these two methods share new findings toward this new phenomenon and the future of selfies.

Keywords: cell phones, Facebook, photography, selfies, social construction of reality, social media sites

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The “Selfie” Trifecta: Cell-phones, Social Media, and Self

Photography is becoming an increasingly public and social activity. The development of the camera phone has been an impactful advancement in the world of mobile technology. With the recent innovations made to cell-phones and the accessibility to these mobile devices, camera phone images have developed their own social life and implications through social media. Smart phones and mobile devices use social media to both populate the content of the Internet and to record our daily lives in the real world (Tsou & Leitner, 2013, p. 55). Technology and social media have integrated one another in a unique fashion; however, this relationship may lead toward the development of numerous social implications. The sharing of photographs captured on cell-phones has cultivated its own cultural values and has made a visible impact on America’s media consumption as well as our perceptions of self. This research paper seeks to analyze this integration to examine why people upload images to various social media platforms and how it affects their social representation of themselves as well as any peripheral effects. Through a series of questionnaires and personal interviews, data has been collected from subjects who own a cell-phone with a camera function as well as the active cell-phone photographers who share their photographs ritually via social media (See Table 1 for a list of Social Media Sites surveyors use.). The photographing of self-portraits and sharing them on social media as a unique cultural phenomenon has found a home among the masses of Facebook and Instagram users as well as anyone who uses a cell-phone with a camera function. By examining the cultural practice and movement of self-presentation via mobile devices through the theory of social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1996) with an emphasis on materiality (Goffman, 1959), insight as to how this new ritual has taken root in an individual’s social development is gained.

Among the many signs of impact that cell-phone photography and social media have had
on society is the overwhelming production and distribution of photographic images. Today it is uncommon to find a cell-phone user without a camera function (see Table 7 for a percentage on participants with cell-phones with a built-in-camera). Fifty-six percent of American adults own some form of smartphone (Smith, 2013). At the same time, activity on social media has gained a vast amount of popularity within the past few years (e.g., Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2011). These new activities include a rising trend among people who take their cell-phone images further by sharing them via social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. A large majority of my personal social media feed has become heavily saturated with visual images of users, their daily lives, and their social media presence. The number of photographs circulating social media has reached a record high, thus disseminating images far beyond the limits of the user’s intended audience. Due to the increasing popularity of social media and the rising number of users, the phenomenon of cell-phones and social media has garnered academic interest as well. There have been a growing number of studies on this subject; however, the aim of this research is to present the main trends in photographic sharing and to provide an overview of major empirical findings.

According to Facebook’s own statistics, more than 300 million photographs are uploaded each day, making it the world’s most popular online photographic service (Facebook, 2013). Among the masses of photos shared on a daily basis through social media sites (SMS), there is a disconnection between the content of the images shared, the number of images shared, and the frequency of images shared, and the users themselves. The combination of cell-phones with built-in cameras and access to social media platforms has cultivated a unique social practice of uploading images of “daily life” to share that can often send a false message. The various methods of receiving affirmation from social media have also influenced this photographic practice. Cell-phones with cameras, access to social media, and a system for receiving
affirmation through ‘likes’ and ‘hearts’ have created this unique self-sustaining trifecta (Facebookb, 2013; Instagramb, 2013). While taking images of mundane, everyday objects, or even photographs of oneself, is another cultural phenomenon that has only recently grown to exponentially large proportions, the ability to skillfully craft one’s identity through a selective process is most intriguing and is worth examining from an academic lens. The general aim of this paper is to provide a summary of major empirical findings in the area of social media use and its antecedents to offer a better understanding of this new cultural phenomenon.

**Background Review**

**Personal & Domestic Photography**

Since the integration of photography into social media, high-quality images have become something that even non-professionals can create and comment on with relative authority and ease, blurring the line between amateur and professional categories in image making. Murray (2008) even argues that the social use of digital photography signals a shift towards transience and the development of a communal aesthetic that does not respect traditional amateur/professional hierarchies (p. 151). Murray (2008) adds that photography has become less about the special moments of family living (e.g., holidays, weddings, baby photos, significant events) and more about an immediate, rather fleeting display of one’s discovery of the small and mundane (e.g., breakfast items, uncreative self-portraits, everyday household objects, articles of clothing, and architectural elements)(p. 151). This movement signals a definitive shift in our temporal relationships with the everyday image, and has altered the way that that narratives are constructed about people and the world around us. Personal photography exists at the intersection between cultural norms, individual practices, market forces and technological infrastructures (Cook, 2012, p. 93). According to Cook (2012), the combination of low cost,
relatively high-quality, and increasingly pervasive mobile devices has transformed domestic photography in many ways.

**Photo Sharing**

In recent studies of these new developments, examinations of the camera phone system from both the pre-existing and emerging uses of photography conclude that camera phone photography has far exceeded the original functionality of both film and digital photography (House & David, 2005). Kindberg, Spasojevic, Fleck, and Sellen (2005) note the ability to conduct timely deliveries of cell phone images as an advancement that has superseded the capability of film and even modern digital photography. Kindberg et al. (2005) further concludes that cellphone images will either serve a social function to inform a niche network or the individual as a means of expression. Subjects of new studies were examined for their photographic practices on the various platforms their images were presented on. By conducting interviews about their general personal photographic practices, House and David (2005) had examined these new practices by collecting images and comparing them to a control group of camera phone users not registered in their MMM system, a database of the collected cell-phone images used for observation and comparison. The sample group and observation period had allowed the study to identify the four high-order “social uses” of personal photography: creating and maintaining relationships, constructing personal and group memory, self-presentation, and self-expression (p. 1). While House and David (2005) interpret camera phones as memory-capture devices, communication devices, and expressive devices, technological advancements and the recent integration of social media has given birth to a new function of the camera phone: selective presentation.

The parameters of House and David’s (2005) research for organizing and analyzing the
data collected for this study have been determined. These parameters have aided the development of the online survey questions and interview questions for this empirical study conducted to analyze photo sharing habits and the effects on an individual’s social development.

Social Media Sites (SMS)

In 2013, the social networking site Facebook had reached 819 million active users, of which 699 million users log into their profiles on a daily basis (Facebook, 2013b). It is also the most commonly used online social networking site among adults that is increasingly growing today (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zichuhr, 2010). Given the popularity of this site and its importance to the lives of social media users to facilitate communication and relationships, it is imperative to understand the many varying factors influencing social media site (SMS) usage to identify any developing tendencies toward new communication technologies (Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010, p. 173). Second only to Facebook is Instagram, a photo sharing social media application which has on average 55 million photographs circulating on a daily basis (Instagram, 2013). With a total of sixteen billion photos shared since its launch in October 2010, Instagram is the second largest photographic social media application (Instagram, 2013). A total of 150 million active users make Instagram a worthy platform to investigate various photographic sharing practices. Alongside sites such as MySpace and Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are social media sites that enable users to create public profiles as well as to build relationships with other people or groups of people.

Social Identity

Facebook allows its users not only to communicate with one another but also to share photos, reveal personal information, and comment on issues. Based on its multifaceted array of applications, Facebook plays different roles, ranging from a method of communication, a
platform for entertainment, or a tool for self-promotion (Blachino, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013). The role of social norms (Hu, et al., 2011), social identity (Kwon & Wen, 2010), and social trust (Oum & Han, 2011) were confirmed in research by Blachino et al. (2013). Further research by Blachino et al. reveals that social factors (i.e., social identity, social norms) are important for shaping various attitudes toward Facebook use and increase actual usage. The importance for Facebook usage and satisfaction were also confirmed in other studies, such as Cheung, Chiu, and Lee’s (2011) analysis of their We-intention model, the exploration of social motivation by Kim et al. (2010), and how group identification study by Barker (2009) related to collective self-esteem and the need to belong (Blachino et al., 2013, p. 777). Likewise, evidence has also been found for inverse influence, namely, the effect of social media use on gaining acceptance from peers (Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Chi-Wai Kwok, 2010).

There is a vast body of research that focuses on the relationship between the five-factor model of personality and the use of Facebook (e.g., Blachino, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013, p. 777; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Hudiburgh, 2012; Moore, & McElroy, 2012; Ross et al., 2009; Seidman, 2012). The five-factor model describes personality on five dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 1999). Further research into each dimension of the five-factor model reveals:

- **Neuroticism** is related to the level of anxiety, moodiness, and emotional instability; it is displayed by psychological distress while being socially exposed. Extraversion is connected with talkativeness, being assertive, looking for social interactions, and deriving pleasure from contacts with others. Openness to experience characterizes those who are open to new solutions, like learning new things, and have a broad range of interests.
- **Agreeableness** is connected with being cooperative, sympathetic, warm, and considerate.
Conscientiousness is associated with being scrupulous and diligent. (Blachino, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013, p. 777)

In Blachino, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka’s (2013) research, extraversion and openness to experience were found to be positively related to social media use, whereas emotional stability was negatively related to the latter (p. 777). Furthermore, some differences with regard to age and sex were revealed. While both men and women with high levels of extraversion used SMSs more often, only those men with high emotional instability were the regular users (Blachino, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013, p. 778).

**Psychological Factors Behind Social Media Usage**

Researchers also focused on psychological factors when they explored how people use social media. Correa, Hinsley, and de Zuniga (2010) argue that extraversion, emotional stability, and openness to experience are among the factors that distinguish users of SMS and instant messaging, often jointly labeled as social media users. Ross et al. (2009) showed that extraverted users were members of more online groups. However, contrary to what was expected, extraversion was unrelated to the frequency of using Facebook and its communication applications or to the number of friends. Those who scored high on neuroticism used the Facebook Wall more often, whereas those scoring low on this trait preferred posting photos on their profiles (Ross et al., 2009). In sum, self-esteem was found to be negatively related to Facebook activity and to time spent on Facebook; the more time spent on Facebook, the lower one’s self-esteem (Kalpidou, Costin & Morris, 2011).

Wilson, Fornasier, and White (2010) revealed that personality and self-esteem were good predictors of using SMS and, at the same time, determinants of addictive tendencies. Another personality trait closely linked to Facebook use and identity is narcissism. Carpenter (2012)
attempted to establish the relationship between the pattern of using Facebook and two elements of narcissism: the “Grandiose Exhibitionism” related to the need of being in the center of others’ attention, and the “Entitlement/Exploitativeness” connected with the sense of deservingness and ignoring others’ needs and feelings. “Narcissism is simply an exaggerated form of self-esteem, possibly with a more emotional than cognitive character” (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998, p. 220). In a similar vein, a Wilson et al. (2010) study showed that narcissists more often updated their profiles on Facebook and showed more appealing profile photos; generally, they were more focused on self-promotional goals (Blachino, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013). According to Mehdizadeh (2010), narcissism was related not only to the frequency and intensity of using Facebook but also to self-promotion in some Facebook applications (e.g., profile photos, status updates).

Finally, Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen (2011) investigated the contribution of self-worth to specific online activities, such as photo sharing. Participants of this study completed an online survey measuring typical behaviors on social media. The results indicated that contingencies or sources of self-worth, such as appearance, approval of generalized others, and outdoing others explained online photo sharing (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). More specifically, the appearance for self-worth had the strongest relationship with the saturation of online photo sharing (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2011). In sum, the review of the literature on social media use suggests that a high level of extraversion, low self-esteem, narcissism, and self-worth are associated with high social media use.

This research pays close attention to a sample’s activity on Facebook and/or Instagram accounts as well as any other social media sites mentioned from the questionnaire. Apart from the many ways an individual can present him or herself, the selection of images presented on
SMS speak volumes about the individual’s values, beliefs, interests, social life, personality traits, and self-esteem. It is the combination of cell-phone photography and SMS that have led to the development of what this study conceptualizes as the “social window” to a person’s social life.

**Theoretical Framework**

Research regarding an individual’s identity shows that it can be categorized into different groups (Bouvier, 2012; Goffman, 1959; Vazire & Gosling, 2004). Some of these categories are based around a “biological model of national identity, while others focus on a belonging to a territory, others on national cultural activities and yet others link to lifestyle identity” (Bouvier, 2012, p. 37). These identity categories have further assisted the organization of this paper’s sample into these various groups based on the content of their images to determine the motivations behind the images shared via social networking. Bouvier (2012) asks, “Does Facebook foster particular kinds of identity categories as users are involved in participating in social networks and creating community links?” (p. 37).

Further research on an individual’s identity on social networking sites has complemented Goffman’s (1959) emphasis on materiality. There is a process of self-presentation on social networking sites, where individuals perform and present who they are, and manage this in various ways at different times and in different contexts (Bouvier, 2012, p. 40). Facebook allows users to skillfully craft and display their identity with little to no regulation or predetermined set of standards. Bouvier notes that the flexibility and freedom of Facebook has led to more discussions about whether Facebook profiles are used to create and communicate idealized versions of selves, or whether social networking sites serve as an extension of our social context in which one’s actual personality characteristics can be expressed (Vazire & Gosling, 2004). Some researchers lean toward the idea that identity is performed on personal pages through a
combination of text, image and sound (e.g., Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield 2007, p. 437). These crafted representations are “purposeful” and “self-production is heavily narrated,” pointing to the connection between user profiles and the mainstream culture industry (Hearn, 2008, p. 197). Many users will publically display their daily ‘diaries,’ complete with photographs that may or of course may not be heavily selective.

**Social Construction of Reality**

Prolonged exposure to visual images on social media begins to inhibit users’ behaviors and influence individuals over time, whether they are aware of it or not. Berger and Luckmann (1996) note that the idea behind social construction of reality is that persons and/or groups interacting in a social system create, over time, concepts or mental representations of each other’s actions. These concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles displayed by the subjects in relation to each other, and when these roles are made available to other members of society, these reciprocated interactions are then institutionalized as part of their social script (Berger & Luckmann, 1996). Therefore, as members of social media sites engage in various interactions, they are influenced by their immediate network to produce similar content that is then shared on their respective networks, creating a cycle that is frequently updated and replicated. In relation to cell-phone photography and social media, the more images we are exposed to, the more we begin to equate the reality of those images with that person. In a similar way, Lampe et al. (2007) noted in their research that social media profiles can help create a sense of presence and a desire to yield positive outcomes for their creators; the images users choose to upload become a direct reflection of this need to present oneself in a likeable manner. Online communities have different goals, but a common and important objective is forming connections between users. Therefore, we can form connections by reciprocating each other’s reality as part
of a script. This is especially true for online communities that focus on articulating social networks, such as Facebook.

In order to achieve relational and other goals, individuals attempt to manage these impressions by strategically emphasizing some characteristics while deemphasizing others, with or without the help of photographs. While Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield’s (2007) research on Facebook profiles notes that “online self-presentation compared to real-life presentation is more impressionable and subject to self-censorship than face-to-face self-presentation, due to the asynchronous nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC),” the same principles apply to the craftsmanship and selective process of image sharing (p. 436). CMC emphasizes verbal and linguistic cues over less controllable nonverbal communication cues (Lampe et al., 2007, p. 436). The types of images that can be shared on social media profiles suggest that certain elements of a user’s profile act as signals that may reveal something about the identity of the user (Lampe et al., 2007, p. 436). Members of social media sites need to keep in mind that these profile signals can easily be manipulated by their creator to communicate personal qualities or even inaccurate information. While these signals are easy to produce, they are harder to verify.

In a cultural study examining the differences between East Asian and Western culture, Huang and Park (2012) note that given the evidence showing that internalized culture shapes cognition, it is reasonable to suggest that sustained exposure to a set of cultural practices will affect an individual’s social cognition both in the offline world and in cyberspace (p. 336). Facebook provides a platform for users to create a public profile to communicate their motivation and interests to other social network participants such as relatives, friends, and strangers. The expanding field of social and personality psychology has provided evidence that there are striking consistencies in the way individuals express and communicate their personality
through online social network sites (Huang & Park, 2012, p. 337). More specifically, online social network sites constitute an extended social context in which to reflect individuals’ characteristics, providing personal information that mirrors private thoughts, facial images, and social behaviors (Ambady & Skowronski, 2008; Back et al., 2010; Vazire & Gosling, 2004). By visually expressing their selves through profile photographs and other images, users engage in the social construction of reality, crafting their digitally mediated identities in interaction with their online social relations (Uimonen, 2013, p. 122). In performing our identities, we reveal ourselves to others, and through this process we also construct ourselves and our social worlds (Uimonen, 2013, p. 123).

In addition to evaluating the effect of social media, studies have also explored its impact on impression formation in those connections. Weisbuch et al. (2009) examine the correspondence between interpersonal impressions made online versus face-to-face. The authors found that people who were liked by interaction partners were also liked on the basis of their social media profiles. Thus, impressions formed from personal webpages provided audiences with valid information about the webpage authors’ likability in the offline world (Weisbuch et al., 2009).

**Personal Construction of Self**

Another important factor in relationships among Facebook users is their physical attractiveness. A study by Wang, Kwon, and Evans (2010) showed that the display of one’s profile photo on Facebook had a significant effect on the willingness to initiate friendships with the profile owners (Wang et al., 2010). Physical attractiveness was most noteworthy as a visual cue when choosing who to befriend when other verbal or non-verbal cues were limited (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2011). In addition, both male and female subjects were more willing to initiate
friendships with opposite-sex profile owners with attractive photos (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2011). Thus, physical attractiveness is one of the most elementary criteria people use when forming impressions about others both online and offline.

Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, and Tong (2008) evaluated different cues of social media pages that affected observers’ impressions of that user. An experiment using mock-up profiles on Facebook asked undergraduate student Facebook users about their perceptions of physical attractiveness. Participants of the Walther et al. (2008) study viewed stimuli designed to reflect differences in physically attractive or unattractive photos on a mock-up Facebook profile. Results showed the importance of the physical attractiveness of an end user’s friends’ photos in creating favorable impressions (Walther et al., 2008). In other words, it benefits one to have good-looking friends on Facebook (Walther et al., 2008). While this study emphasized the nature of having good-looking friends, ultimately members of social media are actively constructing their Internet identities with the hopes that someone in their network will visit their page and leave with good impressions.

Rise of the “Selfie”

By unanimous decision, “selfie” has become the Oxford Dictionary’s word of the year with a 17,000% increase in usage over the past year (Oxford, 2013; Heritage, 2013). While it is not a new word, it has already been included in Oxford Dictionaries Online (Oxford, 2013). The term’s early origins lie in social media and photo sharing sites like Flickr and MySpace. Self-portraits (i.e., selfies) are nothing new as well – “people have been producing them for centuries, with the medium and publication format changing” (Oxford, 2013). Today’s self-portraits, or selfies, are often snapped at odd angles with smartphones, include some part of the photographer’s arm, and are uploaded to social media. Many selfies are intended to present a
flattering image of the person, especially to friends whom the photographer expects to be supportive. It is a new phenomenon in which the photographer is also the subject of the photograph, in a subversive twist on the traditional understanding of the photograph. Technological advancements to the digital camera and its addition to the cell-phone have encouraged this new practice. Its allure is its simplicity in creating and sharing, the control it gives self-photographers over how they present themselves, and the ability to produce instant gratification. “The photographs of my youth were deeply considered affairs – was it worth using up a 24-exposure FujiFilm roll on a photo that might not even be in focus? No such worries with a cameraphone” (Adewumi, 2013, para. 3). Dr. Leaver, a cultural and social media lecturer from Curtin University who studied the art of selfies says:

It's people looking for their friends to confirm they look good. You want that reassurance, we all want people to say positive things about us. You're not going to be taking an image of yourself taking an image of yourself in tracky dacks, watching TV… The infiltration of the selfie in news feeds has led to two thirds of women regarding them positively and a quarter admitting to no longer thinking it strange to upload photos of themselves. I do think as our feeds fill up with photos on Facebook and Instagram it does normalize this idea of self-presentation. (McHugh, 2013, para. 4)

**Methods**

Facebook is an appropriate site to study as it has profile creation, photo albums, the ability to comment on individual images, and the ability to share an album or an individual image. The ability to access Facebook through mobile devices also fosters certain photographic and sharing practices that influence the maintenance of one’s profile. Instagram, a photo sharing social media platform under Facebook, also serves as a secondary source of samples. A total of
219 (n=219) respondents filled out an online questionnaire responding to various questions related to cell-phone photography and social media usage. The questionnaire was distributed online through the author’s personal Facebook account. Ninety percent of Facebook users in this sample were of college age and the author makes the claim that this is a reasonably representative sample of the desired target. Survey questions asked subjects what kinds of images he or she takes on their mobile device, how often, and where the images end up after capture (see Table 3 & 5 for more details on the different subjects individuals take photographs of and where they are shared after capture). Data has been analyzed to support various claims in this paper in terms of validating the popularity of cell-phone photography and social media.

The researcher asked questions to a group of participants centered on their personal photographic practices, their presence on social media, and the overall intentions behind their photographs. Through the sequence of questions, this study hoped to discover any social practices and patterns related to the social media culture, as well as learn about the images that do not pass the users’ parameters regarding what is acceptable to be posted on social media. Any form of empirical data at this stage of social media’s dominant presence in the lives of young Facebook and Instagram users serves as invaluable insight toward this new cultural phenomenon of self-worth and self-presentation. While the online questionnaire asked participants to examine their personal activity with their cell phone and social media on a surface level, the interviews served to dig deeper and analyze their personal habits as well as reflect on why participants may have felt their actions were justified. In sum, the combination of data from the questionnaire and the information from interviews answer the following questions: (a) which individual factors relate to cell-phone photography? and (b) how do they influence or differentiate users’ behavior on social media?
Discussion and Analysis

Results from the online questionnaire proved the overall popularity and frequent usage of the social media sites, Facebook and Instagram (see Table 1). Results have also indicated the vast majority of participants to be owners of cell-phones with either a camera feature, access to social media through the mobile device, or both. Respondents have also revealed the vast quantity of photographs shared on the two social media sites mentioned earlier, as well as the frequency of images uploaded. Subjects who own a cell phone with a camera function and have access to mobile social media applications stated they upload images on average at least once a week (see Table 2 for more details on the frequency of photographs uploaded onto social media). These images consist of photographs of special events (e.g., birthday, wedding, etc.), still life (e.g., food, flowers, household objects, etc.), and pictures of friends with or without the user (see Table 3 for more details on the different subjects photographed by participants). Further questioning on the participants’ self-portrait practices have indicated that users take these images as a means to pass time, to share on social media, as a means of socializing, and for self-expression (see Table 4 for details and more reasons why individuals take selfies).

Further examination of the online questionnaire has also revealed that images posted onto social media sites are uploaded at some point during the day of capture as a means of constructing personal and group memory (See Table 8 for more details on the timeliness of uploading images). The timeliness of uploading images is directly correlated to the pressure to present in a timely manner Social media sites’ instantaneous access allows for users to browse other user’s pages at any given moment. Users are exposed to recent content circulating at that particular moment in time. When determining which images to upload, users discern the subject(s) of their images through the parameters by which they think is acceptable to upload
within the time frame of the activity. For example, a photograph of a dinner plate uploaded onto a social media site around dinnertime communicates the message that the user is currently having dinner at that moment. Images shared outside a specific time period can easily be misinterpreted or used to mislead viewers into believing the activity of that user at that moment. Images that have missed the window of time to upload are often uploaded with a caption or comment stating the reason for it’s delayed posting. Therefore, it can be assumed that timeliness is another factor/tool utilized by social media users to communicate various messages while constructing memory.

**Interviews:**

**In-depth analysis of photograph-posting motivation.** Further empirical studies through interviews have added new insight and literature to this new pervasive social phenomenon. The general aims of these interview sessions were to question participants on analyzing what the “reality” is that social media users today are engulfed in. Has Facebook become a fabricated construction of reality, or is it an honest representation of an individual’s social life? The purpose of photography is to capture the moment; the image presented is only a particular moment of time. It is a very particular moment that is then presented as reality as social media sites have the power to further suspend this moment until it is accepted as the true reality. Photographs presented on social media platforms are therefore imprinted in the memories of the viewers, thus reinforcing a particular image or belief towards the account holder. Acts of communication are irreversible; even if the image were to be removed from the user’s account, the deletion will not guarantee that any viewer will forget the image or its impact. Interviewing respondents about their personal cell-phone photography practices and social media usage has led to a number of interesting analyses for this research as well as for the respondent. Questions concerning
personal cell-phone photography habits and its corresponding nature to social media sites have been asked and have led an array of answers.

Motivations for sending these images varied between the users depending on their intended audience as well as their personal expectations, particularly in regards to the selfie. An example of these different practices and motivations can be identified with T. Herd, a subject who was interviewed for this study. Herd says, “I usually only take a ‘selfie’ if I’m looking decent” (personal communication, November 20, 2013). Herd also says, “I take them to send them to accompany things that I’m telling friends. I’m trying to tell something funny or a story and then I send a facial expression that accompanies it…” (T. Herd, personal communication, November 20, 2013). Yo, another subject who was interviewed offers a contrasting perspective claiming the importance of “the recency of the photo, if it’s a nice picture that I think will attract a lot of ‘likes’... like something interesting” (S. Yo, personal communication, November 20, 2013). Only then will the photograph be acceptable to be shared on social media. Herd takes the perspective that selfies are sent as a means of supplementing emotions to a specific audience, whereas Yo finds these images valuable if there is something “interesting” worth sharing to Yo’s greater social media network. Differences between the intended audience, motivation, and subject matter determine the likelihood of images being shared on social media and the expected responses.

Calculated presentation of self. Only when interviewed subjects were questioned about their personal behavior did they begin to notice the peculiar nature of social media and the culture of self-presentation. Playing “devil’s advocate” while asking questions forced subjects to stop and consider their behavior from an external perspective as media consumers rather than as a producer/contributor. When asked, “What kind of selfies would you not post either to your
friends or the general public?” Herd responded, “Anything where I don’t look ‘good,’ like if my hair is a mess… People want to communicate that they have a great life and that they’re happy and that they have lots of friends” (T. Herd, personal communication, November 20, 2013). An unspoken pressure to present yourself in this fashion exists and is “definitely reinforced through social media and even media in general through magazines that you’re supposed to look good” (T. Herd, personal communication, November 20, 2013). Images are diluted and modified to fit a particular mold for social media “most if not all of the time… by imitating other things that they’ve seen on social media like certain poses or hand gestures or faces. Imitating those kinds of selfies or things that they’ve seen by prominent figures” (T. Herd, personal communication, November 20, 2013). “It’s an excuse to represent yourself in a positive way or with a happy expression or with a bunch of friends on a day you look good like right after you did your hair and your makeup” (T. Herd, personal communication, November 20, 2013). Herd’s response in identifying the undesirable ‘selfie’ provides insight towards the media’s role in structuring what is deemed acceptable and presentable. “Prominent figures,” as Herd mentioned, assume an influential role in determining the standard by which society will accept certain forms of presentation.

Raw, negative emotions are seldom posted out of fear of ridicule, misinterpretation, lack of feedback, confusion, and concern. “Would I find that unusual? No, I don’t think so. If you scrolled through my social media you probably wouldn’t find any pictures of me upset or anything because people don’t post those” (T. Herd, personal communication, November 20, 2013). Subjects soon realized the “normality” of the phenomenon. “My general thoughts on selfies are that they can be a lot of fun but for the most I don’t really understand them; I think they’re kind of dumb, but I participate, too” (T. Herd, personal communication, November 20,
It can be concluded that selfies, are not taken if the subject feels he or she does not look “appropriate.” This preconceived ideology of presenting oneself to a particular standard set by the media increases the pressure and obsession to look a certain way, while certain candid emotions or negative images are discouraged from being posted. Despite the negativity towards these negative images, it has not stopped certain users from sharing; however, these images are often presented with a humorous twist or for the sake of attention.

Presenting self has acquired new meanings and implications, even consequences and repercussions. Bouvier (2012) noted that the flexibility and freedom of Facebook has led to more discussions about whether Facebook profiles are used to create and communicate idealized versions of selves, or whether social networking sites serve as an extension of our social context in which one’s actual personality characteristics can be expressed (Vazire & Gosling, 2004). In the case of selfies, these extensions of our social context cannot be due to the intention of the user; it is no longer candid and does not reflect personalities honestly. Characteristics can be expressed but the unspoken pressure from media and other users to maintain a personable profile causes users to further construct themselves to a certain standard.

**Three-Step Model to Self-Presentation**

Empirical examination of different individuals’ social media use and cell-phone photography habits have revealed a trend in behavior that can be categorized into what the author defines as a 3-step model to self-presentation. The model consists of: (1) an impulse to share and/or express oneself that is triggered by internal desires or from external sources (e.g., Facebook feeds or popular media); (2) active, conscious decisions are made in determining what to share and on which social media platform; (3) the image is captured, reviewed, then uploaded only after approval from the user according to a pre-determined set of parameters (e.g., good
hair, nice outfit). The images are posted, then receive affirmation in the forms of ‘likes’ or ‘hearts.’ Positive responses to particular posts will encourage the user to share more posts similar to that topic or style. Negative responses or even a lack of responses/activity will discourage future images of that subject being posted. However, over-production and over-saturation of what was perceived as successful or positive may lead to negative responses. Users are then either discouraged from sharing posts of that nature or users become more creative and experiment with new techniques in order to gain approval or acceptance.

**Changing Nature of Photography**

Within the complex system of self-presentation and self-evaluation through social media sites, the Three-Step Model to Self-Presentation reveals a change in the nature of photography. While the general idea and purpose behind photography is to document a specific moment in time, social media has ushered in the practice of selective manipulation to carefully craft a desired identity. The advent of digital photography allows for users to capture images, review them immediately and make further adjustments to the image in order to achieve a desired result. While the practice of actively reviewing images for photographic corrections is common among more complex forms of photography, this review system is now practiced on a daily basis with certain social media users. Users can take a photograph of themselves in a specific environment, lighting condition, or time of day, present selective features of himself or herself with relative ease, and make adjustments to any of these conditions with the same effort. These forms of micro-adjustments were not available with film photography.

The real capability of digital photography becomes meaningful when analyzed through this Three-Step Model. While digital photography is often viewed as a new form of technology that was developed to replace film photography, an unforeseen effect of digital photography is
not only its ease of use and how it has democratized digital images, but how digital photography
has become a shared method of active interpersonal communication. Creating and maintaining
relationships during the era of film photography was limited to a narrow interpersonal space that
was determined by the number of physical copies of the photograph available or by proximity.
Only professional photographers had the ability to reach a wide audience with his or her images.
Digital photography has broken the boundaries between audiences and the ability to reach them.
Digital photography presents a paradigm shift from film photography in how images are used as
active tools for communication.

Conclusion

We live in a world that is heavily saturated with technological equipment and
photographers. From point-and-shoot users, to the advanced amateur, to Instagrammers and
more, it is important as ever to be critical of the masses of visual images we are bombarded with
on a daily basis. Though the images we are exposed to on social media are heavily influenced by
the desire to present something interesting or entertaining, there is still a parallel that exists
between this public display and the integrity of private photography, and they are still driven by
the core goals of capturing, communicating, and reflecting on intimate personal experiences
(Cook, 2012, p. 94). Facebook relationships are increasingly communicated through images and
have been successful in providing people with a bridge from a user’s online (virtual world) and
offline (real world) contacts with other people living in varied sociocultural environments. In a
world where perception is often viewed as reality, it is our job as educated media consumers to
examine cultural visual phenomena critically. The author believes that among the masses of
photographs uploaded daily to Facebook and or Instagram, there are messages within the
carefully-tailored combination of images being uploaded. These messages are insights to deeper
underlying issues that may exist from an overexposure of images from a user’s social network. The author also believes that the content of the images shared and viewed on social media can heavily influence one’s self-esteem, value of self, perception of well-being, and lead one to evaluate the quality of one’s own life in either positive or negative ways.

Facebook, as well as other platforms of social media, are a complicated and multidimensional system. Facebook has a variety of applications and has become an indispensable tool in many areas of human activity. It is difficult to predict whether it will replace other forms of online communication; however, most likely it has become one of the most popular platforms for online communication and for spreading information. The pivotal role of SMS has also manifested itself during the recent uprisings in the technological world. Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that social media use is primarily determined by two basic social needs: (1) the need to belong, and (2) the need for self-presentation (Nadkarni, & Hofmann, 2011). These needs can act independently and are influenced by a host of other factors, including cultural background and personality traits such as introversion, extraversion, shyness, narcissism, neuroticism, self-esteem, and self-worth (Nadkarni, & Hofmann, 2011).

Major findings from this study are derived from the Three-Step Model of Self-Presentation and understanding the true impact digital photography has had in the ability to communicate. Digital photography has broken the boundaries of space and time as the ability to communicate to mass audiences is readily available through social media. These broken boundaries have exposed an inner need to society: the need to present oneself in a certain fashion, as one’s profile can be viewed by virtually anybody who has access to the Internet. This new degree of freedom and exposure has encouraged members of social media to take active
control of their identity by skillfully crafting it with relative ease. Social media and digital photography have given us the unique power to actively take and select which images we choose to present to the public. These broken boundaries have also revealed our innate natural desire to express narcissism in a less constrained way, and fulfill our human desire for presentation and acceptance.
References


Appendix

Table 1

*Different Social Media Sites that Surveyors Use*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Site (SMS)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myspace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stumbleupon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flickr</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photobucket</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Frequency of Pictures Taken On Cell-phones*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple of times a week</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t normally take pictures</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t take pictures on my cell-phones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t take pictures at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Subjects of Pictures Taken Cell-phones*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures of yourself with friends (group photos)</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still-life (e.g., food, flowers, household objects, etc.)</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-portraits (pictures of yourself without any other present members)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes and architectural elements</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events (e.g., birthday, wedding, etc.)</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Specifics on Self-portraits*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To reflect my current emotional state</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make a personal announcement</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a means of socializing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal gratification</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share on social media</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of boredom, as a means to kill time</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5

*Where Cell-phone Pictures are Shared*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not share my pictures, they stay on my phone</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are shared with a specific recipient</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Sites (SMS)</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6

*The Purpose of Pictures Taken on Cell-phones*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating and maintaining relationships</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing personal and group memory</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-presentation</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7

*Owners of Cell-phones with a Built-in Camera*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you own a cell-phone with a built-in camera?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

*Timeliness of Images Uploaded Onto Social Media Sites*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediately after capture</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An hour after capture</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometime later that day</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometime later that week</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never share my pictures anywhere</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>