

ABSTRACT

In today's world, the process of digitization and the proliferation of social media have brought about marked changes in consumer behaviour in both physical and electronic marketplaces (Belk, 2013). Recently, increased access to digital and mobile technologies has enabled consumers to display themselves publicly on digital media platforms through a distinctive cultural marker of the current generation - the "selfie". According to the Oxford dictionary, the term selfie is a neologism for "a self-portrait photography of oneself (or oneself with other people), taken with a camera or a camera phone held at arm's length or pointed at a mirror, which is usually shared through social media" (Sorokowski et al., 2015).

Selfies are arguably one of the most important controversies in today's world. Several authors (Erickson, 2013; Murray, 2015) have pointed out that the word "Selfie" has become synonymous with the vision of a self-grossed individual clicking his/her pictures on a smartphone only to garner adulation from a wide range of 'friends' on a social media platform. Academics have been, at best, divided in their opinion as far as this phenomenon is considered. Selfies have been derided as being inappropriate, irreverent, stupid, narcissist, inward-looking, and dangerous, (Novakova, 2014; Shah, 2015). Some selfie-addicts have attracted the ire of critics by clicking their selfies at sombre monuments (e.g. Tuol Sleng Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and Genocide memorial in Berlin, Germany); one of the most controversial selfies was of the US President Barack Obama taking one with the Prime Ministers of Denmark and the United Kingdom at the Nelson Mandela Memorial services (Erickson, 2013). Such behaviour from the point of view of accepted social norms, of course, has been 'disturbing', and the rise of

selfies has been attributed to the self-obsessive nature of the millennials. However, some academics have come to the rescue of the selfie-addicts, terming this as a Do-it-Yourself (DIY) self-expression and liberation (Nemer & Freeman, 2015; Shah, 2015). Their studies showcase selfies as a form/medium through which marginalized individuals are expressing themselves with greater confidence (Lim, 2016) . However, the extant studies suffer from a rather symptomatic view of selfies and have failed to probe beyond the obvious (Novakova, 2014; Presi, Maehle, & Kleppe, 2016). In this dissertation, through a multi-method qualitative enquiry, I try to probe deeper into the phenomenon of consumer selfies to broaden the understanding of the selfie phenomenon.

In my first essay, I investigate why and how consumers manage their identities through consumption selfies. By integrating the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht et al. 1993) and the Practice Theory (Schatzki, 2013), I offer insights into how consumers' personal, enacted, relational and communal identity frames interact and contradict in the online space thereby creating identity gaps and how consumers carefully use the material practice of selfies to manage these identity gaps. I uncover and explain the process of digital identity gap management and elaborate how it happens through the three stages of adapting, adopting and artifacting. This essay contributes to the debate on consumers' digital identity management by extending how materiality and a material practice helps in the communicative process of identities. This essay also offers insights into how consumption selfies are effective tools in shaping and evolution of individual identities. The findings from this study will help broaden marketers' understanding of consumer's digital persona, thereby helping them cater to their consumers in a better way.

In my second essay, I investigate the process of consumer engagement in selfie-based social media campaigns. First, I establish how selfies are little-narratives of one's self in the digital space. Then I explain how consumer engagement in selfie-based campaigns happen through four iterative stages of narrative identification, narrative transportation, narrative construction and narrative elaboration. The findings of this essay highlight the interactive, iterative and experiential process (Brodie et al, 2011) by which consumers engage in selfie-based social media campaigns. The study also uncovers how brands can use the selfie-based campaigns to co-create value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) in this era of digitization, where consumers are becoming increasingly distant from brands and advertisements. These findings will help brand managers to understand the differences in the consumer engagement process in selfie-based campaigns and will help them to construct campaign themes that can make consumers participants transcend the four stages to construct and broadcast their relationship with the brands.

In my third essay, I try to address two research questions. 1) How are the dominant institutional logics which stigmatize the marginalised consumer citizens codified and perpetuated in the online space? How do these marginalised consumers counter these dominant logics through their consumption and online practices to bring forth a new institutional logic? I try to answer these questions by conceptualising the socio-political online consumption space as an institutional field, and studying the dynamics between the upper and lower caste members and their efforts to distort the current logic of caste flux and establish the logic of caste dominance and the logic of castelessness respectively. The study uncovers two types of institutional entrepreneurship namely subjugation and indignation institutional entrepreneurship and their

organisational field level measures that facilitate the construction of contesting masculine identities through consumption practices. Second, I bridge the institutional and practice theories and try to elaborate the materiality of the selfie and its performative role in bringing about an institutional logic change. Third, I highlight the importance of the concurrence of symbolic and substantive actions by institutional entrepreneurs for bringing about an institutional logic change.

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