Chapter 32

The Politicization of Selfie Journalism:
An Empirical Study to Parliamentary Elections

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ABSTRACT

While the phenomenon of selfie photographs in the media has been extensively analysed by academics, Selfie Journalism was recently introduced and constitutes one of the most notable phenomena within the digital media environment, raising a number of issues relating to notions of infotainment and impartial reporting, especially in 'difficult' sectors, such as politics. This paper identifies the specific characteristics of Selfie Journalism in political reporting. Based on both quantitative and qualitative research, the study analyses these characteristics in the period of parliamentary elections of 2016 in Cyprus. The aim of the study is dual: first, to examine the extensive use of Selfie Journalism by candidates themselves in political campaigning and, secondly, to examine the impact of this phenomenon upon the media and, in turn, media engagement in such political tactics. The greater scope of this study evolves around the argument that Selfie Journalism, as a new species of participatory journalism, has penetrated the media in an effort to attract larger audiences.

INTRODUCTION

While the phenomenon of selfie photographs has been extensively analysed by academics in recent years – not only in the area of Cultural Studies but also in the Visual Studies sector and the media, Selfie Journalism was recently introduced (Omar, 2015; Maniou & Veglis, 2016) and constitutes one of the most notable phenomena within the current digital media environment, linking its outspread to the use of smart digital devices (phones, tablets, etc.). This digital revolution seems to have converted citizens into potential creators of images for newsworthy events; as such, Selfie Journalism can be viewed as a form of participatory and citizen journalism.

In this perspective, it was only a matter of time for this new phenomenon to be incorporated in the current journalistic practices, raising – at the same time – a number of issues, relating to notions of infotainment and impartial reporting, especially in 'difficult' sectors of reporting, such as politics. In fact, as the engagement of selfies in politics grows more and more every day that goes by, following the fast-growing tendency to involve microblogging and social networking in order to increase political participation, issues of reliability and trustworthiness of Selfie Journalism emerge, especially in relation to the specific characteristics of this new tendency in citizen/participatory journalism.

This article attempts to investigate the specific characteristics of Selfie Journalism in politics and political reporting. Based on both quantitative and qualitative research, the study analyses these characteristics in the period of parliamentary elections of 2016 in the Republic of Cyprus. The greater scope of this study evolves around the argument that Selfie Journalism, as a new species of participatory journalism, has penetrated the media in an effort to attract larger audience, especially in 'difficult' sectors of reporting, such as politics. In this perspective, the aim of the research is dual: first, to examine the extensive use of Selfie Journalism in political campaigning and, secondly, to examine the impact of this phenomenon upon the media and, in turn, media engagement in such political tactics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Definition and Characteristics of Selfie Journalism

From 'life-streaming' (Freeman, 1997; Marwick, 2013) to selfies, the rhetorical art of 'streaming' visuals, photographs, audio and/or video, to curate a self-identity has become a common everyday practice (Wargo, 2015). With their origins in the areas of Art and Photography, today selfies are perceived as 'gestural images' (Frosh, 2015) and, as such, their aesthetics cannot be purely understood and interpreted through Visual Studies but we need to engage in the analysis of communication and media theories, in order to fully understand their performativity in journalistic practices.

The basic criterion that made selfies become the new 'journalistic tool' in the digital media environment is the practice of sharing and, thus, distributing to a wide audience highly personalized 'stories' (moments, events, etc.), following the fast-growing tendency for people to broadcast themselves ('life-streaming'). The practice of sharing digital content seems to be the fundamental and constitutive activity of Web 2.0, describing both the processes of distribution and communication within the digital environment (John, 2012). Selfies are analogous to 'the communication situation of broadcasting, which displays reporters in various locations and where experiences are mediated to an audience which has no first-hand acquaintance with them' (Peters, 2001, p.717). Banita (2012) describes this phenomenon

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