

Chapter 66

Creating an Instrument for the Manual Coding and Exploration of Group Selfies on the Social Web

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ABSTRACT

A subgroup of the images shared as part of the “selfie” phenomenon is group selfies (aka “groupies” and “we-fies” or “us-ies”) or self-portraits of groups (three or more individuals of focal interest) that are shared on social media. These images have informational value that has thus far been only thinly explored. In this work, an instrument—Categorization and Exploration of Group Selfies Instrument (CEGSI), pronounced “segsy”—was constructed of three parts: (1) Group Selfie Content and Context, (2) Group Selfie Image Creation, and (3) Group Selfie Messaging. It was tested against two image sets: group selfies and dronies, which were scraped from Google Images. This chapter describes the work, the analytical findings, and the resulting instrument for the manual coding of group selfies, and other insights.

INTRODUCTION

- A group of skydivers makes formation, and they capture their shared descent using helmet cameras. This image is uploaded to their group account on a photo-sharing site, and it is an immediate hit.
- A grinning group of elementary school classmates stands with their arms around each other and beam in youthful exuberance at the camera. They have just completed a science experiment, and taking a group selfie is part of the assignment. This image captures a critical lesson about teamwork.

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- Fellow broadcast food critics are meeting at a formal event, and they pose for a “we-fie” in their professional kitchen. Each of the critics are high-profile and maintain fanatical followings.
- At the courtyard, a group of politicians is being interviewed by the members of the press, who are carrying video and still cameras. Flying above is a drone, which is used to capture multiple aerial shots of the event.
- Hundreds of runners are crossing a bridge as part of a city-wide race. High-up is a drone that is capturing an overhead view of the runners below.

The above are all recent real-world examples of group selfies. “Group selfies” (or “groupies” or “we-fies” or “us-ies”), by definition, feature more than one person, with the image captured by one of the members of the depicted group. Two individuals in a selfie have been defined as “us-ies” (especially if they are positioned as couples) or “duo selfies” (Hai-Jew, 2017). Those images with three or more individuals fit in the category of group selfies, or what some call “groupies” (LaFrance, 2014), at the risk of being lumped in with fanatical followers of various celebrities and musicians. Group selfies capture multiple selves or egos in a shared self-portrait.

“Selfie” was the Oxford Dictionary’s Word of the Year in 2013, and it describes a photograph that one has taken of oneself or a “self-portrait.” While group selfies have been around for some years, it is only after the ground-breaking talk show host Ellen DeGeneres selfie at the 2014 Oscars that these became all the rage. There was a Heidi Klum and elite friends image taken with a selfie stick. There was a follow-on Bart Simpson and company sendup with a mix of characters. And there was a major outpouring of group selfies from the general public. In the same way that stand-alone selfies may be part of a collective public conversation—think of the father who posed like his daughter in order to lessen her interest in social media (Howard, July 1, 2016)—group selfies are having a fleeting public moment. However, the practice of group selfies has not yet entered the formal book space. For example, these terms—“selfies,” “group selfies,” “wefies,” do not appear in the Google Books Ngram Viewer up through 2008 (the most recent moment available) and are new to the modern lexicon.

People do bring out other dynamics in each other. A photographer of groups observes, “The first thing that happens is a commemoration of some kind. But when an organization or a club gets together for a picture, it’s a celebration,” Neal Slavin said. Group photos capture various reasons for human togetherness and affirms humanity (“Photographer Neal Slavin...” Dec. 24, 2016). At its most simple, group selfies are self-portraits of groups. While “‘me’ selfies” are about displaying the self through profile pictures, group selfies “capture the moment” in timelines and image albums (Georgakopoulou, 2016, p. 307).

As yet, very little work has been done on “group selfies”. For example, what is the average number of people in a group selfie on the Social Web? In the same way that individual personalities may be interpreted from solo selfies, is it possible to read group personalities from group selfies? What kinds of technologies are commonly used for group selfies? What sorts of messages are communicated through these we-fies?

This work is built on two basic and interrelated hypotheses, both of which deal with the informational value inherent in group selfies:

Hypothesis 1: Group selfies shared on social media platforms and the Web and Internet contain informational value.

Hypothesis 2: Based on extant research and publicly available group selfies, it is possible to build and refine a tool to systematize the extraction of some of the relevant information from group selfies.

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