



Selfies and Photo Messaging as Visual Conversation: Reports from the United States, United Kingdom and China

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Though mindful of how media often equates selfie production with narcissistic “me generation” behavior, we are interested in exploring the extent to which selfies enable new modalities of visual conversation among those who exchange them. Approaching the topic from our respective backgrounds—one of us is a communication scholar and one an anthropologist—we were particularly interested in the degree to which selfie exchange echoes Richard Harper’s descriptions of mobile and online texting and other conversation forms. In particular, in his book *Texture* (Harper, 2010) and in other work, he argues that these forms are not calculated processes or strategic games but rather authentic expressions of the true self. For example, he writes,

People do not text to each other because they are thinking about how to keep the balance in the equation of giving and receiving; no, they do these things mainly without thinking. It comes naturally, or more accurately, it comes from the heart (Harper, 2003, p. 215).

However, as we believe our data will show, at least in terms of the visual forms of virtual interaction, there is great deal of calculation that takes place. This argument is an extension of Katz’s thesis of perpetual contact (Katz & Aakhus, 2002), which was made in the domain of texting-based communication but here is applied here to visual communication.

Introduction

During spring 2014, the Center for Mobile Communication Studies at Boston University administered a survey on selfies to university students in the United States, the UK, and China. The

¹ We thank Oliver Osborne and Yuehan Wang for generously sharing their data. Their contributions and comments were most helpful to us in our work.

survey was part of a larger research project to better understand cultures of mobile communication, including the production and consumption of personal digital images. In the United States (though not in China or the UK), we supplemented our surveys with nonstructured interviews and participant observation sessions. While one portion of our research focused on selfie practices in general, another focused specifically on exchanges using Snapchat, a photo-sharing application that allows users to take images with their mobile device, draw on them or add text, and share them with just one person or their entire friend list.

Snapchat provides an interesting medium for studying platform-specific selfie practices. What makes Snapchat different (as of spring 2015) from most other photo-sharing applications is that the sender can choose how long the viewer can see the image, with a maximum limit of ten seconds before it disappears. This gives the sender and receiver the sense that these interactions are temporary and in the moment. Rather than allowing carefully curated depictions of how users want their self-presented to the public, Snapchat is intended to be a playful means of communicating that reflects how users appear at a given time without long-term consequences. Though news stories have shown that people can save Snapchat images using screenshots and by accessing hidden data, user etiquette makes such activities taboo and saving Snapchat images can result in being defriended.

Our findings indicate that especially on platforms like Snapchat, selfies and selfie-related practices allow for the flourishing of meaningful "language games" using images as both grammar and vocabulary. As such, "selfies as conversation" constitute a major step forward in visual communication within contemporary culture. This is a significant finding, since the dialectical communicative nature and entertainment value of selfies have been too often ignored in scholarly research to date.

Definitions and Methods

We believe that complementing quantitative measures with qualitative interpretations can be helpful in understanding selfies as a new form of visual communication. In what follows, we present quantitative results from a survey on selfie use, supplementing these with material that examine selfies from an ethnographic perspective. From the beginning, we faced the challenge to define the term *selfie* in a useful way as to make discussion meaningful. In general, we found that the term denotes a photograph taken by the person who is the subject of that image. Although interviews with users and even academics turned up different boundaries for that definition,² for our purposes we define selfies as images that were

² Chloe Mulderig, who teaches courses about visual culture at Emerson University, told us during an interview that she includes images of food and immediate surroundings in her definition of selfie. She argues that these are extensions of the self and are intended to impact how the public should view the individual posting the image. Some users we interviewed agreed with this assessment and also included within it images of such things as pets, homes, vehicles, and craft products. However, most interviewees disagreed that these images fell into the larger category of selfie if they lacked part or all of the person taking the photo. It is reasonable to accept a narrower definition as that seems to be the generally accepted meaning, though we certainly see merit in the broader definition as well.

not only taken by the person posting the image but that also include part or all of the person taking the photo.

Once we narrowed down our definition of selfies, we separated out different contexts in which selfies were shared. Early conversations with users suggested that selfies taken for public social media platforms differed in purpose and scope from selfies taken for more private sharing experiences. To get at this difference, we decided to ask survey respondents and interviewees about public platforms such as Facebook and the currently popular app Snapchat, which allows temporary private viewing.

In March 2014, we invited an undergraduate class of communication research students at Boston University to participate in an omnibus online opinion survey about new communication technology. Foci of the survey included uses of the selfie and Snapchat for interpersonal communication. A total of 123 students began the survey; from this number, 117 usable questionnaires were generated. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 24, with a median age of 21. In terms of gender, 19% of the survey respondents were male and the balance identified themselves as females (no one indicated "other").

At about the same time, we engaged colleagues to conduct surveys on selfies and Snapchat equivalents in China (WeChat). In the UK, colleague Oliver Osborne, a recently minted PhD who was also investigating this topic, agreed to share our survey with the informal network he had built for his own research. For data from China, Grace Yuehan Wang, a graduate student at Boston University, used her contacts to survey a small class of communication students at Shandong University. Although data from these surveys are reported alongside the Boston University results, they constitute a convenience sample. Great circumspection is especially necessary when comparing our Chinese data with that from the United States, due to translation and interpretation issues (e.g., does "stranger" have the exact connotation in Mandarin? It is hard to be sure.). Even in the Boston University sample, there are obvious limitations with regard to generalizability. (All figures reported below have been rounded to whole numbers, so totals may be subject to small variation.) Nonetheless, the data from these surveys shed light on the selfie as a communication act.

Complementing the data gathered via surveys, we sought to explore issues related to the upsurge in mobile visual communication in more depth. To do this, we conducted ethnographic research with U.S. users from Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Alabama, and Louisiana. This research consisted of interviews with 18 people as well as informal participant observation and observations of discussions about these topics in public online forums. Interviewees were identified and selected utilizing the snowball method, which resulted in a larger demographic range than the survey participants. As in the surveys, these interviewees were disproportionately female. (This does not necessarily reflect a gender bias in use, but may simply be a by-product of our snowball method.) These interviews provided a context for the survey results and allowed us to put the student-based results in a larger context.

Finally, we also observed interviewees using Snapchat and taking selfies and participated in doing so ourselves. We enlisted friends and family to engage with us over various mobile platforms so that we could see how images were shared, consumed, and distributed. This participation gave us insight into the appeal of the technologies in addition to creative ways to use them. Although done casually, our sampling

of online forum discussions added to our understanding of slang terms, trends, motives, norms, and user concerns across larger, albeit poorly defined, demographic bases. That said, unlike our survey data that were collected in three different national contexts, limitations on resources, including time, prevented us from doing multinational qualitative data collection.

Findings and Discussion

Given the global prominence of selfies, as mentioned above, we would guess that most college students these days know what selfies are. Judging by our U.S. sample, this hunch would seem correct. When we asked our survey respondents (about two-thirds of whom were female) whether they had ever taken a selfie, 115 out of 117 (98%) responded that they had. When we asked whether they had shared a selfie in the last 24 hours, and if so, how often, we learned that nearly half (46%) the students had shared a selfie that day. Of these, one-third (31%) said they had shared selfies once or twice that day, with the remaining 69% sharing between 3 and 20 times that day.

As to the UK sample, most of whom were between 20 and 23 years old and were evenly divided by gender, 71 out of 74 respondents (96%) had taken a selfie. When asked about frequency, about one-quarter reported having taken a selfie in the past day. Of these, most responded that they had shared 1 or 2 selfies, though one individual reported sharing 30.

Our efforts to collect data from a class of Chinese students yielded 23 valid responses from a larger class; three-quarters of the respondents were female. All 23 reported having taken a selfie at some point: 9% had taken a selfie within the past 24 hours, 30% within the last week, and 17% in the last month. In terms of number of selfies shared over these time periods, the number was typically less than five, though one individual reported sending 50 over the past month.

Once we established the approximate frequency of selfie-related activities, we asked a series of questions concerning attitudes toward selfies, using Likert-type scales, with possible answers of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree or disagree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. For example, when asked to assess the statement "It is important to make sure I look good in my selfies," more than half the respondents agreed (45%) or strongly agreed (17%), suggesting that although selfies are designed to look spontaneous, it is quite likely that many selfie senders take trouble to consider how the photo will look, once taken, to the imagined viewer, and so will attend to their appearance and the framed setting. In the UK sample, nearly half agreed with this statement. This finding along with that of the U.S. finding offers further support for the idea that social media-emitted images are prepared with thought and deliberation.

The fact that a sizeable percentage of university students reports sharing selfies with others, and taking care to cultivate an image that looks good, begs the question: Who is the intended viewer? When we asked Boston students who selfies should be shared with, most (60%) felt they should only be shared with friends. A sizeable number of students (25%), however, were neutral on the matter, and a small group (15%) disagreed with the notion that selfies should be restricted only to one's friends. In the UK survey, 12% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that selfies should only be shared with friends. About 2 out

of 5 were neutral on the subject, and one 1 of 5 disagreed or strongly disagreed. Once again, the UK and U.S. results converge.

Given the range of answers with regard to selfie sharing frequency and norms, it should not come as a surprise that selfie exchange is seen as a contentious practice in the media, one that straddles the risky line between private and public communication, but is engaged in nonetheless. This was most apparent to us when we explicitly asked Boston respondents to evaluate the question "I do not worry about how a selfie taken now might affect my future" and discovered students were mixed, with just under half the students (44%) disagreeing with that statement, with the remainder agreeing or neutral.

Among the UK respondents, 15% and 42%, respectively, strongly agreed or agreed with that statement. A total of 14% were neutral while 27% disagreed; only one person (1.5%) strongly disagreed. These data support the contention that young people have little concern about how their selfie practices might affect future employment opportunities or interpersonal situations.

We also asked about whether or not a selfie should reflect the "true" self. In the 2014 Boston sample, a response to the question "a selfie should express your true self" elicited responses as following:

When we asked the UK respondents about this, 7% strongly agreed and another 22% agreed. However, 44% were neutral and nearly 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thus, while opinions clearly varied, there was no compelling support for the hypothesis that young people believe that selfies must reflect one's true self.

In general, our interviews and observations reflected what we found in the survey. We found that users were quite aware of the larger social discussions regarding selfies and this included the stigmas of narcissism and potential pitfalls of sharing images that could harm their reputation. Many users carefully considered the image itself, the platform it would be shared on, and how viewers might consume it (an observation contradicting Harper's argument concerning the spontaneity of social media). They also indicated that they took selfies for a range of reasons that include but are not limited to crafting an image of self for the public, proving they were part of an important, funny, or interesting moment, as a form of communication, and because it was fun.

Most interviewees suggested that they regularly took selfies, but they code switched for different contexts and consumed them differently based on those contexts. Many stated that they were quite careful with their public image on the Internet precisely because they wanted to be proactive rather than regretful. One undergrad that we interviewed said,

My father has been an attorney as long as I can remember so he's always very concerned with his professional image and he's passed on that concern to me. So I'm pretty controlling of my image. . . . I need to be able to get a job out of college and I know that if you Google me things will probably come up that I don't want to come up with my name attached. And if I can control that a little bit more I don't see any reason why I wouldn't.

She explained that she had asked friends not to tag her in photographs and she was careful not to let people at parties photograph her doing anything that could impact a job hunt. She felt fairly confident that she had controlled her public online image as best as she could and therefore was unconcerned with how selfies might affect her future.

Many interviewees noted that the more personal the image (i.e., the more it focused on the user rather than on environment or action) and the wider the public distribution of that image, the more viewers would believe the image had been done for vain or self-promotion purposes. This was not necessarily seen as a bad result by the image producer: Most interviewees recognized that social media provided a useful platform for updating friends and families about their lives. They said that they were comfortable with a moderate degree of egoism that might be attributed to them by their potential audience. However, they also said that there can be a stigma attached to users who primarily post images of just their face and/or bodies rather than images that more directly reveal life contexts such as entertainment activities, jobs, meals, or educational achievements.

Many interviewees also held that selfies should tell a story about the user's life rather than serve as a vehicle for eliciting positive comments about superficial appearances. Some of them felt that this stigma around superficiality was so strong that they avoided publishing most of their selfies on public platforms for fear they would be interpreted as self-absorbed. Hence, a college freshman who frequently Snapchats explained that she has doesn't often take selfies per se: "I've done it once or twice ever. That was just never something I did because again it was just the whole idea of 13-year-olds taking duckface pictures." (*Duckface* is a pejorative term for selfie takers who suck in their cheeks to highlight their cheekbones, which tends to push the lips out in a manner that appears duck-like.) She referenced popular media depictions on sites such as BuzzFeed that made fun of young women who posed with a duckface at parties or as part of an effort to present the self as sexy. Other women we interviewed expressed similar concerns about their selfies being taken to be vain or immature or attempts to elicit positive comments.

In sum, for most of our respondents, selfie staging was a careful balance of not appearing too self-absorbed or vain while still recognizing that as the public presentation of self the photo should be curated and flattering. That said, one interviewee did report purposefully using selfies to play with both male and female presentations and identifications of self and in general to identify as queer gendered. For this individual, selfies provided a public platform to explore these issues and garner positive feedback from a support network that they did not feel they had in the local physical environment. This anecdote serves as a reminder that the mere observation of social media usage is not necessarily sufficient to fully understand the user's motives and meanings for engaging with a technology. Interviews and ethnographic approaches can reveal use practices and attitudes that may otherwise be overlooked or invisible.

The practice of using images to garner feedback reveals another important way in which selfies work: to elicit conversations within groups where they are shared. Sometimes these conversations take the form of writing; other times they transpire in different ways. For example, when we asked students to react to the statement "When a friend posts a selfie I often respond with a comment," students were divided: 48% disagreed with the statement, 33% agreed or strongly agreed, and 19% were neutral. However, when we asked students to respond to the prompt "I send selfies back in response to the selfies

I get," nearly 60% of the students agreed or strongly agreed. By comparison, the UK sample found 20% agree with the statement "When a friend posts a selfie I often respond with a comment" (none strongly agreed). A total of 23% were neutral while 41% and 17%, respectively, disagreed and strongly disagreed. When asked about sending selfies back in response to selfies that one receives, only one person agreed (and none strongly agreed). A total of 18% were neutral while 56% and 24%, respectively, disagreed and strongly disagreed. With regard to responding to selfies, the U.S. and UK samples present a different picture, one in which the UK sample respondents seem much less likely to be involved in a conversation-like exchange of selfies. In this regard, our argument seems supported by the U.S. data, but not by that of the UK sample.

Selfies as Conversation: The Case of Snapchat

The fact that most of individuals tend to send selfies back to the sender in response to the selfie they receive suggests a two-way modality of image communication. It also suggests a grammar of both the process and the content of image exchanges. The dynamic of selfie-exchange-as-conversation is perhaps nowhere more evident than on Snapchat. Indeed, when we asked the 108 students³ who reported using Snapchat to explicitly respond to the sentiment "I feel like I'm having a conversation when I exchange Snapchat photos," 62% of the respondents supported this view (14% strongly agreed, 48% agreed); 16% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed, while 14% were neutral; $M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.15$ on a 5-point Likert scale). The UK sample had a comparable profile. A total of 68% supported the statement while 13% were neutral; less than 20% were in a disagreement.

Although we did not ask the Boston University students how frequently they used Snapchat, we did ask them how recently they got involved in "Snapchat conversations," defined as a chain of images sent back and forth. We learned that 33% of the students had had a Snapchat conversation in the last week (15% of these within six hours of taking the survey, and 18% within the last day). We then sought information concerning the pace of such a Snapchat conversation, asking "How soon should you respond to a Snapchat from a best friend?" 29% of the students answered, "within 10 minutes," while 26% answered, "within one hour" and 25% answered, "within six hours." Again, the UK sample tracked that of the United States: One-third also said the response time should be within 10 minutes. More than one-third said within an hour, with the remaining 40% allowing that it could take longer. These data militate against Harper's premise of message spontaneity, showing as they do that people take into account a calculated time dimension in deciding to respond to messages as well as in interpreting the temporal delays in responses from others. The sentiment that many students had that responses need to be quick is in line with a highly interactive or dialogic approach to the exchange of visual material.

When it came to selfies, the users that we interviewed suggested that they viewed selfies generated via Snapchat differently than ones published on more public platforms or saved onto mobile

³ Of the 123 students who participated in the survey, 105 usable results were obtained for the portion dealing with Snapchat. Among the questions were several that dealt with the communication and interaction aspects of the use of Snapchat.

communication devices. Specifically, they see Snapchat selfies as impermanent, mostly unedited, and more private. One interviewee said,

There is in my mind anyway and people I know—people I hang out with— there is a big distinction between taking selfies for Snapchat and taking selfies to be saved on a cell phone or a regular camera. . . . Because the thing about Snapchat and that's their whole platform is that you see it until it is gone. So I do take a lot of Snapchats.

Interestingly, this same interviewee stated that she did not take many selfies that she published online because she was concerned about how people who took a lot of selfies were perceived and she did not want to worry about how they would impact her online presentation of self to the public. She noted that schoolteachers, parents, and the media had taught her from a young age to be careful about what she put online, but Snapchat allowed a respite from that. Because the images disappear and are only sent to a select few, the focus shifts from the carefully curated narrative of self that online selfies often present toward a more playful, in the moment, and conversational style of photo taking.

Other data sources backed up this sentiment. BUUniverse, a Boston University new media journalism video production, interviewed students about their thoughts on Snapchat. One interviewee in the video, Justin Page, said, "I think people are not holding back as much because they don't think that it's so permanent so they can send things that they might not necessarily want posted on another social media outlet" (Duda, 2014, n.p.). Along those same lines, an undergrad in Boston who we interviewed suggested,

I think most people are under the impression that the pictures are either unrecoverable or super hard to recover so they can goof off with their friends over long distances making dumb faces at each other, saying inappropriate things that they maybe don't want documented.

The ephemeral nature of Snapchat allows for less constrained and more creative forms of engagement. It also means that users can try on different perspectives and presentations of self and gather feedback from friends without the repercussions that could occur if those images were posted in a public forum. This freedom to explore and play with how users want the self to be presented and perceived was echoed in almost all of our interviews.

Bonding, Joking, and Tellability

Snapchat is also an important way to maintain contact with friends, and interviewees stated they were able to send out personalized selfies that reinforced in-group bonds. Often selfies referenced shared experiences, favorite movies, people the users knew, or other in-group referential images. This reinforced bonds even when a large distance separated users. Many of the undergrads we interviewed would Snapchat with high school friends who had gone to other universities and with family members who still lived at home. The app provides a free, quick, and relatively easy way to cultivate and retain social contacts.

To explore the extent to which our respondents use Snapchat as visual conversation, we asked them to rate the statement "The people I send my pictures to understand why I sent them." Nearly 80% agreed or strongly agreed. When we asked them to evaluate the statement, "I love it when someone sends a Snapchat response that plays upon the Snapchat I just sent," 85% of the students agreed or strongly agreed.

Topics for Snapchat images ranged from shots of college acceptance letters to selfies in front of famous landmarks to silly faces. Some of these images were narrating important moments in the lives of users, but many were merely playful engagements with friends. According to our interviews, the latter tended to outnumber the former. Snapchat provided a space for photos that did not need to be preserved long term or published as part of the online presentation of self. Interviewees also pointed out that Snapchat was fun, and when they were able to go back and forth with friends it became like a game. One undergrad said, "I Snapchat all the time. Mostly because it is entertaining. It is fun." She and others said that Snapchat photos from friends often made them laugh, and they enjoyed coming up with appropriate responses that would make their friends laugh as well. They often tried to outdo one another in a playful manner. This might include facial expressions, dramatic poses, imitations of people they knew, and teasing references to an earlier shared experience.

Of course, any conversation needs a common language, even if that language is only understood by those conversing in it. When we asked students to respond to the sentiment "I feel we have our own private language when we exchange images over Snapchat," roughly one-third of the respondents agreed. When we asked them to evaluate the statement "Many of our Snapchats include inside jokes and references," 75% agreed.

Our interviews supported our survey findings, with these interactions viewed as visual communication. For example, one interviewee shared that when her friend went on a diet she complained about it so often that all of her friends began sending out Snapchats of them eating decadent foods just to taunt her. Because these exchanges are often building upon shared bodies of knowledge and are responses to previous Snapchats, they are dialectical and conversational. One interviewee said,

I think it is just like a short succinct way of communicating with people but instead of being a line of text it's a photo. . . . I've literally had a ten-minute conversation with my friend just doing facial expressions. We weren't even adding text. It was just one expression to another.

To demonstrate the kinds of facial expressions they were Snapchatting, she tilted her head to one side, crossed her eyes, and stuck her tongue out of the side of her mouth. These conversations were part of the game-like aspect of Snapchat mentioned earlier, as evidenced by the silly face, but they were also meaningful forms of communicating. She described the exchange as "epic" and noted that when engaging in face-to-face conversations they still periodically referred to how fun it was. The conversation was communicative but also an experience. Other interviewees also engaged in Snapchat conversations that

involved sending selfies back in forth, each one in response to the previously sent photo, and thus creating a larger communicative event.

Though logistical and language constraints prevented us from conducting similar ethnographic research in China, we did speak with a few Chinese college students in Boston regarding their use of WeChat and WhatsApp (Snapchat is not used in China.) One interesting finding was that many WeChat users sent animations rather than selfies as visual communication. The program allows users to download sets of cute animated characters that display various activities and emotional states. Users sometimes hold entire conversations by sending these animated images back and forth. The exchange mimics Snapchat usage in that this type of conversation is private and described as silly, funny, and entertaining. We plan future interviews with Chinese students and predict the different cultural contexts and norms may shift the types of images sent via social media apps.

As part of their conversational calculations users in both our U.S. and China interviews also considered which images would be appropriate responses and conversation prompts. For example, we had interviewees tell us that some users did not understand how to communicate via Snapchat effectively. Tellability is an important aspect of successful Snapchatting, and just like face-to-face or phone conversations users who are unable to tell what is an interesting story are not desirable communication partners. One interviewee told us about a friend who sent multiple Snapchats every day about topics that were boring. She Snapchatted uninteresting shots of her daily life, such as normal meals, and sent the images out to a large friend group, suggesting the images were not personalized in any way. The interviewee grew so weary of these frequent but boring Snapchats that she removed the user from her friend list. This may have hurt her relationship with the friend, but it freed her from feeling as if she needed to scramble for a way to respond to a dull prompt or pretend that she had at least consumed the Snapchat communication.

Conclusion

Rather than being a single phenomenon with a singular purpose of engagement, we found that the selfie category encompasses a range of use and intention. The platforms, subject matter, and audience all impact how users engage with selfies and the reasons for taking them. In this sense, it follows along the trajectory of other recent waves of innovation in digitally-based interpersonal communication practices (Katz, 2006).

For us, one fascinating conclusion arising from the research is the rapid exchange of visual information that constitutes a conversation. Memes arise and are referenced in this form of visual communication, but what is more significant is the rise of private grammar and vocabulary. That is, a language arises and is put into use in the form of dialogue. It becomes a rich and meaningful conversation, one freighted with both denotative and connotative meanings. In addition, the temporal aspect is meaningful. Unlike Richard Harper, who emphasizes the importance of truly revealing oneself to others as a prerequisite for sustaining human bonding via social media engagement (e.g., Harper, 2003, 2010), we find that for many people a great deal of calculation goes into decisions about both the content and the rapidity of responses to a received visual message. This is true even if it appears that spontaneity

and sincerity are the driving forces, and, indeed, these appearances can be carefully considered and planned. Hence, our research suggests that a deep structure seems to arise mimicking and enriching oral and verbal forms of communication that derive from theories of the mind (Lai & Katz, 2012). Harper also critiques information overload, but we find that at many stages people cannot get enough seeming "interruptions" from those they care about. (Though we do have reservations about some of Harper's arguments, these certainly do not invalidate many of the other points he makes with which we do agree and overall we support many of his contentions.)

As one of our reviewers noted, and whom we thank for the suggestion, a major finding is that there seems to be a conversational function in sending selfies. If this finding is sustained, it implies that this activity may readily fit within the general interpersonal communication process framework. In turn, the array of theories and frameworks developed to understand interpersonal communication could be fruitfully applied in new investigations. Selfie activities, for example, might correspond to Knapp's relationship development model (Duran, Kelly, & Frisbie, 2013). Other topics related to interpersonal judgments (social attraction, task attraction, perceived homophily, uncertainty reduction) may provide a lens that helps understand the behaviors and meaning of the exchange processes surrounding selfies.

Going forward, we intend to expand our survey and interviews to more users, modifying our questions and approach in light of our initial findings. We would like to understand to what extent the responses we found are generalizable to other cultures, contexts, and cohorts than those we examined. We would like to examine to what extent the results we found in this study accurately capture user perceptions. The question of social media and interpersonal communication, particularly at the level of the visual, is extraordinarily compelling. We especially want to explore further the "dialogic" aspects of mobile image exchange and its role in evolving forms of interpersonal communication. As mobile technology becomes ever more ubiquitous, and as at this time the practice of selfies shows no sign of slowing down, it is important that we turn our academic eye to how these interactions are affecting social understandings of self and others and their positioning in society.

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