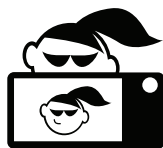


Chapter 5



SELFIE CONFIDENCE



What's the Trend?

The growing ability to share a carefully created online persona allows more people to use social content such as selfies as a way to build their own self confidence.

What would you do if your most embarrassing picture went viral?

Caitlin Seida unfortunately found out, when her most embarrassing photo, of her at a Halloween party dressed as Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*, went viral.

For weeks before she saw it, the photo had been making the rounds online—and commenters had been posting snarky comments about her choice to wear the costume despite being overweight. The cruel caption “Fridge Raider” had inspired hundreds of anonymously mean comments in response.

When she first found it, she was devastated.

It was the perfect example not only of the culture of nastiness that Internet commenting has become known for, but also of a technology-induced problem that has been accelerating so fast we have had to create a name for it: cyberbullying.

According to recent statistics from the i-SAFE Foundation, *more than half* of all adolescents and teens have been bullied online and about the same number have engaged in cyberbullying themselves. In response,

there are a growing number of educational programs designed to help adolescents and teens deal with cyberbullying and even how to fight back.

When it comes to that fight, Seida's story has a positive outcome. Not wanting to hide from the past, and realizing that removing the image from the web was next to impossible, Caitlin Seida did that only thing she could think of; she embraced the embarrassment and told her side of the story.

On October 2, 2013, she wrote an article on Salon.com sharing her embarrassment at discovering the photo and also the fact that she had been having fun that evening and didn't regret dressing up as her favorite video game character.

She told her personal story of her medical struggles with polycystic ovarian syndrome and a failing thyroid gland, both of which caused her weight to spike. And she shared her story of confronting many of these commenters with a short message:

You're being an asshole. Why don't you just do the right thing and delete the post and stop sharing it?

It takes self-confidence to stand up and confront a bully.

Thanks to the world of low privacy filters and an online culture of meanness and sarcasm—the ability to find new ways of discovering your own self confidence has become a daily necessity. The problem is, not everyone can find the type of courage Caitlin Seida did and channel it toward building (or rebuilding) their own confidence.

After the whole embarrassment faded, Seida did her own photo shoot with a retro pinup photographer and described the experience with these words: “that particular shoot felt great. Just to be seen a little bit more as I wanted to be.”

That same sentiment underlies the rapid growth of the world's most unlikely tool for building self-confidence: selfies.

The Upside of Selfies

A “selfie” (as you have likely seen in the media many times) is essentially a photograph someone takes of him- or herself, usually with a mobile phone camera.

Earlier this year, while profiling a laughably popular product called the “selfie stick” (designed to allow you to extend a phone camera away from you to better compose your selfie), *Time* magazine noted that “if 2013 was the year in which *selfie* became a buzzword, then 2014 was the year selfies became a cultural phenomenon.”

While that may be true, selfies certainly don’t enjoy the greatest reputation as a *positive* cultural phenomenon.

Many people rate it the exact opposite, citing low attention spans, a rise in narcissistic behavior, and a temptation to use all those duck face poses and auto-filtered images to portray an unrealistic self-portrait.

In many ways, this usage of the selfie share a controlled version of ourselves is in response to the way the Internet has become a haven for the snap judgment “hot or not” types of rating and comments that can be so damaging to anyone’s self-esteem.

Microsoft Principal Researcher danah boyd is well known for her aversion to the “self-righteousness” of capital letters (thus the use of lowercase to present her name throughout this chapter), and her years of work into understanding how young people use social media as a part of their everyday practices.

In her latest book *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (2014), she explores what the book terms as an online “culture of meanness and cruelty.”

In her research, she explains this meanness as a natural outcome of the social world that teens must navigate, where attention has become a commodity. The ease of online commenting along with a media culture frequently critical of celebrities and personalities can even make this type of meanness seem normal.

In a world filled with anonymous meanness the real question is how teens (and many adults) can build enough self-confidence to be happy.

A selfie may be a greater part of the answer to that challenge than most of us realize.

Do Selfies Promote Selfishness?

The selfie has become the ultimate way to control how people see you online. Selfies can be posed, taken multiple times until they are perfect,

and even filtered and corrected by retouching apps inspired by fashion magazine tactics to manufacture the ideal of beauty through their covers.

Just a few years ago, these artificially manipulated images of impossibly skinny models were generating a huge social backlash. Companies like Dove built viral campaigns designed to expose the reality of beauty and challenge each of us to question what it really means to *be* beautiful. In the process, “Photoshopped” became a dirty word as it began to describe the lie many consumers felt they were being sold by the fashion industry.

Now we can sell those same lies to one another and it doesn’t seem quite so serious.

Instagram can instantly filter a sky to make that picture of a storm from your hotel window seem like an impending monsoon instead of a gentle afternoon shower.

An interesting question this led me to was whether this culture of online shallowness might also be part of the solution? Part of my answer came from what some might describe as the shallowest app ever created.

Facetune Yourself

The well-named Facetune app lets you take any image and immediately fix everything from whitening teeth to widening smiles and transforming cheekbones.

The site supporting the app features an entire tutorial on how to remove eye bags, acne and any other unsightly elements from your face before posting a photo to social media. The site has inspired plenty of other apps offering similar functionality as well.

The app offers understandable ammunition for those who joke that people who share too many selfies may be becoming “#selfieabsorbed.” Selfies can easily seem like yet another example of the “me first” culture, focused on self promotion and little else.

Yet all of this attention on creating and sharing the perfectly sculpted selfies is having an unexpected side effect.

Selfies are becoming instrumental in raising self-confidence in those who need it most.

Why Selfies Are Good for Girls

In February of 2014, a new research survey of approximately 2000 adult and 200 teenage Americans from Today and AOL.com released a series of predictable results about how women and men view their own body image.

The study reported that women spend on average about 100 hours more than men per year on their appearance, and both men and women worry about being overweight.

Aside from an even longer list of “insights” like these, which are unlikely to surprise anyone, a single unexpected figure did stand out. While less than half of adults (40%) said selfies or other flattering photos online usually made them feel more confident, when this same question was asked of teenage girls, the number went up to 65%.

Around the same time, another article by author and co-founder of Girls Leadership Institute Rachel Simmons posed a similar theory with a far more direct headline: **Selfies are good for girls.**

If you write off the endless stream of posts as image-conscious narcissism, you'll miss the chance to watch girls practice promoting themselves—a skill that boys are otherwise given more permission to develop, and which serves them later on when they negotiate for raises and promotions. ... A selfie suggests something in picture form—I think I look [beautiful] [happy] [funny] [sexy]. Do you?—that a girl could never get away with saying.

Not only was this an article in support of selfies as a way for teens to build confidence, but Simmons proposed the intriguing view that selfies might even be the secret to leveling the playing field between boys and girls as they started to approach adulthood.

Why It Matters

Our online identity is becoming a greater and greater part of who we are to the world. For virtual friends and others you rarely see in person, it is this selectively created sense of self that may even become the “real

you” far more than the daily person in real life whom distant friends and relatives may rarely see. While this may seem like a scary deception, the good news is there is plenty of incentive for each of us to bring those two visions of ourselves closer together.

For most of us, it is not only easier to be the same person in both worlds—it is far more fulfilling. Leading a second life where your online persona is completely divorced from who you really are is increasingly the stuff of science fiction. Films love to imagine what this avatar like existence would look like.

In reality, though, the research shows we seem to be heading far more towards fact than fabrication when it comes to our online identities.

The Social Media Lab at Cornell University has published a series of interesting articles on topics as wide ranging as why college students seem to be less deceptive when creating LinkedIn profiles than they are when writing a resume, to why most Facebook profiles *do* reflect our authentic selves instead of some exaggerated version.

Rather than making us self-centered liars, studies show that social media may, over time, be giving us the one thing we need if we want to find and be ourselves: power over our stories.

Ultimately, the strength of the *Selfie Confidence* trend comes down to this simple principle. Selfies are not only symbols of the everyday control we now have to shape the story about ourselves we want to tell. They also offer us the support and permission to ultimately *become* that image we share online without pretending.

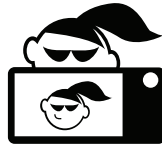
Who Should Use This Trend?

If you have an experience that you offer for people in real life, such an event or some type of retail store, this trend will clearly be valuable to think about in terms of how people can share that moment in a way that is likely to help them tell a story about themselves that has personal value. In addition, brands that are celebrated by their most passionate customers by appearing frequently as props or backdrops in selfies will have a huge opportunity to find and support their greatest evangelists through social content—if they know how to look for it.

How to Use This Trend

- ✓ **Overcome the Narcissism Bias** – The common criticism of selfies is that this newfound ability to be both the photographer and subject of the photograph is creating a generation of me-first monsters unable to empathize with others. If you don't fit into what some have called the “selfie generation” (as I don't!), it is tempting to condemn all those selfie sharers as shallow and narcissistic. To benefit from this trend, the first thing you must do is force yourself to avoid being closed minded about the potential value of selfies.
- ✓ **Leverage Photo Analytics** – If you are going to connect with customers who are featuring your brand in selfies, you'll need to find them first. Unfortunately, without text these images can be impossible to find. Thankfully, more software innovators like Ditto Labs are pioneering solutions to help scan photos posted online for everything from brand logos or fabric patterns to celebrity faces.
- ✓ **Make Experiences Easy to Share** – When food research firm Technomic published 10 restaurant trends that would take off in 2015, near the top of the list was the belief that a meal would become a “staged event that imparts bragging rights.” This idea of staging real life experiences to share them is increasingly central to the experiences themselves. As a result, providing great Wi-Fi or interesting backdrops can help insert your brand or experience into content and selfies being posted by social media-savvy consumers.

Chapter 20



SELFIE CONFIDENCE



What's the Trend?

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The 2016 Perspective

As our online identities continue to reflect our “digital faces” to friends and family, it will continue to impact how we each feel about our true selves in real life.

Late last year, for example, the story of Lexxie Harford went viral after haters online called her “too ugly to love.” A British woman who was born with a large birthmark on her face, Harford responded by sharing beautiful selfies online which featured her looking directly at the camera confidently and without makeup. Her photos were shared by thousands and she instantly became a hero for standing up to cyberbullying.

The past year saw several feel good stories like this all illustrating the same basic premise – that confidence can be built through managing the way you portray yourself online.

Advertising campaigns over the past year also illustrated a growth in this trend with several hashtag driven “body positive photo shoots” where brands like Lane Bryant (#ImNoAngel) and Dove (#NoLikesNeeded)

promoted the message of being comfortable with yourself. The latter campaign encouraged girls to share their selfies and their best vision of themselves while also encouraging their friends and the online community *NOT* to press the like button. In other words, those selfies and the rise in confidence that results is starting to be separated from the quest for outside validation. Selfies have become a statement rather than an insecure cry for approval.

Beyond selfies, this trend also expanded into other interesting ways for individuals to grow their confidence. In one unique example, *Fast Company* named tattoo artist Vinnie Meyers to its 2015 list of Most Creative People for his work with the The Center for Restorative Breast Surgery in New Orleans to create realistic looking nipple tattoos for breast reconstruction patients to help them feel more confident.

Moving into the coming year, this link between the identity we share through images online and the impact it has on how we build or evolve our own self confidence will continue to drive the way we perceive themselves and how we expect to be treated by the people (and brands) around us as well.

Who Should Use This Trend?

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