

THE UNDERWORLD OF CATFISHING, BEAUTY APPS, AND FANTASY ONLINE IDENTITY

¹Parveen Kaur,²Eshvin Raj Singh ³Arif Jawaid ⁴Aisyatul Khumaira binti Khairul Salleh,⁵Barbara Hubong Andrew Hului,⁶Nur Farhana binti Ahmad Fuad

^{1,4,5,6}Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia,

Email: sspkaur@unimas.my

²University of Dundee, Nethergate, DD1 4HN, Dundee, United Kingdom,

Email: eshvinsingh24@gmail.com

³Academic Director, Lahore Garrison University Pakistan,

Email: arifjawaid@lgu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT: *Online identity is part of characteristics that humans develop in cyberspace and interaction between netizens. Online identity is an identity that has been created online or virtual reflecting the identity of the person in reality. In today's technological advancement and the rise of the significance of beauty apps and social media, users have created an online identity that differs from reality. Many of these imaginary and fantasy identities have created sparks in social media indicating that people are being 'catfished' through these virtual profiles. Catfishing is luring people into a relationship based on an online persona. These profile pictures tend to be filtered by using beauty applications, creating an audience that believes how we look is exactly similar to what is posted online. 20 undergraduates consisting an equal number of male and female students of University Malaysia Sarawak were interviewed using personal interview methods. The findings reveal that the fantasy online identity is used for self-confidence, to protect one's real identity, and to manipulate and be deceitful. The limitation of this study is that the number of respondents is small and further research should be bigger in size of respondents.*

Keywords: Beauty Apps, Online, Identity, Catfishing, Fantas

INTRODUCTION

Identity is how we define and represent ourselves to the people surrounding us. Researchers [1] mentioned that identities are 'the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is. In some sense, identities can be created and socialized into a person [2]. Online identity, however, is an identity that has been created online or virtual reflecting less or more of the identity in reality. It can be imaginary too. It has created sparks in social media indicating that people are being 'catfished' through these virtual profiles. Catfishing is luring people into a relationship based on an online persona [3]. Beauty applications somehow contribute to the 'do not believe your eyes' situation. Profile picture in Facebook, for instance, is the main picture of ourselves that we display on our Facebook page. These profile pictures tend to be filtered by using beauty applications, creating an audience that believes how we look is exactly similar to what is posted online. Users of beauty applications link it to increase self-confidence. Self-confidence somehow is applicable and only stays online rather than offline. People will be disappointed if the person that you chat with online is different from what you showcase virtually. Selfie is the way how people take solo pictures of themselves through the front camera [4]. The obsession with 'selfies' is so famous that this word has been included and added in the Oxford dictionary.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Beauty applications have marked their ground in the world of easy makeup. It is convenient, can be downloaded free, or can be done online. Somehow, it becomes normal to have a picture of ourselves without being filtered by a beauty application. By filtering the profile pictures, it creates physical appearances of what people expect to be but end up not. Physical appearance can be linked to identity especially to online and fantasized identity. These identities create self-

confidence and lead to motivation that boosts one's self-esteem. According to researchers [4], higher self-confidence enhances the individual's motivation that allows people to see a vested interest in his performance, an incentive to build up and maintain self-esteem. Other than that, beauty application is often intertwined with instant makeup and painless plastic surgery. In a way, it creates a new identity when uploading the pictures online. Most of the beauty applications are used to beautify one's self without changing the actual appearance. It is a satisfaction that pleases one's vain.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will seek to understand and analyze the following research questions:

1. How do beauty applications can boost confidence among students in UNIMAS?
2. How many beauty applications used to alter a person's physical appearances and why?
3. Why beauty applications are widely used in profile pictures?
4. Does 'instant plastic surgery' create an online identity or/and fantasy identity?
5. Are beauty applications widely used by male or female students of UNIMAS?
6. How many filters in the beauty applications are used before uploading it into social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to understand and seek knowledge concepts in relations to self-confidence, beauty applications, and online and fantasy identity as follows:

1. To understand how self-confidence can be developed and boosted through changing appearance
2. To seek knowledge how online identity and fantasy identity are linked to self-confidence

3. To analyze how beauty applications are the newest and easiest makeovers and instant plastic surgery

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 21st century is where many technologies have been invented and used to make human life easier. Moreover, technologies not only replaced human work, but they also replaced human's daily routine and make it easier for any situation. One of the examples is computer-mediated communication (CMC) like social media which enables humans to interact with each other without boundaries at any time and anywhere [5]. People nowadays greatly depend on CMC in terms of communicating with each other and creating a social life. However, the effect of CMC is to allow people to produce online identity which sometimes may be fake from reality.

Online identity is part of characteristics that humans develop in cyberspace and interaction between netizens [6]. Moreover, people tend to change their identity according to the website. For instance, some people may have a different identity in Facebook compared to other social accounts like Twitter and of course, each of the websites has a different picture to represent them. This different representation also known as partial identities as none of the social media have our full and true pictures.

Other than that, the researcher [7] states that identity does not have a fixed term as it is used in many different contexts for many different resolutions [7]. People may change their identity in cyberspace and differ from his or her real life. That is why people always said that humans can 'deconstruct' his or her own identity in cyberspace because no one can detect whether it is true or not. Like the famous online proverb says, 'on the internet, no one knows you are a dog'. Thus, it is not possible if one can change his or her identity in cyberspace just to please others [8].

But does pictures that have been posted by an individual is considered his or her identity? Obviously, if people posted a self-picture or selfie on the Internet, their face could determine their race, skin color, and gender. From this, the community on Internet can identify their actual identity. However, some people also tend to use other people's pictures rather than his or her own picture. Thus, the concept of trust is in question here. An individual will try to upload the best picture in social media and it depends on whether society or their peer friends will accept it or not [9].

In addition, the 'Me Syndrome' in cyberspace also occurs to someone who always uploads his or her picture on social media. 'Me Syndrome' is an unhealthy behavior in social networking where the users always have 'look at me!' behavior [10]. Usually, this kind of behavior can be seen on Instagram or Facebook where many people upload their pictures in their best way. This includes filtering and editing

the picture so that the user will become flawless as possible. Hence, it is not possible if the real picture has a huge difference from the online picture [11].

Youth nowadays are always connected with their social life. Some even 'live' in their social life but are anti-social in real life. Moreover, it is common for them to take several pictures or selfie and post it on the Internet. But does anyone know that the pictures being upload are real or filtered? It is hard to detect whether the picture is real or not and because of this, many people tend to disguise behind their real look. Apparently, they will look as beautiful as possible to satisfy the netizen rather than being themselves [12].

METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION

After further research, the researchers decided to go with 20 key informants to understand the topic much further as the topic is somehow sensitive especially it involves one's identity and people's perception. The research was carried out with interview sessions, starting with a brief explanation of the introduction, followed by questions. We did face a few issues especially with recruiting volunteers as many as possible, yet we are grateful for their openness and cooperation towards completing this mini-research. These key informers are interviewed on their thoughts and reasons behind their lenses of perfection. We analyzed and observed their body language with each answer that they provided. The results will highlight the similarities and differences between each individual. Results will be shown in the context and narration summarization.

For demography, we conducted research on 10 male and 10 female students which we gathered at The Centre for Academic Information Services (CAIS), University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). All respondents are full-time students in UNIMAS. Six are from the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (FSSH), two are from Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS), four are from Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology (FCSIT), two are from the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), three are from Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development (FCSHD) and last three are 3 from Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts (FACA). We have two students in their first year of study, two in their second year, twelve in their third year, and four in their fourth year. Names of our fellow respondents will be in pseudo names and so does their race and religions. The demographic background of the respondents can be considered as having a wide range and large variety. In this case, this characteristic has been an advantage for collecting data because it gives different perspectives to view on the idea of selfies and online identity. Graphical details of the respondent's demography background are as shown below in Diagram 1.

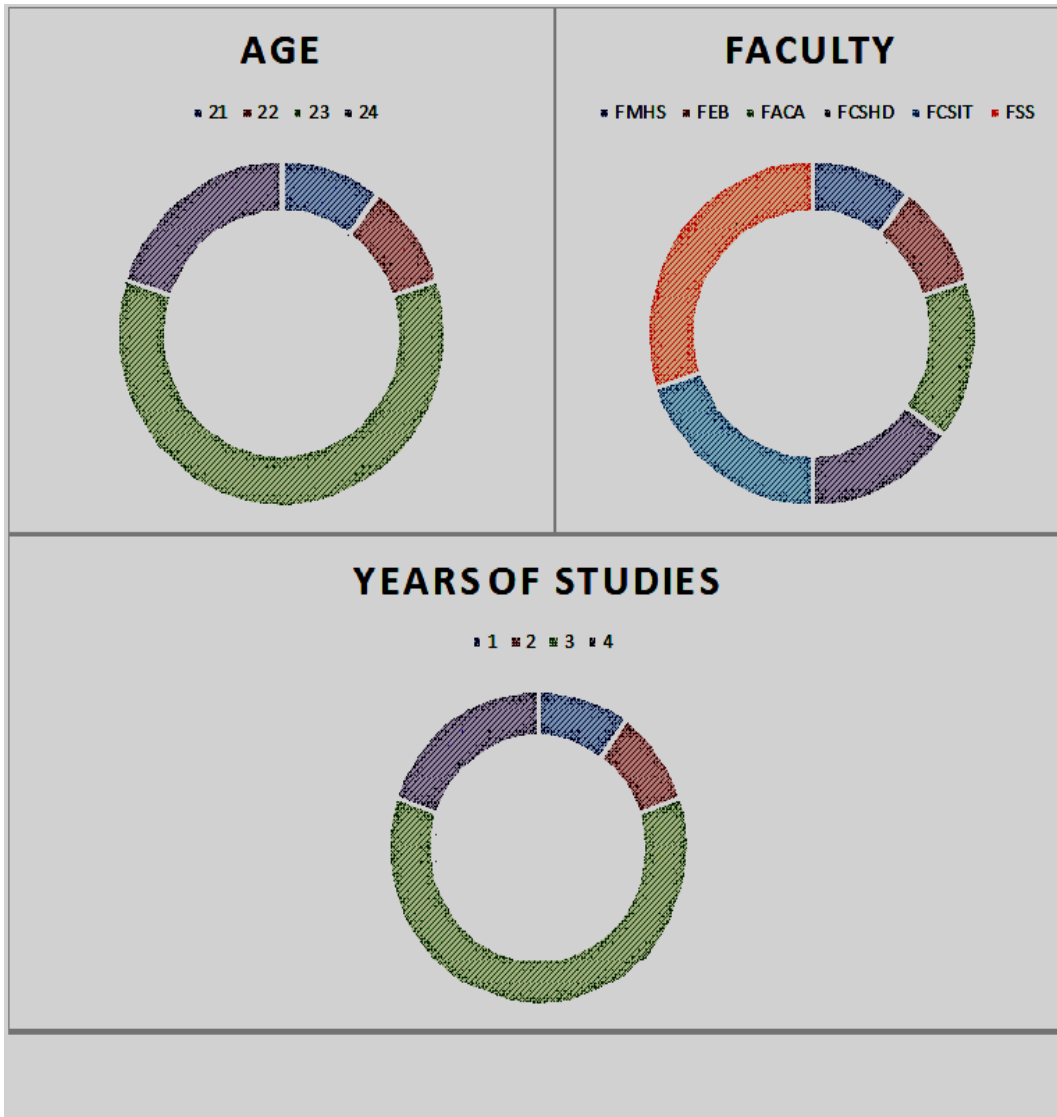


Diagram 1: Age, Faculty, Years of Study of Respondents Selfies and Beauty Apps

Selfies and Beauty Apps

Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. But what about the beauty of mother's love and certain issues which societies can agree on without a doubt. Selfies is an art, practiced by most people, from all walks of life. The majority of the respondents view selfies as a way to show one's situation through a single or set of photos. 60% of the respondents expressed their take on selfies as a way to alter one's appearance. Another 20% view it as partially okay as it is okay as long as people learn to post it according to time and another 20% despise selfie as a negative activity which is described as a "narcissism outlet" or even "personal stuff that

you should not show to people". Reasons behind taking selfies range from "hobby" to "trying new makeup styles".

Some responses on why the respondents take selfies; "Sejakakubelajarjauh (UNIMAS), akukene ah post gambagamba (selfies) banyak-banyak. Lagipun, bilaaku post gini, barumokaku tauaku okay katsini, no halah".(Since I'm studying (here) in UNIMAS; I always take a lot of selfies to show how I'm doing okay despite being far from family.) Khalid (24 years old).

"Selfie is ok. It helps me to touch up my look before I posted it on Instagram, it helps me to feel more secure of my appearance on that day and automatically improves my confidence level" Sasha (22 years old)

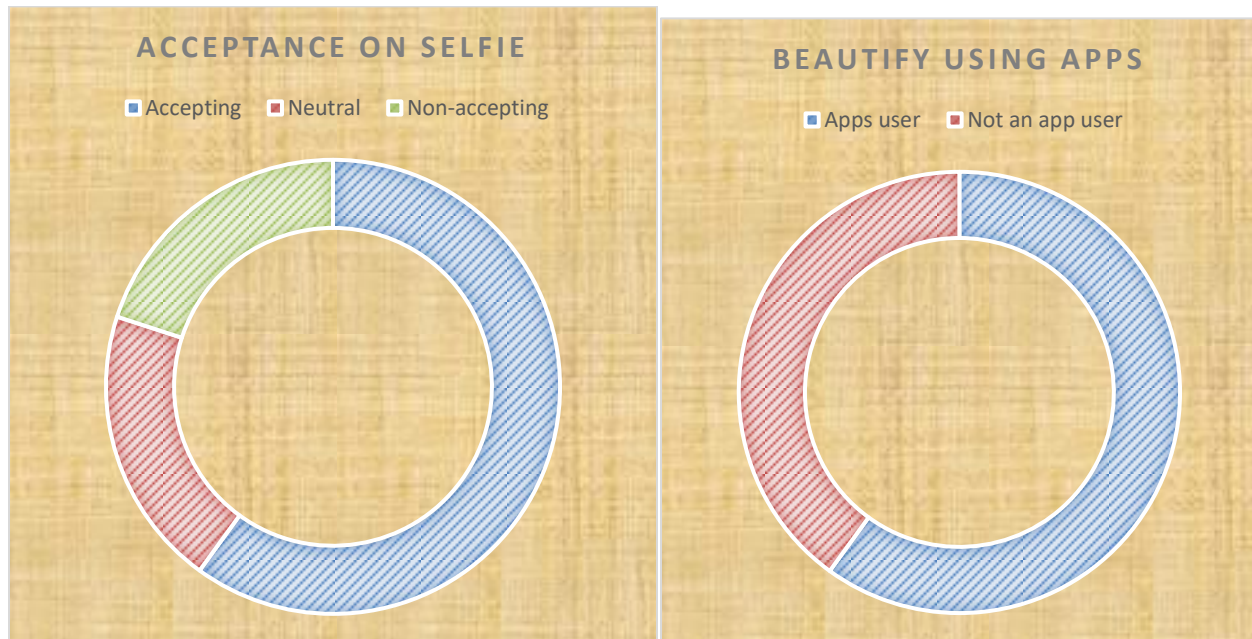


Diagram 2: Acceptance on Selfie and Beauty Apps User

One of the most puzzling findings is the fact that 77.8% of the respondents keep their selfies within their gallery only whereas another 22.2% post selfies every day on social media and mostly post on Instagram (66.7%), WeChat (22.2%), and Facebook (11.1%). It noted that Instagram is more accepting in terms of posting selfies, as it is the hub of selfie lovers and some appreciate “filters” provided by the uploading process as it is fitted in lightly- altered selfies. Most of the respondents have their own reasons on posting selfies on Instagram rather than on Facebook.

“I personally think Instagram is more selfie-friendly in terms of posting since it is designated for posting a post. Even though Facebook and Instagram shared the notification when we upload photos, yet the community in Insta is much more accepting. If we post too many selfies on Facebook, people might start to “unfriend” your account, and trust me, you don’t want that to happen.” Jacob (21 years old).

The results show 60% of selfie lovers keep their selfies in their phone’s gallery or post it online and only 40% did not use beauty apps. JA’IN (22) a third-year student from small-town (pekan) in Malacca, did mention how every one of her selfies is needed to be altered before posting. When we asked on the amount of beauty application (apps) that she has on her phone;

“Geez, I never talked about this with people before especially strangers but oh well, I have around...ten of them! (Laugh) but I did not use all of them, seriously, usually, I use VSCO cam, Fotorus, and Camera 360.”

It has become a ritual for her to alter her lower chin and her nose to make it appear smaller especially around her nose’s bridge and structure. The respondents widely differ in terms of places to alter when using beauty apps. Skin colors are among the most notable features which are being tightened during the process, regardless of either male or female respondents. People are always on the perception that by having fairer skin color, they will be noticed as being prettier

than their peers. 50% of the respondents did not deny the fact that if they were given a chance to change one thing, they would go for skin color. Yet having a much fairer complex would be a problem for those with skin problems such as acne.

“I have a very blotchy face, acne can be seen almost at every nooks and cranny. I do have a problem that when I make my skin lighter, my acne would be more visible. Which is why, I would often use up to 3 types of beauty app, just to cover up what can be covered.” Jay (22 years old).

Lastly, another half of the respondents would only use beauty apps for their filters as it can make pictures appear either more saturated in color or even make it turn into black and white. The majority of the respondents only lightly alter their selfies and did not change it beyond recognition which makes them not much different than how they look in reality. Yet JA’IN stated the opposite:

“I do receive comment on how I look different when I’m online, it is because beauty is subjective and I groom myself for my own satisfaction. I look good, I look really good, and even if I changed too much, I know that deep down inside, I’m still the same guy”.

Beauty Apps and Online community

There are five questions to test the respondent’s response towards the idea of beauty apps and the online community. Each of the questions relates to respondents’ comfortability rather than being in an online community or offline community. After further interviewing with all of the respondents, there are numerous and diverse responses on the topic and it does need further explanation on each of the questions. We started by asking them to describe their lives in both realities and in the online community. It is in which community do they feel more welcome and more like themselves. Among all of the respondents, only those that post selfies daily and have more “followers” on their Insta’s account would rather be on the online community more than

in reality. One of the respondents, Jacob mentioned on even how they long to be able to stay on the online community they are still restricted with reality as everything that shapes who they are came from reality. Their ideas and appearance are from the very foundation of reality. He claimed that he is more comfortable being with the rest of his friends and families in real life rather than interacting with people behind the screens.

“I had a very bad experience with “friends” on the web, and I don’t really feel like going there anytime soon. People are so fake and self-centered; it is like we are living in the generation of “me, me and me”. Everything must be about them and even every negative comment is simply referring to them”. Jacob (21 years old)”

The researcher has tried to identify the correlation between online identities and taking selfies, however, it is found that there is no significant difference. For instance, despite having many followers and positive feedbacks from the online community, JA"IN commented on the reality still playing a huge role in shaping one’s identity towards the surrounding that they are facing. Situational identity, the way how people behave rely heavily on which context they are in is the main explanation for this issue. Are they in the context of dealing with higher authority or peers? The online community is exposed and filled with loopholes; people are constantly being judged on what you write (not what you eat). Which explains how people created new identity when being on the internet but if they were given the chance; they would rather stay in reality. People always try to look their best, it is the fact that they hold in order to gain recognition and acceptance from others, even if it means not being true to oneself.

“They (people) won’t exactly know what you are up to behind the screen yet even if it means faking my life, I’m happy with it.” Clarice (22 years old).

CONCLUSION

As the number of respondents is very small, the findings of this research may not reflect the true situation as a whole. Further researchers that include a bigger sample size is necessary to produce more valid and reliable findings. Hence, such research will only be possible when there is a more satisfactory level of knowledge about online identity and selfies. This research has covered mainly the idea of a selfie, beauty apps, and the formation of online identity. Further research is needed to be done to examine the practicality of this suggestion and find out a more detailed solution. Hence there is a long way ahead of us to understand people’s formation of identity, either online or offline situation.

REFERENCE

- 1- Oyserman, Elmore, Smith (2012). Self, self-concept, and identity. in M.Leary & J. Tangney (Eds). Handbook of Self and Identity,2nd Ed (pp69-104). New York:NY.
- 2- English, M., St Pierre, M. E., Delahay, A., & Parente, R. (2016). Efficacy of self-perception after traumatic brain injury. *NeuroRehabilitation*, 39(1), 45-52.
- 3- Jarymowicz, M., & Szuster, A. (2016). Self-we-others schemata differentiation as a base for personal agency and social attitudes. *Frontiers in psychology*, 7, 1227.
- 4- Bénabou, R., & Tirole, J. (2005). Self-confidence and personal motivation. *psychology, Rationality and Economic Behaviour* (pp. 19-57). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- 5- Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). (2016). Retrieved 7 May, 2016, from Techopedia: www.techopedia.com
- 6- Understanding your Online Identity: An overview of Identity. Retrieved from <http://www.internetsociety.org/sites/default/files/Understanding%20your%20Online%20Identity%20An%20Overview%20of%20Identity.pdf>
- 7- Buckingham, David. (2011). “Introducing Identity.” Youth, Identity, and Digital Media. Edited by David Buckingham. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008. 1–24. doi: 10.1162/dmal.9780262524834.001
- 8- Krotoski, A. (2012). Online Identity: is authenticity or anonymity more important? *The Guardian* 20 April 2012. Alison 12/27/2013 08/10/2014
- 9- Durante Montiel, M., Martínez González, A., Morales López, S., Lozano Sánchez, J. R., & Sánchez Mendiola, M. (2011). Educación por competencias: de estudiante a médico. *Revista de la Facultad de Medicina (México)*, 54(6), 42-50.
- 10- Zakrzewski, L. (2015). Cyberspace Theory.
- 11- Ávila, R., Mahana, P. A. B. L. O., Rivera, C. A. R. L. O. S., & Mc Coll, P. E. T. E. R. (2016). Simulación Clínica como método de formación de competencias en estudiantes de medicina. *Rev Educ Cienc Salud*, 13(1), 11-14.
- 12- Fernández-Deaza, G. P., Villate-Soto, S. L., & Puerto-Jiménez, D. N. (2017). Educación basada en competencias para estudiantes de medicina sobre la prevención y detección temprana del cáncer. *Educación Médica*, 18(4), 270-275.