

# Selfie Art

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the development and relationship between art and the selfie trend in the postmodern era. The development of technology in the digital communication era, as well as various facilities and social media, have resulted in an increased selfie trend. The selfie phenomenon has become a lifestyle for all smartphone users. Ultimately, it is seen not only as a form of narcissism, but also a piece of artwork that has value. This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on phenomenology study. The research context is on the art in selfie photographs.

**Keywords:** *Art, photography, selfie*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The art of photography can be understood as a combination of technology and art. Various aesthetic values not covered in photography technology must be harmonized with the technical process to give character and beauty to the visual results. The art of photography is not just a recording of what it is from the real world, but it becomes a complex work of art and media that also gives meaning and message [1].

The impact of technological advances is very rapid at this time, making almost everyone already familiar with and has a mobile phone or smart cell phone equipped with the latest features and applications, and high capacity like a computer that works using operating system (OS) software known under the name of a smartphone. Smartphone or gadget is a telephone that can be used by the internet which usually provides Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) functions, such as calendar, agenda book, address book, calculator, and notes [2]. Smartphones are generally equipped with various advanced features so that it can be used for various purposes. Some of these features are SMS, camera, music and video player, internet, document editing, eBook viewer, game applications, and others. Smartphone users can also add other features needed by installing certain applications into it.

The camera is one of the features used by smartphone users and is a favorite feature. Through the camera feature, users can capture events considered necessary to be documented. Almost all the setting features on a regular camera are on the smartphone camera, but the use and results can be different due to differences in sensors, processors, and compression programs. Nonetheless, with its own application, photos can be edited and enhanced by adding special filters or editing features.

The advancement of smartphones has been along with the development of social media used as a means of social interaction online on the internet. On social media, users can

communicate with each other, interact, share, build a network, and have various other activities. Social media uses website-based technology or applications that can transform communication into an interactive dialogue. Some examples of social media that are widely used are YouTube, Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, Path, Instagram, and others.

A trend that has also developed is the behavior of photographing yourself using a camera or doing a selfie. The results of this selfie photo are then uploaded to the user's social media. A study by the Opinium agency in the UK on July 26-29, 2013 shows that people between the ages of 18-24 of 2005 respondents do more than one million selfies in a day [3].

Nasrullah adds that selfie has become a cyberculture that was agreed upon with political, economic, educational, psychological, business, and religious perspectives [3]. Nevertheless, the beginning of the emergence of selfie photos is the presence of technology providing space for the user to access themselves through social networks in order to construct themselves. Another reason for using selfies is that they can be used to document their personal self-activities, capture moments in various situations and expressions when they gather with friends or alone.

Based on the background above, the authors were interested in investigating the phenomenon of selfies and their art that has increasingly entrenched in the postmodern era.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research uses a qualitative approach, with the type of phenomenological study. The data generated are in the form of descriptions, and the findings can be the reflection of seeing art in selfies.

### A. Research Subjects

The subjects in this study consisted of social media users who were the researchers' friends. They were selected purposively based on their active selfie uploads on Instagram.

### **B. Data Collection Instruments**

This is descriptive research with a qualitative approach, whose instruments employed include observation, interview and literature study guidelines.

Non-participant observation techniques were chosen because researchers and research subjects interacted in the cyberspace. Observations were done to selfie photos uploaded by research subjects. Interviews were conducted with Instagram Direct via text messages (chat), voice messages, and video chats. Through text messages, researchers send bit.ly links so that the subjects can answer research questions more easily. Literature studies are used in exploring and sharpening the data obtained.

### **C. Data Analysis Techniques**

In this study, researchers employed the qualitative analysis techniques of Miles and Huberman [11], namely interactive and comparative analysis model which compared the results of the research with the findings of previous studies. Data analysis consisted of three activities done simultaneously, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

This analysis process was carried out by collecting data in the form of texts produced from observations, interviews, and documents. The data were then processed by typing, recording, and editing.

### **D. Data Validity Analysis**

Research data that had been collected were checked for their validity. The technique used was the triangulation of methods and sources. Triangulation of methods was carried out by comparing data on observations, interviews, and documentation. Then, the triangulation of sources was done by comparing informant interview data.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Postmodernism offers characteristics that are contrary to the nature of its predecessor era. What needs to be underlined is that the essence of artistic value takes precedence over the ratio itself. Openness is preferred, then from such conditions, it can be assumed that it allows a very big opportunity for everyone to express art. Everyone is free to name the art they make and is free to value their artwork.

### **A. Social Media as an Art Medium**

According to McQuail in his book *The Theory of Mass Communication*, the main characteristics of new media are the existence of interconnectedness, access to individual audiences as recipients and senders of messages, interactivity, diverse uses as open characters, and their ubiquitous nature [4]. The development of technology that was previously in the form of traditional media into new media has been equipped with digital technology. This growing concentration of modern telecommunications consists of computers and broadcasting networks. People start to be confronted with new styles of processing and disseminating digital information, the internet, www (world wide web), and multimedia features [5].

Concerning this, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Path, and YouTube are new types of media that are included in the online media category. These new types of media allow ordinary people to talk, participate, share and create networks online [6]. Social media, so-called social networking, is a social structure formed from nodes (which generally are individuals or organizations) bound by one or more specific types of relationships such as values, visions, ideas, friends, ancestry, relationship status, political views, talents, and interests [7].

At present, the existence of new media is understood as an era of actual digital technology and the internet, as well as its impacts on the surrounding culture. The emergence of new media also contributes to the change and transformation in the making of art, and this context can be seen that the internet and social media also influence the phenomenon of selfies.

Various new media allow people to talk, participate, share, and create networks online. The smartphone technology can be used as a medium for artwork whose results can be exhibited in social media without time and space limits to access.

These social media also have very wide-ranging benefits, for example, to make it easier for humans to exchange information and ideas, to find work, or to be creative in making a work, for example, they legalize selfies. With the existence of social media, which is the legitimacy of ordinary people as art receptors, there is a new scheme in consuming art, namely producers, distributors, and consumers of art.

Art producers are selfie artists, consumers are the public (art community, art connoisseurs, and ordinary people) in this case known as citizens, and art distributors include social media and news disseminators on social media. In this case, social media become a central role in the existence of individual selfie uploaders and the art itself. The virtual world is very significant in its development, and social media functions more to provide and exhibit private selfie posts to the public sphere. Implicitly, it is certain that social media have become an arena of existence to selfie photos with the best moments.

### **B. Art Digitalization**

The theory put forward by Marshall McLuhan for the first time in 1962 in his writing *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* suggests that changes that occur in various ways of communication will also shape human existence itself. Technology shapes individuals on how they think, behave in society and the technology ultimately and directs them to move from one technological age to another.

Technological determinism can be interpreted that every event carried out by humans is the influence of technological developments. In the beginning, technology was invented by humans, but gradually it is the technology that actually influences what humans do. The essence of technological determination is the discovery or development of communication technology that is what actually changes human culture. This study chose this theory as a reinforcing philosophy because researchers think that the presence of a smartphone acts as a development of communication

technology that is used not only as a communication medium but has led to the phenomenon of selfie culture.

Besides, in this modern era, all aspects of life are closely related to globalization and digitalization. Art develops along with the development of its civilization as it is marked by the discovery of the technology itself. The digital phenomenon cannot be denied any more because it assimilates with people's daily life. Digitalization is no longer an option and is not a necessity, but the reality that inevitably has to be accepted. To this day, the development of art also accompanies technology that is increasingly fast and sophisticated, especially digital technology that is increasingly endless and makes the development of art towards digitalization continue to advance.

Furthermore, the existence of the internet can indirectly result in a new generation, and this generation is considered to be a future generation nurtured and raised in a new cultural environment of interactive digital media.

Likewise, smartphone technology is so advanced, starting from the use of tools to communicate, and now turning to sophisticated and attractive applications. The sophistication of this application is what makes many smartphone changes appear nowadays by changing the function of a smartphone itself to function in terms of photography, which gave rise to the selfie phenomenon.

### **C. *Selfies as a Postmodern Art Work***

Jean Francois Lyotard was the person who introduced postmodernism in the fields of philosophy and science in the 1970s through his book entitled *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. He interpreted postmodernism as all criticism of universal knowledge of either the metaphysical tradition, foundationalism, or modernism.

Postmodernism is a new idea that rejects or includes the development of an existing idea about the theory of thinking in the past, namely modernism which tries to provide criticisms of modernism considered to have failed and is responsible for the destruction of human dignity; it is a shift of science from modern ideas to a new idea brought by postmodernism itself [8].

One of the postmodernists, Jean Baudrillard states that postmodernism culture has prominent characteristics, including the following.

1. Postmodernism is a culture of money (excremental culture);
2. Postmodernism culture prefers signs over meanings, media rather than messages, fiction over facts, sign systems over object systems, and aesthetics rather than ethics;
3. Postmodernism culture is a simulated world;
4. Modern culture is characterized by hyperrealism; and
5. Postmodernism culture is marked by the explosion of mass culture, popular culture, and mass media culture [9].

Various fields of life and scientific disciplines such as art, architecture, literature, sociology, history, anthropology,

politics and philosophy almost simultaneously provide responses to the theme of postmodernism. It offers features that are contrary to the nature of its predecessor era, namely: stressing emotions rather than ratio, media rather than content, signs rather than meanings, plurality rather than singleness, possibilities rather than certainty, games rather than seriousness, openness rather than centralization, local rather than universal, fiction rather than facts, aesthetics rather than ethics, and narrative rather than theory [10].

Photography comes into separate media and grows over time to show its existence. Photographic media functioned as a tool in the world of painting in the past, but now the media has become a new phenomenon present in the art world. This phenomenon is marked by the number of photographic works exhibited in art galleries. This makes photography media today stand in line with other arts. Technological developments in the world of photography present many changes, one of them with the presence of selfies.

Oxford Online Dictionaries includes the word "selfie" as part of the English vocabulary in August 2013. According to the dictionary, "selfie" is "a photograph that one has taken of one self, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and upload to a media social website" or in other words, i.e. take pictures of yourself or more taken through a cellphone camera and then uploaded to social media.

Selfie is etymologically derived from the word "self", where "self" means the person himself. Thus, selfie means activities related to and carried out by a person himself. Selfie, or in the Indonesian translation called "*swafoto*" is the process of taking self-portraits using a digital camera (of any type or form) without the help of others.

Selfies are a form of intrapersonal communication, where selfie artists communicate with themselves before taking selfies. In its development, the results of selfie photos are no longer enjoyed privately by the people who take photos of these films, but with advances in technology, they have been uploaded or posted on social media.

At the beginning of the selfie popularity, each individual perpetuated himself either at a certain moment or vice versa, but now, selfie actors do not take selfies anywhere. They seem to understand what places or activities will make selfies look more aesthetically pleasing.

Viewing aesthetics as a philosophy, in essence, has put the aesthetic itself at a dichotomous point between reality and abstraction, as well as between beauty and meaning. What is seen in aesthetics is no longer beauty in the conventional sense, but it has shifted towards discourse and phenomenon.

Lately, views about aesthetics have experienced a shift, in line with the shifting of aesthetic concepts in every era. The view that aesthetics only studies everything that is beautiful (beauty, style, art) has long been corrected, because there is a tendency that modern works of art no longer offer beauty like the Romantic or Classical times, but rather on mental meaning and action.

In today's discourse, works of art are no longer seen as artworks but are seen in terms of signs, traces, and meanings. Aesthetic studies, therefore, also become widespread, not

limited to artifacts agreed upon as a work of art, but on those containing meaning.

Besides, the creation of photographic work can be based on various purposes by calling it a medium in delivering a message for a particular purpose. Photography works are also used for the interests of the photographers as a reflection of their expression, then the work can become a work of expression photography. In this case, the selfie photos can be interpreted as a medium of expression that displays the identity of the photographer in the process of creating art photography works.

The presence of selfies as an art began to gain worldwide recognition. One of them was at the exhibition at Saatchi Gallery, London, England on March 31, 2017, which turned hundreds of selfies into amazing works of art. Carrying the heading "From Selfie to Self-Expression", this event highlights the role that emerged from smartphones as an artistic medium for self-expression. This exhibition compares and combines old self-photos with modern selfies in the digital age.

Therefore, selfies and posts seem to form an inseparable correlation. Social media plays a large role in supporting cell phone practices, especially applications available on social media. While social media that enable the way to enjoy works with selfies are getting more primary.

Implicitly, there might be a change in art and the meaning of art, which is usually determined by the presenter, collector, or connoisseurs of art, subsequently, now ordinary people also consume art, even with a different form, namely selfie photos.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that a selfie photo is not just a self-portrait, but there exists an artistic value.

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