# To be seen or not to be: Narcissistic tendencies among bloggers

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**Abstract**

In recent time, bloggers became one of the most significant players on the on-line media field. The influence they have gained though their blogging and across other various media platforms is increasing. Some of them, the A-listers[1], are viewed as personas embodying and representing popular culture and worshipped as celebrities. The image that bloggers construct about themselves using their personal blogs and visual-posting possibilities of personal publication platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter) is crucial for their presentation and helps them to perform as celebrities in front of those very media users and general public. Bloggers tend to shape their public image using specific blogging routines. The trend of visualized style of communication seems to be most important for bloggers to obtain the role they want to play. If we look closer, we can detect the narcissistic tendencies in their presentation style using such textual forms. I have decided to explore narcissism among bloggers and the usage style of certain media in connection to this phenomenon.

**Key Words:** Narcissism, bloggers, social media, Facebook, Instagram, blogging routines, celebrity, self-construction, identity, selfie, visual culture, Dominika Myslivcova.

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## 1. Introduction

This Work in Progress paper presents my upcoming research focused on Czech teenage starlet and former blogger Dominika Myslivcova and its goal is to reveal and explore possible narcissistic tendencies occurred in her public performances. Myslivcova established herself within Czech blogosphere when she was just 15 years old teenager in 2009. She based her blog www.dominikamyslivcova.cz[2] on genres and discourses used in the official teenage media. Based on constructed identity she was continuously providing in her activities, she is nowadays recognized as an authority not only by her followers but also by the very media she refers to. Her visibility has a specific dynamics. It began with worshipping celebrities by posts in the inner space of her blog which catapulted her into the space out of her blog, where she became one of the celebrities.

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However, she closed down her blog recently and now continues to construct and maintain her gained status of a prominent blogger using personal publication platforms Facebook and Instagram instead. In this paper, I would like to examine the possible background of this evolution in connection with a possible narcissism of Myslivcova.

To be seen, or not to be… and how to construct the image of the self to be famous - that´s the question, nowadays.


## 2. Conceptual Framework

Medium of blog represents a public space, a personal journal, where its users can freely and constantly document chosen aspects of their life, express their opinions on various topics and communicate through those notes with a certain group of other virtual users.[3]  In social demographic terms the biggest as well as the most active group across the blogosphere are teenage girls and young women.[4]

Based on the application of the uses and gratification theory[5], we can define the social actions[6] which influence the blogger in shaping the produced content in a certain way to satisfy his or hers concrete needs.[7]

Bortree[8] suggests that teenage girls and young women use blogging mainly to construct their own identities, evaluate their blogging appearance according to the response of their audience and legitimize their view on the topics and values they provide based on sharing the content with the rest of the virtual community they belong to. The desire of power and influence can be also present. Moreover, bloggers can also search for new friends or similarly focused users across the community.  Lövheim[9] adds that female bloggers (and bloggers in general) can be also influenced by such users as well and this fact can result in the way they blog.

Young female bloggers also tend to emphasize their personal live which they not only document but also re-construct in the convenient way. This process enables them to create the virtual identity of themselves which doesn´t need to be necessarily identical with their real life appearance. Applying Erwing Goffman´s sociological concept of dramaturgical behavior of people in everyday life[10], we can say that every blogger play a theatre. The stage – blog – enables them to perform the role of their choice, idealized performance; construct their public image which is styled and influence the meaning of auditorium which observes them. This public performance, however, can be totally different from their private life they live in backstage. Blogs are also a type of media where we can observe the negotiation between the stage and backstage. Bloggers tend to mix both areas together, provide the information from backstage as well, because they use blogs as their virtual diary (or they shape it in sort of the way). Rosen[11] talks about the process of constructing a metaphor of the person within social network sites, and the organization of individuals around this

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abstract concept of themselves. "As a result, one's entrée into this world generally isn't through a virtual neighborhood or community but through the revelation of personal information."[12]

Bloggers can be seen as DIY celebrities[13] which main interest is to be famous, well known and likeable by the others – their potential and already established fans. The role they perform within the blog and other social media and self-branding activities help them to manufacture themselves to become celebrities they admire, identify with and desire to obtain the same celebrity status. "The heroes are the supermodels, pop stars and actresses who perform on the virtual world stage. The dream is to be elevated to the same celebrity status."[14]

The visual form of communication plays a tremendously important part of blogging, as well as manufacturing the celebrity from a blogger. As Dikovitskaya[15] suggests, the image became one of the most important form of rendering the everyday reality. Mitchell[16] talks about the iconic turn: "It is…a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality."[17]

The concentration of social media users on the visual appearance and its connection to narcissism is one of the current focuses of the media studies Narcissism is a personality disorder when people tend to view themselves in the best way possible; in terms of intelligence, power or attractiveness.[18] Yet not every user of social media is necessarily a narcissist. But, according to same authors, there is a tendency of narcissistic people gathering together on social media. Thanks to the shallowness of the communication style used within social media based on often superficial relationships. Social media as well give the users a "complete power over self-presentation."[19] They are focused on the self of each individual and give the opportunity to be seen within their peer group based on the data they provide by text, links and photographs. All those actions are connected with an individual personality to obtain more friends be likeable and to construct the identity in the best way.

> Users are committed to self-exposure. The creation and conspicuous consumption of intimate details and images of one's own and others' lives is the main activity in the online social networking world.[20]

In their research of video blogs, Griffith a Papacharissi[21] describes a high rate of narcissism among the bloggers. This bears upon bloggers´ construction of a public identity through which they legitimize their view of themselves and their own superiority. Moreover the narcissists need a public, the bigger the better, and among the environment of social media they can easily measure the number of their followers. Thus, give them even bigger confidence to continue in the construction of themselves.

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Personal blogs also embody the type of media which technological limits and way of use enables that. In case of fashion bloggers it is obvious, that a medium of picture (in the form of stylized photographs of themselves. The picture is a way how to easily describe to the audience their identity and lifestyle; what they are wearing, what and where they eat, how they entertain themselves. This process of seeking the ideal presentation of a blogger includes specific blogger routines to perform well on the stage: the selection of the clothes, make-up, finding the right stage and pose, as well as the right angle for taking the picture.

The photographs are the most frequent visual form of identity construction and individuality presentation form on online media overall. Self-taken photographs, a concept used in the field of photography for decades, reused as a tool demonstrating and documenting qualities of self, uploaded as a visual content on social media is considered as a cultural phenomenon of past few years. The concept of "selfie", firstly adopted by teenagers, spreaded among the social media users across their age, social and cultural status.

Celebrities use selfies to define their status and give the users the glimpse into their both private and public lives, updated on daily bases. The overal number of posted selfies and number of followers define the percieved stardom of each celebrity. We can find ranking online statistics[22] based on the frequency of celebrities´ posting activity. Selfies became a valuable source of information about famous people lifes and provide facts and gossips usually media and especially tabloid media used to reffer to. Today, to publish information about their private lives (such as romanic relationships, born of the child, new tattoo), celebrities don´t need the traditional media to reffer about themselves, they do it on their own. We can find there a paralel between celebrities and bloggers behavior to maintain and influence their audience. Using the institute of selfie, bloggers replicate the same pattern of behavior as celebrities and appear as they are celebrities to their audience as well.

Despite of the possibilities of personal blogging in terms of publishing visual content, we can determine recent trend of bloggers´ activity within other personal publishing sites which accompanies their blogging activities. Thanks to the convergence of media, even the social media platforms are connected between each other. Bloggers use sites as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Pinterest to complement their constructed and publicly presented identity from different angles and justify it.

In fact, these platforms can be more convenient for a narcissistic blogger personality in terms of usage and visual impact then they own blog, they can prioritize them in their virtual public performance as a celebrity. In case of blogger Dominika Myslivcova whom evolvement will be described in his paper, some bloggers, in order to obtain their ideal construct of themselves leave their blog which they used mainly as a tool serving that purpose and define themselves throw other social media with more space for their visual presentation in a constant matter.

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### 3. Research and Methodology

My future research puts together the content of social media platforms generated by a certain publicly known personality and her other public activities. It is important to emphasize that my aim is not to describe the narcissism of the blogger just through images or comments posted on social media. My objective is to find the linkage between the two fields - the character of social media and the possible narcissistic tendencies which their usage can generate or among the bloggers on a specific example. My rationale is that the aim of my research is not to describe the problem in general, but it can contribute to the future research of this phenomenon which surely has specific and variable appearances.

My work is theoretically grounded in psychology, visual studies and media studies, which help me to understand, properly, the context of those fields. I also draw on insights from other theories, such as semiotics, to get an even more complex overview of the subject. Due to the fact that I have so far concentrated only on the Czech environment, my primary data come mostly from Czech blogosphere and social media established in Czech Republic.

It is of course not possible to describe to you the whole complexity of the topic. I have, therefore, selected a single concrete example that I will focus on more in depth.

### 4. Concrete Example

In the beginning blog www.dominikamyslivcova.cz served mainly as a personal journal of its founder, a young teenage girl who tried to replicate the discourse of media dedicated to teenage girls. Although the fact that the blog was more a personal space of a young girl naively trying to act as she was able to capture the main topics of the media she referred to. The main rubrics of the blog were beauty tutorials, photo stories, romantic posters, shopping reports and love counselling forum, all with Myslivcova playing the main star of each form.

The concept of the blog which was mirroring the print media and the fact that it was constructed by a teenage girl, became a very popular among other teenage girls. Before the close of the blog she had 14 00 followers mainly consisting of girls in age between 6-18 years. They found an online version of their favorite magazines which was more personal - embodied by a real girl of their age, a virtual friend who could help them with their problems and concerns in romantic matters as well as provided the advice about beauty and fashion. What was a game of young girl started to be seen as a serious platform for teenage girls. The personality of Myslivcova which was tightly bounded with all the activities within the blog became to be worshiped and admired not only by her own peer group but as well by the media she referred to. Under these circumstances she started an online shop[23] providing merchandising

products labelled by her face or signature. So far, we could presume that Myslivcova, as an amateur without any resources, naturally constructed her blog around her personality. But in this step of her evolution, we can determine a significant change of her own evaluation, a sense of a future potential of her actions and the beginning of the glorification of herself as a celebrity.

In 2012 Myslivcova started to contribute to Bravo Girl![24], one of the most influential teenage girl magazine in Czech media environment. After a success on a different platform Myslivcova started to be recognized by a wider public, she appeared as a host on a popular national TV show and shoot several music videos and video where she appeared as a singer.

By that time, her presence on the blog started to disappear, and instead of maintaining the blog she started to be more active in her own Facebook page[25] as well as on Instagram[26]. In March 2014, she closed her blog and remained visible only on these two platforms.

Interestingly, in her overall public performances she stopped define herself as a blogger and started to define herself as Dominika Myslivcova, the celebrity. This fact supports my suggestion that Myslivcova´s narcissistic personality according to increase of her popularity evolved. Through the medium of blog she established herself as a celebrity and gained popularity. The success, confirmed by her appearance in other media, resulted in her higher self-esteem and provided an impulse to decline a medium of blog anymore as a useful tool for her self-presentation.

Her style of contribution changed accordingly. On Facebook and Instagram, she presents herself through short comments and self-taken pictures documenting her stardom life. The use of visual content is connected to Myslivcova´s narcissistic tendencies. We can observe that she uses selfies as a mirror of herself. Using them, she shapes and re-construct over and over her builds desired public image which helps her to maintain her position of celebrity.

Despite the fact that she left her stylization of a helping friend into a professional celebrity focused on her own performance, her fans seem to follow her on the new platforms. Im May 2014, on Facebook she had more than 84 000 followers and on Instagram around 14 000. According to these numbers, I argue that one of the reasons she left her blog she started to use these media intentionally, was to obtain the higher attention of the public than she had on her blog. This also resonates with a concept of a narcissistic personality; she defines herself in terms of popularity among her audience and evaluates herself based on the admiration and attention within the platforms. With Facebook and Instagram she became more visible to current as well as potential audience.

The instant way of communication also enables Myslivcova to quickly communicate with her audience and get its proper response. That generates even

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higher frequency of the post and higher self-esteem of Myslivcova and justifies and encourages her in the continuous delivery of the same type of content.


## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, Myslivcova´s public actions were always focused on herself, whether in the environment of her blog, social platforms or here other performances. According to provided evidence, I suggest this switching media process was intended by Myslivcova to express herself in more instant and vivid way through visual textual forms and short written messages rather than using the medium of blog requiring more time as well as effort to construct her public image as she desires. Moreover this change of media and new type of self-presentation resonates more with Myslivcova need to satisfy her obvious narcissistic tendencies.

Finding and learning more about the connection between the social media platforms and its usage by bloggers, I believe, improve our understanding in both psychological and social sciences. Such connection can tell us more about the behavior of the bloggers, their usage of social media in order to construct themselves as celebrities and its development, as well as the role of social media in the society. This paper generates more questions and opens a space for future studies. Are we all narcissists when using social media? Is it possible to generalize this described phenomenon? How does the institute of selfie define our social actions? Did the border between personal and public life finally disappear?


# Notes

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