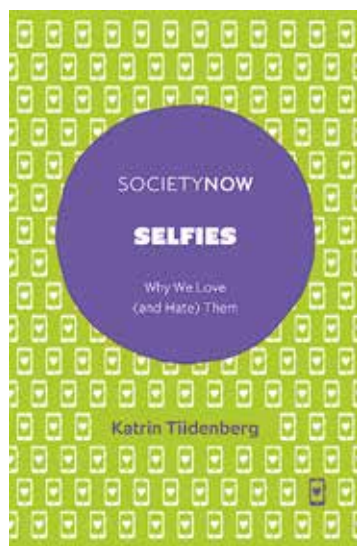


Book Review



Katrin Tiidenberg, *Selfies: Why We Love (and Hate) Them*, Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2018, 978-1787-437-17-3, 158 pp.

Katrin Tiidenberg, *Ihu ja hingega internetis: kuidas mõista sotsiaalmeediat?*, Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2017, 978-9985-588-38-3, 363 pp.

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In this present day, social-media-saturated era, it is probably not an overstatement to say that all social media users seem to know what selfies are, what they mean and what they do. But only after reading Katrin Tiidenberg's insightful book *Selfies: Why we love (and hate) them* is one actually able to capture all the multifaceted nuances selfie practices consist of and depend upon.

Drawing upon extensive scholarship and popular discussions on selfie practices, as well

as her own fascinatingly rich empirical studies, Katrin Tiidenberg, an associate professor of visual culture and social media at Tallinn University, invites the reader to critically reflect upon "what and why selfies mean, why we seem to love and hate them and what that says about us: our collective cultural values and social norms" (p. 4). Rather than repeating all the age-old clichés and moral panics around selfies and selfie takers which aim to "keep the privileged in privilege" (p.130), as Tiidenberg rightfully notes, *Selfies: Why we love (and hate) them* offers a fresh and unique contribution to these debates.

Tiidenberg's style of writing is engaging and witty, smart but not thick with academic jargon and thus an ultimate pleasure to read for everyone interested in challenging one's understandings of selfie practices. Furthermore, the overall structure of the book makes its salient features easily accessible.

In the introduction to the book, Tiidenberg introduces all the key terms and concepts (e.g. affordances, performativity, virality, visual culture) that form an important basis for her analysis. The first chapter provides an overview of the predecessors of selfies, offering, for instance, quick historical snapshots of visual self-presentation in art history and photography in order to answer the question "What are selfies?"

In chapter 2, Tiidenberg proposes an answer to the question "How do we selfie?" Relying on her extensive empirical research, Tiidenberg lays out rich sets of examples to illustrate that selfies have multiple functions and meanings, all of which depend on the context surrounding them.

"Why selfies matter?" asks Tiidenberg in chapter three, offering a convincing and

eloquent overview of the diagnoses to the problem of why selfies make us feel (anything). In this section, Tiidenberg unpacks different social norms e.g. narcissism, authenticity and moral panics; as the main roots of why selfie practices can make us feel bad; but also provides fascinating analysis on the empowering potential of selfies. I would encourage this chapter to be read not just by aspiring scholars and students, but actually by all social media users who are willing to go beyond the ordinary, judgemental labelling that selfie practices usually invite.

In the fourth chapter of the book, Tiidenberg offers an inspiring and thought-provoking look into the future, to "the 'what ifs'" (p.102) of the post-selfie phase. In addition to the irrefutable scholarly insights on post-selfie speculations, the chapter offers a fascinating read for scholars looking for new research methods and types of inquiry, such as science fiction speculation – a method the chapter is built upon – which introduces a fresh and engaging way to study the future of the internet.

Ultimately, I highly recommend *Selfies: Why we love (and hate) them* to all the lecturers working in the realm of media studies, visual culture, internet studies or gender studies. The book can certainly be used as a textbook when teaching about present day visual practices, and it also contains a carefully selected recommended reading list, which serves as an excellent starting point for anyone looking for additional readings on the topic. Furthermore, I would warmly encourage all the interested academics to follow @kkatot on Twitter, as Tiidenberg has also made available some in-class discussion prompts and assignments that can be splendidly used

(speaking from experience here!) when teaching selfies.

Ihu ja hingega internetis (eng. *Body and Soul in the Internet*), yet another book by Katrin Tiidenberg, published by Tallinn University Press, could be used as a textbook for undergraduate courses tackling current trends in media and internet studies. It offers the first Estonian language overview of different burning questions and topics that scholars working on the interdisciplinary field of internet studies are currently working on. In its seven comprehensive chapters, Tiidenberg both manages to provide an overview, not only of the main concepts and terms that should belong to the *lingua franca* of every student of communication, sociology or media studies, but also introduces the names and scholarship of all the well-known pioneers (e.g. Markham, boyd, Papacharissi, van Dijk) responsible for establishing the field of internet studies in the world.

Tiidenberg herself is also a pioneer, as *Ihu ja hingega internetis* makes an important contribution in developing Estonian scientific terminology on the field of internet studies. Although the first two chapters of the book – which provide an introduction to what the internet and (visual) social media are all about – are perhaps a bit too sketchy and full of academic jargon; they significantly extend Estonian language scholarship on the topic.

The second part of the book, is based on Tiidenberg's own pioneering research, providing fascinating insights into practices of online identity creation, self-presentation, online body politics and online normativity at large. Relying on her extensive four-year-long ethnographic fieldwork (including field notes, participant observations, individual and group interviews,

blog outtakes, etc.) and founding scholarship by, for instance, Foucault, Goffman, Giddens, Bourdieu, Butler, Haraway and others; Tiidenberg offers a captivating insights into the selfie-practices on NSFW Tumblr and Russian-speaking, pregnant Instagram users. Illustrative extracts from the interviews and visuals, that have been altered with the help of different sketching apps (Tiidenberg is the first to introduce the idea of "ethical fabrication" proposed by Markham 2002, to Estonian readers), so to minimize recognition and add additional nuances to her sound theoretical arguments.

Regardless of the fact that the field of internet studies is very interdisciplinary and in a constant flux, Katrin Tiidenberg busts several myths and misconceptions about the online world, and its users. Hence, *Ihu ja hingega internetis* is definitely a must read for everyone trying to make sense of life in a platform society.