In this paper, I explore the challenges and opportunities that multimodal forms of social media open up for the study of (im)politeness. I focus on selfies, which as a form of discourse entail both impression management and interpersonal potential as they circulate in different social media sites and services. ‘Ugly’ selfies are a particularly interesting subgenre, which appear to be a form of self-mockery that follow Leech’s (2014) modesty maxim to avoid praise of self, and which result in a range of different relational work for the selfie-taker and recipients including compliments and critique. I argue that in order to understand how and why ugly selfies achieve different kinds of relational outcomes we need to pursue a multi-layered, contextual approach centred on the participants’ perspectives of their interactions with these selfies. The data I report includes a focus group discussion with 12 students, 200 posts marked with the #uglysselfie hashtag extracted from Instagram using Netlytic (Gruzd, 2016), and an experiment with 160 participants which tested the effect of interpersonal space on the perception of ugliness. The results of these studies show the relational work of ugly selfies is embedded in different kinds of contexts, where as part of the students’ lived experience, ugly selfies were sent and resent as performances of relationality. The analysis of the Instagram interactions showed how the face-threatening potential of #uglysselfies was scaled up as forms of ironic resistance that critiqued beauty ideals (Widdows 2018) and was particularly marked in the context of Instagram’s aesthetic norms. Lastly, the experimental research showed how the camera angle and proximity was perceived as humorous, and hence might contribute to the rapport associated with the so-called ‘ugly’ images.