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Uses and gratifications of Generation Z within social networks: A dialectical investigation into the Facebook domain

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Ryan O'Carroll and Tara Rooney

Uses and Gratifications of Generation Z within Social Networks: A Dialectical Investigation into the Facebook Domain

To date, little research has considered how various types of gratifications operate within SNSs such as Facebook (LaRose et al. 2001; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010; Wang, 2015). To address this gap, we explore Generation Z's motivational behaviour through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory. Additionally, we investigate the types of gratification obtained by Generation Z through Facebook. The research adopted an interpretivist philosophy and employed a qualitative approach. The data collection method used semi-structured interviews, in conjunction with qualitative digital diary research. Research participants were requested to record emotions, behaviours and opinions in their digital diaries over a consecutive seven-day period. Corbin and Strauss' (1990) Grounded Theory classification, methodological memos and Rose's (2016) visual analysis assisted in the data analysis process. Generation Z are motivated to utilise Facebook in an attempt to attain their primary gratifications. They envisage attaining a sense of digital empowerment through gratifying their primary motivational needs. This is achieved through leveraging the quality of content produced within Facebook, which subsequently prompts the attainment of their primary gratifications. It is pivotal marketing communications practitioners produce content that comprises elements of creativity, emotion, humour, authenticity, transparency, tailored messaging, or incorporating facets of storytelling. Consequently, Generation Z Facebook users are incentivised to interact with the produced content and subsequently attain primary gratifications. Additionally, Generation Z will develop a positive perception to both the brand and the Facebook platform itself.

Keywords: Motivation Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, computer-mediated communications, Facebook

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INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of social networking sites (SNSs) are significantly impacting how individuals relate to one another, share information, acquire information, interact/socialise, establish relationships, construct social identity, behave, and provide social and emotional support to peers (Barkhuus and Tashiro 2010; Cheung et al. 2011;

Ha et al. 2015; Ross et al. 2009; Ryan and Xenos 2011; Smock et al. 2011; Wilson, Gosling and Graham 2012). Consequently, the abundance of rewards and gratifications garnered via SNSs establishes a significant level of complexity within user motives and behaviour. To date, our understanding of the motives that lie beneath gratification attainment in a digital context remains limited (LaRose et al. 2001; Quan-Haase and Young 2010; Wang 2015). However, contemporary Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) has been positioned as a viable framework to understand need attainment in this context (Ruggiero, 2000). Consequently, the purpose of this research is to comprehend how and why Facebook is selected and utilised by individuals to gratify their motivational needs. These needs are underpinned by various motives and goals sought by users. UGT will act as the guiding theoretical framework whilst evaluating UGT's core facets in the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC) concepts, comprised of the hyperpersonal model; apprehension; selective self-presentation; and content sharing. Considering the prevalence and incorporation of social SNSs into an individual's daily life, it provides marketing communications practitioners with potential avenues to exploit this phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uses and Gratifications Theory

UGT identifies the social and psychological motives that drive individuals' use of specific media (Cheung et al. 2011; Katz et al. 1973; Wang 2015). It is a motivational theory that contextualises users' socio-psychological needs and subsequent goal-orientated behaviour within a technologically enabled platform (Xu et al. 2012). Consequently, UGT attempts to identify and explain what social and psychological needs motivate audiences to select particular media channels and content choices (Lee and Ma, 2012; Stafford et al. 2004). UGT is popular for its effectiveness in addressing the "how" and "why" individuals use media to satisfy specific needs (Quan-Haase and Young 2010). It focuses on how individuals actively seek-out and select media channels in a goal-directed manner to gratify needs such as information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, self-identity and/or escapism (Katz et al. 1973; LaRose et al. 2008; Lee and Ma 2012).

Windahl (1981) argues that media and political researchers examine mass communication from the perspective of the communicator, whereas UGT researchers place the audience at the centre of any communication exchange. This positions UGT as a contemporary audience-led theoretical framework. Similarly, O'Donohoe (1994) argues that UGT is highly correlated with commercial aspects of media, which revolutionised the connection between new media, such as the internet, and UGT (Grant, 2005; Ruggiero, 2000). UGT encompasses a nomological network for research rather than providing a predefined set of constructs or factors (Wang, 2015) such as traditional mass communication theories. Consequently, UGT has been conceptualised as being able to identify the array of gratifications obtained by individuals via media usage, whether they are gratified informationally, socially or for leisure needs (Katz, 1959), whilst also encompassing various attitudinal and behavioural effects (Diddi and LaRose 2006; Ruggiero, 2000). Furthermore, as an individual's motivational needs provoke cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes, UGT's audience-centred approach positions the framework as integral for media research (Katz et al. 1973; Lee and Ma 2012; Ruggiero

2000). The prevalence of demassification, where individuals have control over their media use has resulted in the view that new media, such as SNSs, has led to increasing selectivity where users can tailor messages to their needs (Ruggiero 2000; Williams et al. 1988). Moreover, the classification of the user as a 'prosumer', a simultaneous consumer and producer of information, subsequently provides users with greater control over content consumption (Quan-Haase and Young 2010). This ability to self-direct motivates individuals to select platforms that will be most effective in attaining their desired needs.

Topology of Gratifications

A distinction exists in UGT between gratification opportunities; gratifications sought; and obtained. Gratification opportunities are contingent on the attributes of both the platform and the user (Lo and Leung 2009). They have become enhanced through digital medias such as SNSs, enabling users to communicate in two ways; asynchronously and synchronously (Lo and Leung 2009; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010; Ruggiero, 2000). Asynchronicity means that messages may be staggered in time, resulting in users being able to respond and interact with their peers at their own convenience (Ruggiero, 2000). This aspect of asynchronicity can be correlated to the concept of selectivity within new media. Conversely, synchronicity refers to real-time interaction/engagement common through instant messaging services (e.g. Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp). However, even in platforms where synchronicity is favoured, asynchronicity can still occur and users can take time to construct their message in attempting to obtain gratifications (Blau and Barak 2012; Ruggiero 2000).

Gratifications sought therefore drive media usage, whereas gratifications obtained are the outcomes of the goal-orientated behaviour of the active users (Palmgreen 1984). Upon obtaining a gratification an individual will develop a positive predisposition toward the media channel resulting in an increased level of interaction with that channel (Levy and Windahl 1984; Xu et al. 2012). People utilise media either for two primary reasons. Firstly, the content carried by a platform incentivises users to engage with the platform, such as information and entertainment. Secondly, the experience of the platform for which it creates is also a factor that encourages individual to utilise the platform, for instance, the level of interaction with acquaintances, play/gamification features or browsing (Stafford et al. 2004; Wang 2015). On a basic level, gratifications can be divided into two general categories: content gratifications and process gratifications (Stafford and Stafford 1996). Content gratifications refer to the messages carried by the platform itself, whereas process gratifications are concerned with the actual use of the platform and the subsequent experience the user derives (Cutler and Danowski, 1980 as cited in Stafford et al. 2004).

Ha et al. (2015) propose a model of the four gratification types, in conjunction with the concept of gratification-opportunities, which are presented in Table 1.

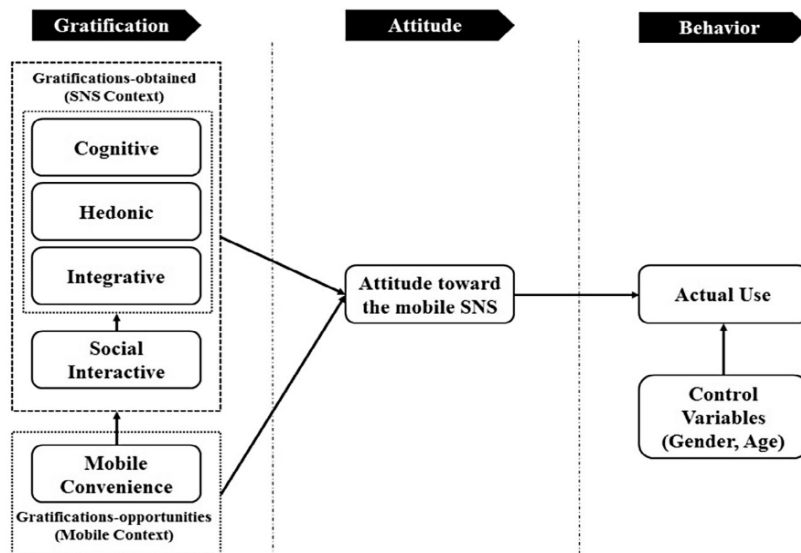
Table 1: Gratification Types (Ha et al. 2015)

| Gratification Type | Description |
|---------------------------|--|
| Cognitive | Gratifications obtained via sharing knowledge, acquisition of information, seeking/sharing consultation (utilitarian functions). |
| Hedonic | Gratifications obtained through deviation, aesthetic, entertaining, resting/passing time, and joyful experiences. |
| Integrative | Gratification of forming personal identity, strengthening trust, confidence and status with acquaintances whilst establishing a sense of belonging via social media. |
| Social Interactive | Gratifications that arise from interpersonal communication exchanges and bonding between individuals via a technology-enabled space. |
| Mobile Convenience | Gratifications obtained through the ease of effort whilst not being subjected to time and space limitations. |

Gratifications and Social Networking

Ha et al. (2015) argue that a user’s behaviour within the SNS, is shaped by the attitude developed through the gratifications obtained. Similarly, as depicted in Figure 1, they identify a range of variables that impact behaviour.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Gratifications, Subsequent Attitudes, Conducted Behaviour (Ha et al. 2015)



A cognitive gratification constitutes seeking and sharing knowledge, acquiring information, curiosity, and consultation. The functions that comprise cognitive gratifications are of a utilitarian nature (Ha et al. 2015). Hedonic gratifications are associated with experiencing a joyful experience, whether that is passing time or viewing/interacting with entertaining content (Ha et al. 2015; Ko et al. 2005). The leisure and play gratifications are important because they are as equally motivationally

driven as any other gratification. However, these consumer activities are often overlooked by marketing practitioners (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Although practitioners are becoming aware of the demand for hedonic gratifications, the dynamics of SNSs within contemporary society make it difficult for marketers to exploit (Quan-Haase and Young 2010; Wang 2015).

Integrative gratifications assimilate to both personal (identity) and social integration (relationships) (Ha et al. 2015). A primary facet of personal integrative gratifications is self-identity through status enhancement behaviours, which is a significant stimulant of motivation for incentivising online participation (LaRose and Eastin, 2004). By contrast, social integrative gratifications refer to engaging in SNSs and conducting activities such as interacting with friends, joining extended communities, and preventing oneself from feeling lonely (Wang et al. 2016). Nambisan and Barron (2007) argue that integrative gratifications comprise the formation of one's identity, enhancing individual values and establishing interpersonal relationships. Social interactive gratifications correspond to when individuals feel comfortable and competent in engaging in interpersonal communication exchanges via technology-enabled spaces (Ha et al. 2015; Phang et al. 2009). A social interactive gratification can be described as a grand gratification, as it exerts a significant effect on other gratifications (e.g. cognitive; hedonic; and integrative). It is also perceived as a cause rather than an effect, and so, indirectly affects the other (Lee and Ma 2012). For instance, Facebook acts as a platform that enables users to interact and communicate with their friends, express their opinion and so on. Mobile convenience gratification is comprised of effort, time and space (Papacharissi and Rubin 2000). Mobility is an attribute that differentiates mobile SNS and internet-based services (Ha et al. 2015). The higher degree of mobility and convenience, the greater utility of gratifications obtained by users, as anything that simplifies work, adds to the users' ease (Park and Han 2013). The growth of mobile SNSs has increased mobile convenience gratifications as individuals seek information, entertaining content or increased interactions with acquaintances in a more convenient way resulting in a positive attitude towards the platform (Collier and Sherrell 2010).

Computer-Mediated Communications (CMC)

CMC involves the exchange of information in textual, audio, and/or video formats, which is transmitted and controlled via the utilisation of computer and telecommunication technology (Bubas 2001). Examples of spaces for CMC are blogs, SNSs, instant messaging apps – i.e. WhatsApp; Facebook Messenger, email, chat rooms, and online forums. CMC creates an anonymous environment due to a reduction in paralinguistic and social cues, such as facial expressions and body language, which are common in FtF communication. Roed (2003) concludes that users perceive the concept of asynchronicity within CMC to establish a lessened sense of anxiety and stress, as users can construct their message appropriately at their own convenient time, achieving greater levels of response from peers (Ruggiero 2000). Consequently, users experience a lower degree of social anxiety as they can self-direct the pace of how they communicate. This compensates for the cognitive interference of anxiety and facilitates the user to construct a stronger/tailored response. Furthermore, greater experience with a technology minimises the levels of apprehension a user may have when utilising a specific platform, thus enhancing mental stimulation (Scott and Timmerman 2005).

Facets of CMC

Two elements of CMC are of particular relevance to the motivations behind uses and gratifications; the hyperpersonal model and the concept of computer-mediated communications apprehension (CMCA). Walther's (2007) hyperpersonal CMC model states that users exploit various technological aspects of CMC. This goal-orientated behaviour, which is orchestrated by users, motivates them to enhance constructed messages as they seek to manage online impressions and establish desired relationships (Walther 2007). These technological aspects and embedded features within CMC present users with an abundance of gratification-opportunities and motivate them to gratify motivational needs (Lo and Leung 2009). This exemplifies that the hyperpersonal CMC model posits that users leverage features available to achieve a higher level of social intimacy and interpersonal engagement. This is due to the demassification and asynchronous nature of CMC-enabled platforms (Ruggiero 2000), which could not be attained to the same degree as one would in FtF communication. Kim and Baek (2014) conclude that selective self-presentation using CMC is affected by an individual's self-esteem and levels of social trust. They argue that CMC enhances individual's propensity to share their ideal self (Kim and Baek 2014) through leveraging the digital functionalities and features available (Belk 2013; Chen 2016; Schau and Gilly 2003). Consequently, self-presentation strategies resemble personal integrative gratifications.

The second component of CMC theory is computer-mediated communications apprehension (CMCA), which is an extension of Communication Apprehension (CA) Theory. CMCA refers to one's fear or apprehension towards communication within a technologically enabled platform (Neumann and Pugliese 2000). As CMC platforms, such as SNSs, blogs and apps become more prevalent, so too has the interest in CMCA (Arnold 2007; Hunt et al. 2012). CMCA has been shown to decrease a user's motivation for utilising SNSs and other CMC platforms. This is true of platforms where levels of interpersonal communication are high and self-expression is expected (Hunt et al. 2012). Overall, the impact on motivations to seek out uses and gratifications can be negatively affected (Ellison et al. 2007). Brown et al. (2004) argue that individuals will refrain from social activities when their desire to create an impression is coupled with a lack of confidence in their ability to do so. Hence, although the asynchronicity of CMC may reduce the sense of anxiety (Roed 2003), external forces (offline) have a knock-on effect in determining one's confidence and social engagement online.

CMCA has been significantly correlated to social anxiety, loneliness and reclusiveness, which has been shown to impede the desire to interact and communicate with others on SNSs (Hunt et al. 2012; Scott and Timmerman 2005). Contrastingly, Joinson (2008); and Ryan and Xenos (2013) find that loneliness and isolation can increase usage of SNSs as individuals seek to mitigate these feelings through the access an SNS can provide to others. The levels of engagement in this instance may be more passive but the motivation and gratification sought is to achieve a sense of belongingness. Furthermore, Hunt et al. (2012) add that SNSs can provide the opportunity to reduce CMCA for users through appropriate features to initiate positive social interactions.

UGT and Facebook

Facebook users conduct their behaviour based on their underlying motives, whether comprised of passive activities or goal-orientated behaviours. Therefore, Facebook perfectly lends itself to the lens of UGT as the platform gratifies the underlying assumptions of the theory (adapted from Katz et al. 1973):

- (i) Users select and utilise Facebook under the influence of rational self-awareness of one's own needs resulting in goal-directed behaviour.
- (ii) The utilisation of Facebook is based on the user's conscious motives which they seek to gratify.
- (iii) Individuals using Facebook are active users.
- (iv) Facebook is competing with other forms of media platforms for selection, attention and media gratification with the likes of Twitter and Snapchat.
- (v) The content within Facebook is assessed by only the audience active within the platform.

Facebook's foundations and functionalities are developed to facilitate content sharing and UGC – sharing images; videos; status updates; third-party content (Facebook pages). Thus, there is an abundance of gratification-opportunities users can exploit in order to attain gratifications sought (Ha et al. 2015).

Upon a user obtaining gratifications, a positive attitude can form based on utility extracted (Dunne et al. 2010). Consequently, the user's perception of this specific media channel will be positively enhanced and encouraging re-use. This positive reinforcement leads to an increased usage of the relevant media channel - for example, Facebook (Fry and McCain 1983; Ryan and Xenos 2011). Taking this to be true, one would assume an inverse relationship is also present, where negative reinforcement and not obtaining the gratifications sought will decrease the frequency of usage of the media channel. However, this is not the case. Users, upon failing to gratify their initial needs, are subsequently motivated to partake in passive activities. These activities are often in response to feeling rejected by a group or social activity and will result in the user monitoring the behaviour of peers, or groups, they seek to affiliate with (Joinson 2008; Ryan and Xenos 2011; Smock et al. 2011).

METHOD

The primary goal of this research is understanding behaviour and not predicting it. Due to the complex nature of the research, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it enabled the research to explore how and why Generation Z employ Facebook as a platform to gratify their motivational needs. It employed an inductive approach due to its qualitative nature (Strauss and Corbin 1998) which involved building themes from the "bottom-up", by organizing the data into abstract units of information, resulting in a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell 2007). The research had two phases which are explained in the following sections. Phase one involved the collection of digital diaries and phase two comprised of in-depth semi structured interviews with participants. A total of seven digital diary logs, interviews, transcripts,

methodological memos and field notes assisted the research in assessing the participants’ underlying beliefs, motivational needs and goal-orientated behaviours. In total, 4 hours and 35 minutes of interviews, 139 pages of transcripts and 78 pages of digital diary entries were collected.

Sampling

Judgement sampling was applied; thus, no set sample size was pre-established and a sampling to saturation approach was employed. Table 2 presents an overview of the sample, interview duration and indicators of digital diary Facebook usage.

Table 2: Participant Profiles and Interview Duration

| Participant ID | Age | Gender | Date of Interview | Daily use of Facebook (for any purpose) | Frequency of interacting with third-party content on Facebook (weekly) | Frequency of posting personal content on Facebook (monthly) | Interview Duration (Min/Sec) |
|-----------------------------|-----|--------|-------------------|---|--|---|------------------------------|
| Emilia | 20 | Female | 18/04/19 | 15-20 times | 10+ times | 1 time | 34.04 |
| Robert | 22 | Male | 18/04/19 | 10-15 times | 5-10 times | 0-1 time | 35.13 |
| Darren | 21 | Male | 21/04/19 | 20-30 times | 10+ times | 1 time | 37.21 |
| Sarah | 21 | Female | 22/04/19 | 20-25 times | 5-10 times | 1-3 times | 40.29 |
| Abbie | 22 | Female | 25/04/19 | 30+ times | 20+ times | 2-3 times | 50.26 |
| Emma | 20 | Female | 26/04/19 | 3-5 times | 1-2 times | 0 | 35.37 |
| Shane | 22 | Male | 29/04/19 | 15-20 times | 5-6 times | 1-2 times | 42.44 |
| Total Interview Time | | | | | | | 274.74 |

All participants were contactable through Instagram and prospective participants were willingly interviewed. This was possibly due to the researcher’s connections within the sporting community which facilitated access to even elite level athletes.

Phase 1: Digital Diaries

Digital diaries facilitated participants to record their diary entries in real time, providing rich and raw data (Biraghi 2016). Furthermore, they facilitated the collection of spontaneous and self-directive data (Zimmer, 2010) which provided participants space for in-depth reasoned reflexivity (Kaun 2010; Holt 2002). They also afford participants high degrees of mobility for data collection (Biraghi 2016). Participants were required to digitally log their Facebook usage and note their observations, interactions and thoughts. This enabled the research to explore participant behaviours and motivations encompassing their Facebook usage, driven by their need to attain gratification. The digitisation of the diaries also enabled participants to attach any relevant information such as screenshots or hyperlinks. The digital journal app, Day One Journal was used to

enhance convenience. This app enabled both textual and visual diary entries to be recorded on participants' mobile device. Each participant was provided with the autonomy and freedom to decide what they wanted to include within their diary entries. This ensured participants included content chosen by them rather than feeling obliged to follow a strict format (Patterson 2005; Taylor 2003). Diaries were recorded for one week. On completion, participants were requested to send their digital diaries to the researcher via email, to permit analysis prior to the supplement semi-structured interviews.

Phase 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

Once the digital diary data was analysed, semi-structured interviews were conducted to probe for motivations and perceptions whilst guided by a structured approach. They also facilitated the exploration of data from participants' digital diaries to draw a more in-depth analysis (Saunders et al. 2012). All interviews were recorded and transcribed in chronological order, from oral to written text for analysis. Given the visual functionality of Facebook, the use of photo elicitation recorded in the digital diaries was also incorporated and discussed during the interview process. The use of photographs assisted in revealing the interviewee's values and beliefs (Saunders et al. 2012). The intention was to bridge the gap between their inner and outer worlds, referred to as breaking the frame (Meo 2010).

Data Analysis

For both the digital diaries and the interview transcripts, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Grounded Theory classification of coding was employed. While Grounded Theory coding mechanisms were applied in this study, it was not a Grounded Theory study. Grounded Theory is a logically consistent set of data collection and analytical procedures for analysing data (Charmaz 1996). Methodological memos were developed to assist in the development of codes and concepts, and to demonstrate the decisions behind the process. It included both case-based and conceptual memos, which assisted in validating the conclusions drawn from the data collected (Harding 2013). Rose's (2016) visual analysis method was used to analyse recorded Digital Dairy images from Facebook. This method demonstrated how to approach, examine and interpret visual culture. Due to the development of digital technologies (Quan-Haase and Young 2010), interpreting visual culture has altered (Rose 2016).

FINDINGS

Category One: Digital Empowerment

Existing literature states that technological features which cannot be availed in the offline world, play a significant role in enhancing gratifications for users (Bazarova and Choi 2014; Fox and Vendemia 2016). In support of this, we find that Generation Z Facebook users attain this through gratifying their primary motivational needs. Facebook empowers its users with capabilities and opportunities they cannot avail of to the same extent elsewhere. Digital empowerment implicitly appeared in all interviews and digital diaries. Several gratifications were identified and are discussed below:

Primary Gratifications

Seven motivations functioned as their primary gratifications obtained by utilizing Facebook. These seven gratifications were classified as primary gratifications and are as follows:

- (i) Communication
- (ii) Information retrieval
- (iii) Entertainment
- (iv) Relationship enhancement
- (v) Relieving boredom
- (vi) Self-esteem and self-efficacy
- (vii) Sense of belongingness

Shane described the phenomenon of gratifying primary motivational needs and attaining a sensation of empowerment as: "Facebook provides me with things I just can't get in the offline world, you know? It likes empowers me and provides me with constant entertainment, news, social events, and being able to contact my friends." Furthermore, Facebook was often a prioritised information source for participants. They visit Facebook pages to acquire information, rather than visiting a dedicated news organization's website. Darren explains in his diary: "One of the sole reasons I use Facebook is because of how quickly I can get news [...] I'm the first to know and then tell my friends about it." Similarly, Emilia states: "I want to get news quickly and conveniently like. I don't enjoy having to search websites for news, but I always go on to Facebook, as what I'm looking for is just always there [...] it's really handy." An additional motivation for participants was that they actively consume and share entertaining/humorous and informative third-party content with peers. This is to relieve boredom and improve relationships whilst enhancing their self-identity with peers. Sarah reflected on this phenomenon in her diary, "it's weird when I think about it, but when I share content like that, it's like my mates see me as a funnier person, like the content I share sort of characterises me and at the same time, improves the relationship I have with my mates". This suggests that relationship enhancement and user-self presentation strategies are closely correlated.

An interesting phenomenon surrounding the concepts of self-esteem and self-efficacy began to emerge during the interviews. As Facebook is considered less intimate and more informal, participants feel more confident and competent when interacting and sharing third-party content with their peers. Abbie states: "I certainly don't feel the same level of nervousness I would when I'm with the person physically you know [...] so I'm at ease and I can focus all my attention on responding to a text message through Facebook messenger, or even a comment I've been tagged in." When asked about other platforms, she explained that "Instagram and WhatsApp are very intimate. Facebook is more open and less formal and like more unintimate, so I feel more confident and open to meet new people." This supports Ruggiero (2000) and Roed's (2003) theory that asynchronicity within CMC can establish a lessened sense of anxiety and stress as users can construct their message at a time convenient to them. Attaining a sense of belongingness, through

Facebook groups, is also a strong participant motivation for Facebook usage. Robert explained in his diary: “what I like about these Facebook groups is that it gives me that sense of attachment or I suppose belongingness as people are sharing content of the same interests [...] it’s always nice getting that recognition for posting in funny memes or jokes.” Nambisan and Barron (2007) support this idea stating that a sense of belongingness helps an individual construct their identity.

Instant User Gratification

Ha et al. (2015) demonstrate how mobile convenience has an antecedent effect on gratifications as it enables users to gratify motivational needs in a quick and convenient manner. Generation Z holds an attention span of 8-seconds, in comparison to the Millennial’s 12-second attention span (Forbes 2017). This infers how Generation Z seek gratification instantly, in the most convenient manner accessible. This correlates with Emma’s perspective as she stated: “I don’t want to waste my time looking at something that I won’t enjoy.” These findings are supported by all research participants, as they stated they all use their mobile phone to access Facebook and other social platforms due to its increased accessibility, minimalised effort and convenience. When asked about this, Emilia prefers “mobile as it is quicker, more accessible and more convenient because when I upload pictures or share with friends, it is quicker on the phone because their contacts are synced and the images pop-up quicker, like screenshots.”

Mental Stimulation and Habitual Usage

All participants reported behaviours consistent with subconsciously incorporating a routine in their Facebook usage. This involved checking Facebook on waking, commuting, or going to sleep. Similar to O’Brien (2018), this research supports the notion that Generation Z feel pressure to keep up with social trends and cultural norms within contemporary society. The findings suggest that this routine is driven by the underlying need for mental stimulation and the apprehension of the ‘fear of missing out.’ Emilia states, “the first thing I always do in the morning is look at my newsfeed and notifications on Facebook [...] as it sets me up for the day.” Abbie reinforces this perspective by expressing how she finds her Facebook usage as “bizarre, it’s like an addiction.” This habitual consumption of content seeks out mental stimulation through content, whether that may be hedonic, cognitive, interactive or integrative stimulation. This is summed-up clearly by Shane as he claimed: “I think it’s like a habit and I just constantly need to take in information, looking at funny memes and I suppose just get excited about upcoming new things that are of interest to me, like movie trailers or music events.”

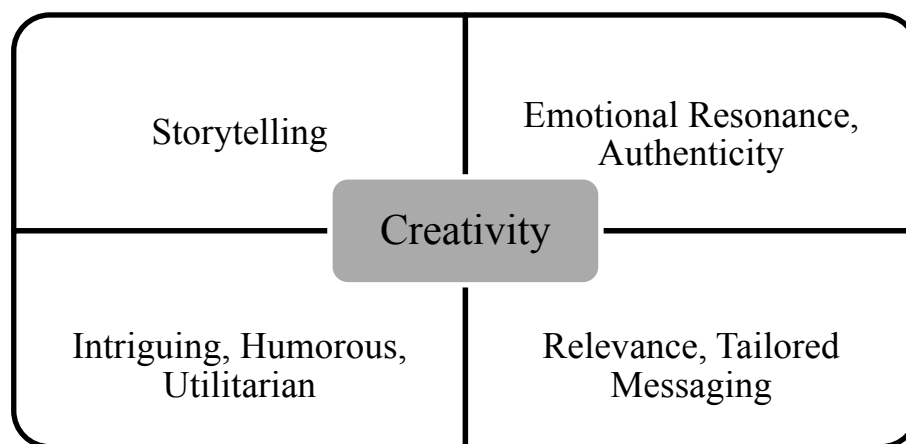
Category Two: Content Supremacy

This category characterises what the research calls, sub-gratifications. These are gratifications which underpin the gratifications of the primary motivational needs for Facebook users (as in category one).

Sub-Gratifications

Content quality emerged as something that can affect the entire gratification process and can be categorised as sub-gratifications or content gratifications. In order to attain these sub-gratifications, participants identified requirements which content producers within Facebook must adhere to, specifically third-party Facebook pages. These content requirements are illustrated below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Generation Z’s Sub-Gratifications Content Requirements



This is evident in a discussion relating to Foil Arms and Hog’s content. Referring to their content quality, Abbie states: “that’s why they are so successful and get great exposure because the content they produce relates and resonates with their audience. And it’s funny, so it’s a win-win [...] it’s creative and integrates Irish humour.” Similarly, Emilia explained that their content is “relevant, creative and entertaining to their audience.” She also addresses the aspect of creativity being the most effective way to garner attention, “I also really respect and admire creativity.” Robert states that storytelling is the best means to resonate with Facebook users, adding that “the stuff that really jumps out at me and sometimes catches my feelings is when there is a story behind it.” However, findings also show that most of the content participants consume is perceived as uncreative and irrelevant and thus creates a negative perception of Facebook as a platform. Furthermore, it establishes an impersonal environment and reveals the lack of control Facebook users have over the content which they are exposed to. Robert states that “I notice when flicking through posts is how many of them have been regurgitated by the same pages sometimes months before. This can be quite irritating and put me off a page.” Additionally, Abbie comments that her “Facebook usage has reduced” due to the regurgitated and impersonalised Facebook newsfeed, and lack of peer-related content appearing in her newsfeed.

User-Generated Content

This research supports the theory that user-generated content (UGC) has more influence on participant perceptions than other sources of content as it is perceived as a trustworthy information source and is embedded within a consumer's personal network (Chu and Kim 2011; Corrigan 2013). Authenticity and unbiased branded content produced by other Facebook users is perceived as more reliable and transparent. Consequently, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays a pivotal role in terms of brand-perception and user-engagement. Robert states in his digital diary that: "I find the comment section of Facebook often cuts through the crap and often serves as a brilliant barometer of whether the content is worth clicking on, and reflects the content more honestly, with some posts often summarising the just of it." Additionally, Emma says that she would look at the comments "to determine if something a post is worth viewing, and to see how people already reacted to it."

Leveraging Third-Party Content to Enhance Relations

Data shows that participants seek to leverage third-party content to enhance relations they have with their peers. Participants actively seek content that is either creative, intriguing, emotionally resonant, humorous, relevant or incorporates facets of storytelling. Subsequently, participants leverage this content to improve relations with their peers through sharing, tagging, commenting or sending via Facebook Messenger to peers. Ha et al. (2015) reinforce this stating there is an abundance of gratification-opportunities which users can exploit in order to attain gratifications sought. Abbie says that she admires Facebook pages that "provide me with an opportunity to tag my friends and have a laugh with them as we can all relate to the content and like in the long-run, it builds our relationship." This can be correlated to Eftekhar et al. (2014); and Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) as they posit content sharing as facilitating an increased degree of interactivity whilst empowering users to establish and enhance relationships.

During the interview, Emilia was asked to elaborate as to why she tagged her friend in content posted by a Facebook page (see Figure 3 below – photo retrieved from Emilia's digital diary). She expressed, "I saw it as a good opportunity to hopefully bring my friend to the concert with me and like become a greater friend." Similarly, Sarah addressed that she tagged her friend in the post because "I absolutely love posts that are really interesting and informative. My friend is the same and we always tag each other in posts like that, and even in college we talk about them all the time!" This mirrors Smock et al. (2011) who conclude that sharing content can support offline peer interaction. Evidently, the quality of content is integral in terms of facilitating social interaction and enhancing relationships between users, as we see with Sarah's example.

Figure 3: Emilia's Digital Diary – Historical Pictures



Figure 4: Sarah's Digital Diary – Intriguing Competition Giveaway



Micro-Influencer Authenticity

As demonstrated by Montechhi et al. (2018), micro-influencers disseminate brand-related content which is perceived as more authentic than other media sources. This statement is in accordance with Generation Z Facebook users. The participants perceived micro-influencers as more relatable, authentic and trustworthy when it comes to branding and product endorsement. By contrast, Generation Z considers renowned macro-influencers as fake, untrustworthy, and profit orientated. Sarah expressed her views on micro influencers, “I trust micro-influencers so much more because they always give their honest opinion”. Conversely, Sarah criticised renowned social-media influencers, “these famous social-media influencers are fake as s*t and do not care about what they are endorsing once they are getting paid.” Abbie also obtains this same perspective and stated: “I know micro-influencers are more genuine and they are more concerned about giving an honest review rather than selling a product and lying about it because you’re getting paid.”

Various participants discussed how it is vital for micro-influencers to endorse products that reflect their nature of work or general background. In other words, the brand’s persona/image must align with the micro-influencer’s nature of produced content, whether that is beauty, fitness, business etc. Darren explained that “I completely lose trust in micro-influencers that endorse products that [they] have no expertise in because it’s obvious they have no knowledge about the product and simply care about being paid.” Sarah further added, “for me it’s so important the micro-influencers have knowledge about the product they are talking about.” However, due to the impersonal environment within Facebook, Generation Z perceives social influencers to be more effective and resonant on Instagram. This is primarily due to the intimate and visually orientated nature of Instagram. Emma supports this perspective as she stated: “To be honest, I use Instagram for following social-media influencers because it just feels more real because they’re uploading their own personal content consistently. You don’t get that personal feeling on Facebook.”

Category Three: Impersonalisation

It became apparent throughout the interviewing and analysis process that the content produced and overall environment within Facebook has become very impersonal. This has altered participant perceptions of Facebook as a platform, their apprehension levels, self-presentation strategies, and predisposition for engaging in passive activities.

Distraction Platform

For participants, Facebook usage has altered significantly with all reporting a decreased level in usage. Shane comments in his diary that Facebook “can be a real distraction [...] Facebook can be a good thing for passing the time but a distraction and prevents me from getting work done, mostly just looking at boring and irrelevant posts.” Moreover, Emma expressed that she “never really uses Facebook to socialise with people, that’s more so Instagram’s job, I pretty much just use Facebook for entertainment reasons or like get ideas of what I may want to buy in-store.” This finding is consistent with Smock et al. (2011) who concludes a major driver for Facebook usage has become affiliated with entertainment purposes.

Role of Distrust and Increasing Apprehension

It has been well documented that Generation Z upholds privacy and security as a major concern (Woo, 2018). Participants reinforced this by stating they do not trust Facebook advertising and would be reluctant to purchase via Facebook. However, they do notice advertising on Facebook and use it for sourcing possible purchases. Emilia stated: “I don’t trust buying through Facebook [...] but I do use the marketplace to get ideas of what I might want to buy.” Similarly, Darren expressed: “I just don’t really trust the platform, but I do like getting suggested with relevant ads that reflect my interests, so like, I would buy them in the future in-store or on their website.” Following from this, there was a reluctance from participants to share intimate content due to the excessive openness of Facebook as supported by Kim and Kim (2018). For instance, the use of the Facebook story feature was unused by all participants. Abbie: “I have too many people in my friends list that I don’t know, and I feel stories are very personal and intimate [...] Facebook is impersonal, so I wouldn’t use the Facebook story feature.” This reflects Brandtzaeg et al.’s. (2010) finding that having too many Facebook “friends” can disrupt the sharing process due to experiences of social surveillance and social control. The data supports the concept that apprehension and distrust among Facebook users’ effects motivational behaviour.

User Self-Presentation

Participants enhance their identity through the content they share with peers. Firstly, it is instigated by the user sharing content with peers to improve their relations through social interaction. Subsequently, the quality of the content, whether humorous, informative or creative, reflects positively upon the user’s self-image. This eventually solidifies the user’s affiliation within that particular social groups, through continuous online interaction. Abbie: “the content that I share with my friends reflects on how they see my personality, so that’s why I always share good content with my friends.” Surprisingly, participants did not frequently upload their own personal photos to enhance their identity. Emma: Facebook is “too impersonal” and doesn’t know “loads of people in my friend list” to upload personal photos. Darren was worried that “other

people wouldn't take note of it or see it on Facebook because I never see my friends uploads anyway." Consequently, it became evident that they do not perceive Facebook as a platform to enhance their identity through frequent personal photo sharing as it is perhaps too impersonal. Occasionally, participants would post personal pictures on Facebook but only of a significant event or milestone that occurs in their life. This suggest participants use personal photo sharing sporadically in the act of self-presentation. This establishes a long-term personal narrative, incorporating significantly spaced intervals or memories of their life, referred to as distributed memory by Belk (2013). Abbie was asked as to why she posted on her Facebook profile (see below), "I looked nice. It was also at my friend's twenty-first birthday party so it was quite a big deal for her and all of us like, and I wanted to post it to let people know I was there, to let them know that I'm like still socially active." Similarly, Shane stated: "I don't normally post my own stuff, but this was a big deal for us. We had a chance to play at Electric Picnic provided by RTE."

Figure 5: Shane – Promotion of Band on Birthday RTE



Figure 6: Abbie – Best Friend's 21st



Passive Social Surveillance

Quan-Haase and Young (2010) and Ryan and Xenos (2011) conclude that Facebook is used passively by users to a large extent such as social monitoring. Therefore, due to Facebook's open nature, it facilitates people to monitor social activity and stay up-to-date with what is occurring within and outside their social circle. This form of passive social surveillance was evident amongst participants. Emilia uses Facebook to "look at their profiles to stay up to date with what they are doing or any upcoming events they are going to, so I know what's going on in my social circle and like what my friends are up to." While Sarah stated that "when I'm completely bored and have nothing else to do, I would look at my friends' profiles to see what they are doing."

Category Four: The Cycle of Interpretation

In this section we show how the significant affect interpersonal feedback loops possess on Generation Z user's CMC apprehension levels affect their gratification-seeking behaviour.

Consideration for Audience

The research supports Roed's (2003) assertions that external forces have a knock-on effect in determining one's confidence and social engagement online, such as the social interaction with

the user's audience. All participants carefully considered the reactions of their Facebook audience prior to sharing content. The three main considerations were; social embarrassment, damaging peer relations, and lack of content exposure due to the impersonalisation of Facebook. Sarah states that she always asks herself before tagging her friends in content, "will my friends find this post funny or would they get offended?" While Darren worried that "if my Facebook friends find a post that I share offensive, it would have a bad knock-on effect on my image." Emma discussed that posting on Facebook makes her nervous about posting, "I always worry before posting, because like what if my friends don't see my photo and I get no likes?"

Obsessive Self-Affirmation Seeking

There was evidence that participants can become obsessed with the reaction they receive from peers and the subsequent mental stimulation derived through personal photo sharing. This is a well-documented psychological response to posting online (Alter 2017; Mehdizadeh 2010). Emilia (see below) uploads photos to Facebook and hopes to get "nice comments from my friends and a lot of likes. It always makes me feel good about myself." Similarly, Emma only uploads photos to Facebook if "it's a big event and that I look nice, so I have a chance of getting a decent number of likes." The primary motivation is to derive satisfaction from this action. Belk (2013) refers to this as the 'co-construction of self.' There is also a social currency at play for participants in the form of likes and comments.

Figure 7: Emilia – Image from Birthday Night Out



Interpersonal Feedback Loops Affecting CMC Apprehension

Positive interpersonal feedback correlates with Skinner's (1957) Reinforcement Theory, as Generation Z receive positive feedback, they repeat the conducted behaviour as their CMC apprehension levels have been lowered. Positive feedback is essential to participants as it can enhance their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Zywica and Danowski 2008). When asked about the effect Sarah would get from positive feedback, she expressed, "if I get a lot of likes and nice comments from my friends, I would definitely feel more confident putting up a similar photo the next time, because clearly my friends

think I look nice too." Contrarily, negative feedback can arise through a peer ignoring the user's tag in a piece of content; or if the user has received a low amount of likes on a personal photo. For instance, Shane discussed that he "would never repeat that action. It would make me feel horrible and a bit nervous, like I'd be worried about how my friends would react when I see them in person." In addition to the ramifications of positive and negative interpersonal feedback, it is also clear that a relationship exists between the online and offline world. CMC apprehension levels, as Shane referred to, are correlated with offline ramifications, as he was concerned about the latter effects in the offline world, as a result of his behaviour online. This aligns with Kaikati (2012) and Mishra and Ismail (2017), who state that online behaviours are interwoven within offline interactions.

DISCUSSION

Digital empowerment is the over-arching grand gratification motivation obtained by Generation Z Facebook users. The concepts of mental stimulation and instant gratification simultaneously achieved, amplifies the utility derived from the primary gratifications obtained. Social interactive gratifications are the primary gratification motivations obtained by Generation Z, consequentially producing a sense of digital empowerment. They actively search for content that will stimulate social interaction with their peers, whether entertaining or informative in nature. This behaviour is driven by their desire to enhance relations, acquire knowledge, attain a sense of belongingness etc. In short, social interactive gratifications are stimulated through initially attaining hedonic or cognitive gratifications, which is then subsequently shared with peers to attain the level of social interaction Generation Z users desire. Thus, characterizing social interactive gratifications as a grand gratification. The prevalence of mobile convenience gratifications further enhances the degree of satisfaction derived from the primary gratifications. The asynchronous nature, in conjunction with the level of media richness in Facebook, amplifies the number of 'gratification opportunities' Generation Z can avail of (Lo and Leung 2009).

Generation Z does not directly seek and subsequently obtain their primary gratifications. Contrastingly, they seek content gratifications or sub-gratifications, that adhere to their stringent requirements for optimising content quality. Thus, their primary gratifications are obtained as a consequent. In other words, attainment of primary gratifications arises from content gratifications. Furthermore, this research conveys that Generation Z does not engage in frequent personal photo sharing on Facebook as a self-presentation strategy, regarding the platform as too impersonal to gratify personal integrative gratifications.

Sub-Gratifications - Stringent Content Requirements

Generation Z seek content that comprises elements of creativity; emotional resonance; storytelling; relevance; humour; intriguing information; brand transparency; or being practical to the user in some form, such as learning a new skill. These stringent content requirements impose pressure on marketing practitioners and brands on Facebook. Simultaneously, the

content requirements establish a niche which can be exploited by micro-influencers/Facebook pages/marketing practitioners. We thus argue that in order to acquire the transient attention of Generation Z Facebook users, among the cluttered and impersonal environment, Facebook content producers must align their content with Generation Z's content requirements. Conversely, the research shows that regurgitated, unengaging, and irrelevant content which is produced within the Facebook domain has altered the type of gratifications sought by Generation Z, as they are less inclined to desire personal integrative gratifications.

Diminished Personal Integrative Gratifications

Nambisan and Barron (2007) argue that integrative gratifications aid in the formation of an individual's identity, enhancing individual values and establishing interpersonal relations. Although there are high levels of social integrative gratifications obtained, contrastingly, there are minimal levels of personal integrative gratifications obtained by Generation Z Facebook users. This establishes a substantial margin between personal integrative gratifications and social interactive; cognitive; hedonic; and social integrative gratifications. Facebook's impersonal environment and the visual orientation of Instagram has altered their desire to enhance their self-identity through frequent personal photo sharing within Facebook. Consequently, Generation Z only enhances their identity and interpersonal relationships through sharing third-party content with their peers, ultimately arising from social interaction. As personal photo sharing is the most effective means of enhancing self-image, impression and identity management, and visual communication (Mendelson and Papacharissi 2010), the ability to improve their self-identity within Facebook is limited. Thus, Generation Z resorts to sporadic self-presentation strategies through personal photo sharing, which is driven by the need to archive memories and create a long-term personal narrative within their Facebook profiles. Facebook is no longer perceived as a social networking site by Generation Z. They instead perceive it as a distraction platform. The impersonal environment, aroused by the cluttered newsfeed and regurgitate content, in conjunction with the lack of exposure of peer-related content, has minimalised the consumption personalised social content, and overall Generation Z Facebook usage.

Visual Element

In terms of Facebook's visual element (Kim and Kim 2018), its multi-dimensional functionality and composition of varying content, facilitates users to gratify a diversity of motivational needs. Therefore, it possesses high media richness levels, thus enhancing Generation Z's hedonic and cognitive gratifications and ultimately stimulating social interactive gratifications. Interestingly, the depletion of personal integrative gratifications enhances Generation Z's user-experience in Facebook. This is because they are less prone to engage in social comparison as they are constantly consuming third-party content, rather than peer-related images, which could hamper their self-esteem. Therefore, they are subconsciously improving their perception of Facebook and increasing their usage, whilst combating the paradoxical concept of Facebook's impersonal environment, which is reducing their usage.

Recommendation Algorithm

Ruggiero (2000) and Williams et al. (1988) suggest that individuals have control over their media use within SNSs, which has led to increasing selectivity where users can tailor the content they are exposed to in alignment with their needs. However, the results of this study negate these findings. Generation Z is exposed to an amass of regurgitated, irrelevant, and uncreative content which accentuates a cluttered newsfeed and an impersonal environment. This has led to Generation Z users being exposed to minimal levels of peer-related content,

thus reinforcing the concept of Facebook being perceived as a distraction platform. Unequivocally, this has hindered Generation Z attaining personal integrative gratifications - i.e. self-presentation strategies. Overall, this positions Generation Z users as consumers of content within Facebook rather than producing their own, thus negating Quan-Haase and Young's (2010) conclusion that SNSs users are 'prosumers'.

Privacy Setting and Openness

Previously publicised Facebook data breaches, in conjunction with Generation Z possessing unknown individuals in their friend list, has established increased levels of distrust and CMC apprehension. Therefore, the privacy setting has disrupted Generation Z's personal sharing process (personal content) and has disincentivised them to purchase products through Facebook. Instead, they use shopping adverts in Facebook as a form of idea generation of potential products they may want to buy through a different source. Interestingly, the cynically perceived privacy setting and overall openness of Facebook enhances Generation Z's confidence and competency levels when interacting and sharing third-party content with their peers. This arises due to the platform being perceived as less intimate and more informal, thus more convenient for stimulating social interaction.

Mobile Simultaneousness

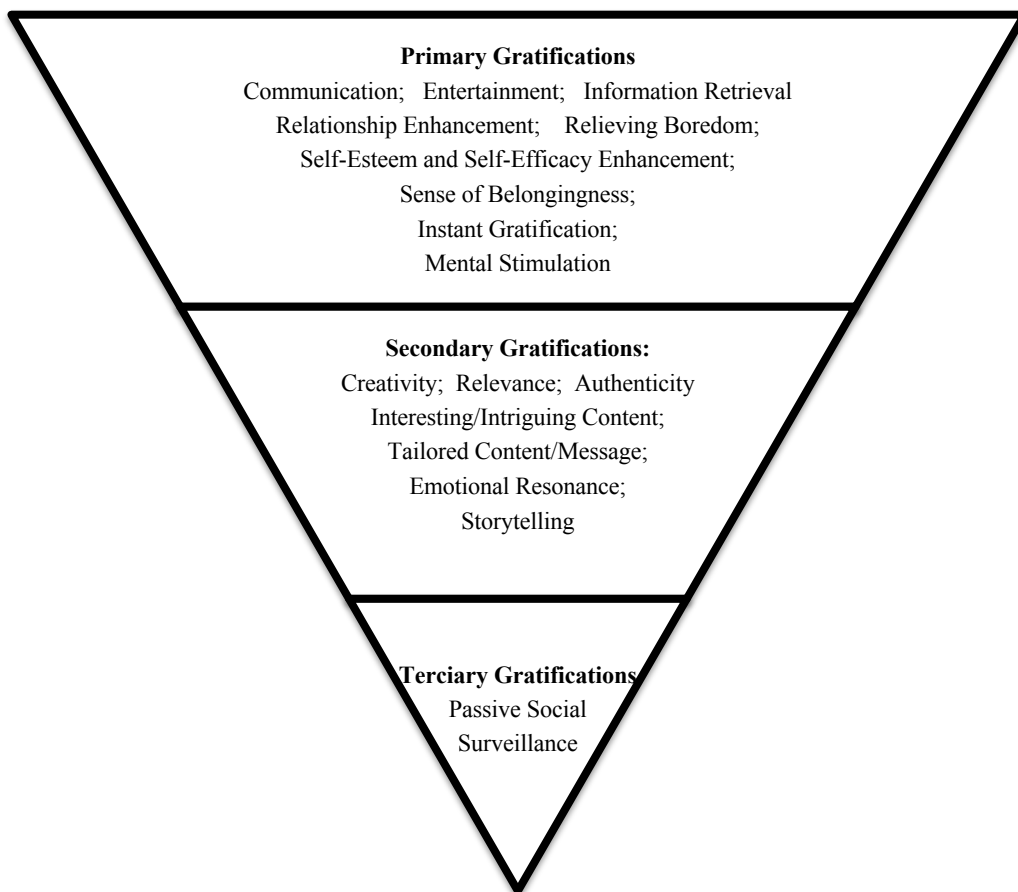
There is a distinct necessity in using mobile SNSs (Facebook) for Generation Z, as they believe the convenience and increased accessibility enhances the utility derived from their gratifications obtained. Therefore, the increased accessibility, convenient usage, and overall simultaneousness of the platform enhances the satisfaction derived from gratified needs for Generation Z. Generation Z places significant importance on their online audience. The cycle of interpretation and interpersonal feedback loops play a significant role in oscillating Generation Z CMC apprehension levels, thus altering consequent behaviour. Generation Z CMC apprehension levels are significantly affected by how their online audience perceives them, thus, resembling 'the looking-glass' (Zhao 2005). A distinct pattern emerged from the findings reflecting how Generation Z users' CMC apprehension levels fluctuate prior and post-sharing content. However, the habitual nature of self-affirmation seeking motivates Generation Z to endure the risk of increasing their CMC apprehension levels. This aligns with McClelland's (1961) perspective that achievement is of strong interest where there is moderate risk or maximum opportunity of acquiring personal achievement without running the undue risk of failure. Therefore, positive feedback received from peers enhances their self-esteem and self-efficacy, resulting in repetitive behaviour and ultimately seeking more complex gratifications which evoke greater satisfaction. Thus, elucidating the powerful and influential role Generation Z's online audience plays on their gratification-seeking behaviour.

Hunt et al. (2012) demonstrate that CMC apprehension has been shown to decrease a user's motivation for utilizing SNSs. This infers that the impact on motivations to seek gratifications through SNS usage can be negatively affected (Ellison et al. 2007). However, we find that although Generation Z's usage is reduced due to the impersonalisation of Facebook, it is not reduced due to their CMC apprehension levels. CMC apprehension is increased when their initial gratifications sought are not subsequently obtained, thus resulting in seeking tertiary gratifications, passive social surveillance. In short, CMC apprehension levels do not reduce Facebook usage, it only makes Generation Z more inclined to engage in passive social activities.

CONCLUSIONS

After analysing and collating the findings derived from the research, a hierarchy of gratifications began to emerge. As aforementioned, the primary gratifications are the main drivers which encourage users to employ Facebook as a platform to gratify these needs. The secondary gratifications, or ‘sub-gratifications’ act as tributary gratifications which ascertain the attainment of the primary gratifications for Facebook users. Finally, tertiary gratifications are the least common, and least satisfactory means of gratifications. They are not goal-orientated motives, yet they are more prone to spontaneously occur and subsequently gratify within Facebook. Figure 8 below, depicts the hierarchical structure developed from the findings.

Figure 8: User Gratification Type Hierarchy



In answering the research problem; “How and why are individuals motivated to use Facebook to satisfy/obtain gratifications?”, we find there are various underlying reasons as to why Generation Z are motivated to use Facebook. The research suggests that they are motivated to utilise Facebook in an attempt to attain their primary gratifications. Ultimately, they envisage attaining a sense of digital empowerment through gratifying their primary motivational needs. It is apparent that Generation Z actively seeks ‘sub-gratifications’, where the content abides by their stringent quality requirements. By leveraging content that adheres to their quality standards, they attain sub-gratifications, which then facilitates Generation Z to gratify their primary motivational needs.

In answering how Generation Z utilise Facebook to obtain gratifications, we conclude they leverage the quality of content produced within Facebook which subsequently prompts the attainment of their primary gratifications. This reinforces Katz et al's. (1973) perspective that the audience is active. However, we also find that upon Generation Z failing to attain gratifications, they possess the predisposition to engage in passive activities. This is initiated due to Facebook's impersonal environment, the users' lack of control over the content they are exposed to and their fluctuating CMC apprehension levels. This contradicts Ruggiero's (2000) concept of 'demassification' within an SNSs, further reinforcing the perspective Facebook is no longer perceived as a social networking site, but rather a media platform. As a result, Generation Z's gratification-seeking behaviour is primarily focused on leveraging third-party content in order to attain primary gratifications, and ultimately a sense of digital empowerment.

Managerial Implications

This research depicts that Generation Z primarily attains hedonic and cognitive gratifications, ultimately stimulating social interactive gratifications and social integrative gratifications. However, they obtain minimal levels of personal integrative gratifications due to the impersonal environment in Facebook. Existing literature exemplifies how SNSs users employ different platforms, that does not replace one another, yet build a repertoire of digital technologies, to satisfy an array of gratifications (Quan-Haase and Young 2010). This research reflects the authors' perspective as it illustrates how Generation Z utilise Facebook as a media-orientated platform to gratify social interactive needs and attain a sense of digital empowerment. Contrastingly, and broadly-speaking, they employ Instagram as a platform for consuming peer-related content and enhancing their self-identity through personal photo sharing (personal integrative gratifications). Evidently, impersonalisation acts as a focal point out of the categories established. It affects the gratifications sought; thus, consequentially effecting gratifications obtained. It also fundamentally alters the dynamics of Facebook whilst simultaneously effecting Generation Z users' gratification seeking-behaviour. This makes it increasingly difficult for marketing practitioners to capture their attention and gain significant exposure among the plethora of cluttered and regurgitated content. Therefore, it is integral marketing practitioners produce content that is either creative, emotionally resonant, humorous, authentic, transparent, tailored, or incorporate facets of storytelling. Hence, this will incentivise them to engage with the content and subsequently gratify their primary motivational needs. Thus, attaining a sensation of digital empowerment. Consequently, Generation Z will conjure a positive perception to both, the brand and the Facebook platform itself.

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