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URGES AND GRATIFICATION OF FACEBOOK USES FOR ROMANIAN STUDENTS

***Claudiu STEFANI*[1]**

Abstract

Since its inception in February 2004, Facebook has rapidly become not only one of the most popular Web sites for social networking, but also one of the most popular sites overall. Facebook is also the most popular social network among Romanian students, 93 % of young people aged 15-24 use Facebook in Romania. Till now, there are few studies concerning the pattern of Facebook use among Romanian students and about the gratification obtained by it. This paper aims to determine the pattern of Facebook use among the students and the main types of gratifications obtained by the use of such social networks. The results show that this social network is used for multiple purposes, among the most significant being having fun, being interesting and socializing online. For Romanian students it is also important to be available online, for others to be able to interact when required. The results show us a significant difference in Facebook usage between men and women, the first spend significantly more time on the social network. The most important gratifications gained by students from using Facebook are gratification access and social gratification.

Keywords: Social Networks Sites, Facebook, access gratification, social gratification, content gratification.

Introduction

Technological changes and technological advancements change the way humans communicate with each other. Social media platforms like Facebook, MySpace, Linkedin, Twitter are relatively new forms of communication in which individuals create virtual profiles and form networks with friends, family, co-workers, and others (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008). One of the most well-known social media sites is Facebook. According to the the Statistics Portal, Statista, in 2017, 71 percent of internet users were social network users and these figures are expected to grow. Social networking is one of the most popular online activities with high user engagement rates and expanding mobile possibilities. Facebook

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currently has over 800 million active users, and more than 50% of users who are active log on to the site every day (Facebook, 2011). Members can connect with friends on the site, and the average user has Roughly 130 friends (Facebook, 2011). Furthermore, more than 350 million of these users login to the site using a mobile device (Facebook, 2011). Social Networks Sites (SNS) are defined as "*A group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content*"(Haythornthwaite, 2005). Social media operates in a dialogic transmission system, (many sources to many receivers). This is in contrast to traditional media that operates under a monologist transmission model (one source to many receivers). The most popular social networks sites in Romania is Facebook. According to the Zelist Monitor, a monitoring and measuring tool for Romanian social media, Facebook has the most active users, 4.021.063 in 2017. There are also 27,501 pages and over 3,8 million comments on public pages. According to the Computer Desktop Encyclopedia, Facebook is defined as "*an online social networking website where people can create profiles, share information such as photos and quotes about themselves, and respond or link to the information posted by others*". Facebook is an SNS developed by Mark Zuckenberg, which is free for the members, allows users to add friends, send messages, and update personal profiles in order to notify friends and peers about themselves. Facebook user can also form and join virtual groups, develop applications, host content and you can find out about others' interests, hobbies, relationship status through users' online profiles. Students, in particular are heavy users of Facebook, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) found that 94 % of undergraduate students at Michigan State University were Facebook users, who spent between 10 and 30 minutes a day on the site and who have between 150 and 200 friends on average, listed on their profiles. Researches related to usage patterns, showed that this network is mainly used to maintain contact to offline connections rather than to develop new relationships (Ellison et al., 2007, Lampe et all., 2006). Especially SNS, primarily help to support existing social relations. Facebook also allows users to express their emotions that are called self-presentation, impression management or self-disclosure. Despite the ubiquity of Facebook among the student population, little research has been done on Facebook itself as Facebook has opened to the public only in early 2004. There are few studies concerning the pattern of Facebook use among Romanian students and about the gratification obtained. In this paper we wanted to explore the consumption pattern of social networks by the Romanian students as well as to what needs are gratified by the use of this social network. As a theoretical background we used the usage and gratification theory by its user orientation, taking into account that today's media users and especially students are more active than ever.

Uses and gratification approach

Unlike mass media concepts and theories that emphasize the media influence, uses and gratification approach looks at consumers as active factors and analyzes their motivations as well as what gratification is obtained. While older theories

used by the media consumption analysis suggested that the audience is passive and can be easily influenced (eg. magic bullet, hypodermic needle theory) uses and gratification theory emphasizes motivation and the active use of media content that can gratify the needs of the individual recipients (Griffin, 2012). This approach was inspired by the functionalist perspective on mass media, used in the 1940s, to analyze the effect of radio broadcasts on listeners (Eighmey and McCord, 1998). Among the first specialists who appreciated that it is important to review the process of communication by media is Elihu Katz, who pointed out that the most important question related to the perspective of media is *"what people are doing with the media rather then what the media is doing to people"* (Katz,1974). Usage and Gratification Theory (UGT) offers a unique perspective to understand how users deliberately choose media that will satisfy certain needs and allow one to enhance knowledge, relaxation, social interactions /companionship, diversion or escape. According to the UGT, media users assume an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. A central concept for this approach is that of "*active consumer*" of media. This is described by Mark Levy and Sven Windahl (1985) as "*a voluntary and selective orientation by audiences toward the* communication process. In brief, it suggests that media use is motivated by needs and goals that are defined by audience members themselves, and that active participation in the communication process may facilitate, limit, or otherwise influence the gratifications and effects associated with exposure. Current thinking also suggests that audience activity is best conceptualized as a variable construct, with audiences exhibiting varying kinds and degrees of activity". Briefly the basic assumptions of this theory can be summarized as follows: (1) The audience is active and the media use is goal oriented; (2) The initiative in linking the need for gratification to a specific medium choice, rests with the audience member; (3) The media competes with other resources for the satisfaction of their needs; (4) People have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers within an accurate frame of that use; (5) Value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

According to West and Turner (2010), UGT has developed from Needs and Motivation Theory of Abraham Maslow according to which people are actively seeking to satisfy their needs, organized in the form of a pyramid, from the most fundamental at the base, to the need of self-update at the top.

Over time, this approach has begun to be used to study the motivation for using several types of media, such as the Internet and its various applications. In time, the theory has continuously been developed with respect to different categories of factors and features of the media that attract consumers.

The first researches performed from the perspective of this theory, were centered on classifying the reasons wherefore people chose specific types of media (Richard *et al.*, 2010). In 1944, Herta Herzog, often credited as founder of the uses-and-gratifications approach although she never used this term, conducted a research among soap opera fans in order to understand why so many housewives were attracted to radio soap operas. In the work published after the research, "*Motivations and Gratifications of Daily Serial Listeners*," she provides

an in-depth examination of media gratifications. So she identified three types of gratification: emotional, wishful thinking, and learning. First, there was "merely a means of emotional release"; "a second and commonly recognized form of enjoyment concerns the opportunities for wishful thinking"; and the "third and commonly unsuspected form of gratification concerns the advice obtained from listening to daytime serials" (Schramm, 1955). In another study conducted in 1972 by Denis MCQuail, Jay Blumer and Joseph Brown suggested that the viewers' motivations can be grouped into 4 categories: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance (West & Turner, 2010). Recent studies from the UGT perspective have as their primary objective the reason being why media is used and the achieved gratification. Modern applications of uses and gratifications research include the mobile phone usage, internet usage, Social Network Sites.

Classification of gratification

Referring to what kind of gratification users can get from using social networks we can remember the statement made by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) according to which:*"they are as numerous as a number of recipients themselves, the same content can gratify different individuals*". Research from this theoretical perspective has revealed a series of types of gratification. Stafford (2004) suggested that there are three main types of gratification, namely: *content gratification, process gratification* and *social gratification*. *Content gratification* is defined as *"informational content for special consideration as a desired outcome of consume media access*" (Stadford, 2004). These types of gratification are important for any media user regardless of media type (Lin, 1999). *Content gratification* is concerned with the message carried by the medium. *Process gratification* refers to the convenience of and ease of use, the experience of media usage and it is associated with resources, search engine, experiencing a new technology and websites. *Social gratification* refers to the gratification internet users derived from chatting and interacting with friends and others. According to some authors, interpersonal communication and social networking is social gratification sought by the audience (Amstrong, and Hagel, 1996, Rubin, 1981). Another author, (MCClatchey, 2006, differentiates between hedonic and utilitarian motivation to using mobile phones. According to Stafford (1996) there are two categories of motivation: *process* and *content*. Process motivation refers to actual use and enjoyment of the medium itself. In content motivation, the individuals use the medium for its contents. Later, Gillenson and Stafford (2004) added a new category of motivation, *social motivation*. This includes friendship, chatting, continuing relationship.

Motivations and selection patterns have been studied across a variety of media, such as quiz programs, radio serials and newspapers (Bryant and Zillman, 2002). McQuail (1972) studied users' motivations for watching television and outlined four main needs that people use the media to satisfy. These were diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance needs.

Diversion needs involve a need to escape or a need for emotional release. Personal relationship needs are reasons to connect to others. Personal identity needs include the use of the media to help people form, adjust and understand their own identity. Finally, surveillance needs inspire the use of the media for information and for understanding the audience's environment (McQuail, 1972).

The purpose of the study and research questions

Based on the literature discussed above, we proposed as a general purpose of research the determination of the pattern of Facebook consumption among students and the main gratifications obtained as a result of its use. The objectives of the research carried out among the students were: (1) Evaluating internet usage and determining student usage pattern; (2) Determining the purpose of using the Facebook by students; (3) Determining gender differences in the use of Facebook; (4) Determining the main types of gratification gained from using Facebook.

Research methodology

The research method chosen was the sociological survey and the population targeted for this study is the students from the "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Romania. The sample was a multistage probabilistic one and contained 461 respondents from all faculties and specializations at bachelor and master level. The final sample contained only students who own Facebook accounts and non-users were excluded. The sampling frame was represented by the matriculation registers of the faculties where all enrolled students are registered. Students from all specialties were questioned; the stratification criterion was the year of study. Thus, by each specialization students were selected randomly by each year of study. The selected students received a questionnaire to which they answered on their own according to the operator's instruction.

Frequency analyses were employed to examine de patterns on Facebook consumption. Finally regression analyses were conducted to examine the impact of selected gratification types on Facebook consumption.

Findings and Discussions

Patterns of Facebook use among Romanian students

To understand why people are motivated to use Facebook, it is important first to understand the patterns of Facebook use. According to comScore Media Matrix, people aged 18 to 24 disproportionately use online communication methods (comScore, 2005). It is also this 18 to 24 demographic that constitutes 51 percent of SNS users (Hitwise, 2005).

Demographic characteristics

With regard to the characteristics of the sample used, as shown in the table below *(Table 1)*, the total sample comprised 461 respondents. The majority of them are female (65,1 %) compared to one third men (34,5 %). This is in line with the gender distribution of the students within the University of Alba Iulia where the specializations enrolling female students prevail: social work, philology, pedagogy, sociology, occupational therapy, history, theology-philology, foreign languages. With regard to the place of residence, almost two-thirds come from urban areas (62,7%) compared to the rural area where approximately a little more than a third of the sample students 3(7,2 %) come from. This characteristic of the sample is consistent with an important characteristic of the student population in Romania where the ratio of rural students is lower than that of those in the urban area (36% according to INSSE). The proportion of students on faculties is close to that of the students enrolled in them. In terms of ethnicity, we have a majority of ethnic Romanians (94,4 %) and a few percent of Hungarians (2,7 %) and Roma (1,8 %). These proportions are close to those in the population of Alba and Hunedoara County where most of the students from the Alba Iulia University are from.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic profile	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	161	34,9
Female	300	65,0
Total	461	100
Residence		
Urban	286	64,7
Rural	170	35,2
Total	456	100
Faculty		
Law and Social Sciences	168	36,4
Economic Sciences	202	43,8
History and Philology	55	11,9
Theology	36	7,8
Total	461	100

Demographic profile	Frequency	%
Ethnicity		
Romanian	418	94,4
Hungarian	12	2,7
Romma	8	1,8
German	4	0,9
Other	1	0,2
Total	443	100
Religion		
Ortodox	395	86,8
Catolic	9	2,0
Protestant	20	4,4
Greco-catolic	12	2,6
Neoprotestant	11	2,2
Total	455	100

An important aspect that helps us describe the profile of the Facebook user is the onset of net use. In many cases it coincides with creating a Facebook account. The answers received showed us the following situation:

Table 2. Onset of internet use

	N	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Minimum age	Maximum age
General	450	14,91	15	4,5	5	50
Male	157	14,50	-	4,84	5	50
Female	293	15,08	-	4,26	6	40
Difference	-	0,58	-	0,18	1	10

The onset of internet use occurs on average around the age of 14.91 years *(Table 2)*. The earliest happens at 5 years olds and at the latest at 50 years olds. Differences between men and women are insignificant. As we can see in the table below (table 3), most begin to surf the net until the age of adolescence, more than half of them between 14 and 16 years of age (52,2 %).

Table 3. Distribution of onset of internet use by age interval

Age range	%
Between 5-13 years	28,2
Between 14-16 years	52,2
Between 17-50 years	16,6
Total	100

Few of them start using the internet after 17 years old (16,6 %). We can appreciate that for the analyzed population, the onset of internet use, which coincides in most cases with the moment when they make an account on Facebook occurs predominantly during puberty and adolescence. The early onset of Internet use is associated in some studies with abuse and addiction (Chou, 1999, Griffith, 1991).

One goal pursued in the research was to determine the use of Facebook among students. The indicator used was the average number of hours spent on Facebook per week. The results (table 4) show an average of 19,8 hours a week spent on

Facebook. Standard deviation is quite high (14,27) which shows us a great difference in the use of this social network among students.

Table 4. Internet usage among Romanian students

	Hour / week
Mean	19,8
Median	15,0
Standard deviation	14,2

Further on, we wanted to see how Facebook usage differs according to gender. The responses received *(Table 5)* can be seen in the table below:

Table 5. The degree of use of Facebook by gender

Gender	Mean hour spent on Facebook	Number	SD	Maximum hours spent on Facebook	Minimum hours spent on Facebook
Male	22,47	157	17,19	80	1
Female	17,53	292	12,13	65	1
The difference	4,94	35	5,06	15	

We can see from the table above *(Table 5)* that the difference in Facebook usage between women and men is significant, men spend an average of 4,94 hours a week more than women on Facebook. The difference is statistically significant. According to the Levene test result, F (447) = 0.144, p = 0.654, as F is insignificant, the variants are equal and the homogeneity condition of the variables is satisfied. Test results t (447) = 3,536, p = 0,001, which means that there are significant differences between means, male subjects having on average higher scores on the number of hours spent on Facebook versus females.

In terms of net consumption in general we have obtained the following data regarding the sites most visited by the students:

Table 6. Most used sites

	%
Online socialization sites	38,5
Movies and music online	28,7
News and various information	15,0
Online shopping	6,5
Online sports	4,0
Online games	5,0
Online pornography	3,6

We can see above (table 6) that the students enter most frequently on social media sites (38,5 %), movies and music online (28,7 %) on those that broadcast news (15,0 %). A significant interest also shows online shopping sites (6,5 %), online sport sites (4,0 %), and pornography sites (3,6 %).

To explore the rewards offered by using the Facebook social network, a useful clue is the main purpose of surfing the net. It illustrates indirectly what are the motivations of surfing the net and how important the social network has in satisfying them.

Table 7. The main purpose of surfing the net (Facebook)

Main purpose for surfing the net	N	%
For pleasure, to find various interesting information	140	31,0
To watch movies and music online	117	25,9
To socialize with friends	103	22,8
To meet new people	31	6,9
To buy and sell on the net	27	6,0
To play online games	24	5,3
For chatting and looking for partners for intimate relationships	6	1,3
Other	4	0,9
Total	452	100

The main purpose for searching the internet is according to the data obtained *(Table 7)* the pleasure and the opportunity to get interesting information (31 %). It corresponds to emotional and affective needs from the Katz, Hass and Gurevitch (1973) classification of gratification. Watching posts on Facebook, students aim to gain information, knowledge and understanding and at the same time, to have emotional pleasurable or aesthetic experience. Watching movies and music running through Facebook posts is the second most important goal of Facebook navigation (25,9 %). Obtaining information, killing time and entertainment are crucial in content gratification. The third important purpose of using the Facebook network is social integrative needs, maintaining or strengthening contacts with friend and family (22,8 %). Chatting and interaction with friends and other is social gratification. A less important but significant purpose of using Facebook is that of meeting new people (6,9 %). The results obtained are consistent with Ellison and Lampe (2007) findings that the Facebook network is used predominantly to maintain old relationships rather than make new ones. A special case is the use of the network to find partners for intimate relationships (1,3 %). This occurrence was analyzed separately from the one in which the students wanted to know new people due to the fact that in the first case the purpose of use was wider, while in the second, the social network was used for one purpose only. Students also use Facebook to sell or buy online through posts on specialized groups or on their own wall (6,0 %). Playing online games is another important goal for students (5,3 %). Here users connect with their accounts to play different games in a network. According to the research data obtained, students use the Facebook network for a variety of purposes satisfying a multitude of needs, but we can appreciate that the main types of gratifications are those of content and socialization.

In order to determine what are the most important types of gratifications that students get by using the Facebook social network, we built a multiple linear regression model in which the dependent variable is the Facebook consumption expressed in the average number of hours spent weekly on Facebook and the independent variables are the content gratification, process gratification, social gratification, gender and age of students. Because the number of variables is

rather small and the analysis of the specialized literature does not give reason to consider that some independent variables contribute more to the better explanation of the dependent variable, we chose the simultaneous method (enter). Verifying that there is a relationship between the independent and dependent variables I noticed that they are linear and the correlation coefficients in the Correlation table, we found that they are low or medium and there is no problem of collinearity.

Table 8. Correlation between Facebook consumption, content gratification, access gratification and social gratification

	Unstandardized Coefficients		*Standardized Coefficients*	*t*	*Sig.*	*Correlations*		
Model	*B*	*Std. Error*	*Beta*			*Zero-order*	*Partial*	*Part*
Access gratification	.813	.430	.117	1.888	.060	.218	.096	.091
Social gratification	.546	.297	.122	1.839	.067	.241	.094	.089
Information gratification	.343	.311	.067	1.103	.271	.200	.056	.053
Gender	5344	1512	.172	3.535	.000	.177	.178	.170
Age	-.358	.144	-.122	-2.494	.013	-.130	-.127	-.120

To verify the influence of some explanatory models on Facebook usage by the students, based on the content gratification, social gratification and process gratification, we applied the method of simultaneous linear regression (enter). The averages, the correlations between the variables and the standard deviations are presented in *Table 8*. The results show that the gratification access and social gratification variables best explain the use of Facebook, their contribution being significant (P=0.060 and P= 0.067. Thus, gratification access and social gratification best explain the use of Facebook among students. The three predictors, access gratification, social gratification and content gratification explain 7.3% of dependent variable variation, Facebook usage (R Square =0,73). The introduction of gender and age variables has increased the explanatory power of the model, the variance of the dependent variable increases to 9.9% (R Square = 0.99). We can say that men use more social networking than women and this variable explains more than gratification access and social gratification the use of Facebook.

Conclusions

Facebook is an important component of the modern internet experience for Romanian students, a substantial degree of users log on daily if not more often. However we still know relatively little about what makes them so appealing and how and for what it is used. The study presented in this paper aims to determine the pattern of using the net among the students and what are the main gratifications obtained as a result of this use.

The results obtained show us that the onset of using the Facebook social networking network occurs in most of the students between the ages of 14-16, or even sooner than a third of them. On average they spend 20 hours on Facebook weekly but there are big differences in network usage. In some cases it reaches up to 80 hours per week. There is a significant difference between men and women in terms of Facebook use, male membership results in more time spent on Facebook. Romanian students use the internet and Facebook for a lot of purposes, among the most significant being for entertainment and to find interesting information, to watch movies and music online and to socialize with friends. An important finding is that the Facebook social network is used predominantly for maintaining old relationships rather than establishing new ones. Testing the explanatory model proposed by us, which contained three types of gratification, content, access and socialization to explain the use of the internet has proven that it is only responsible for about 10% of uses. This shows that there are many more variables that explain the use of Facebook and many more types of gratification. It remains for future studies to analyze several explanatory patterns and test other types of gratification for Facebook use, to better understand the use of Facebook by the Romanian students and what types of gratification they get from this use.

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