

# Examining the Antecedents of Social Media user Gratification among High School and Undergraduate Students

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This study aims to investigate the user gratification factors among the high school and under graduate students about the usage of social media. **Methods/Statistical Analysis:** A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. A total of 516 respondents filled the survey where 256 respondents were college students and 260 respondents were school going, students. Factor analysis approach was used to name the gratification factors and a t-test was performed to compare among the two students community about the usage of social media. **Findings:** Results of this study states that fashionable, cognitive needs and professional advancement had a significant difference whereas relaxing entertainment and social interaction has no significant difference among the high school and under graduate students. The result inferred from this study shows the positive impact of the usage of social media among the students irrespective of their age. This will help the students to develop their skills, networking, to groom their personality, and also to improving their knowledge on various aspects required for their studies and future development. **Application/Improvements:** This paper studies the user gratification theory on the usage of social media. Future research can be about the impact of the social media tools using smartphone among the students.

**Keywords:** College Students, Social Media, School Students, User Gratification

## 1. Introduction

Social media has recently become most popular for sharing of thoughts and communication with others and act as the center of information exchange. It provides users with a variety of instant communication tools such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, internet forum, picture and music sharing and many more<sup>1</sup>. More than a billion individuals across the world connect and network together to create, collaborate, and share their knowledge and wisdom<sup>2</sup>. According to a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), 66% of the 180 million Internet users in urban India regularly access social media platforms. Users do not embrace a single form of social media but, tend to employ a range of tools for communication. This trend shows that one type of social media does not replace another but, rather, becomes integrated into a bundle of media use. When

compared to working and not- working individuals, 33% college students form the largest demographic of active social media users in India<sup>3</sup>. Recent studies indicate that there is a steady increase in the usage of Online Social Networking Sites by college students over the past decade. It has become an essential tool and practice in day to day life of the students because it has revolutionized the way students think and interact. Social media acts as a platform for activities such as networking with friends and family members, to find lost contacts across the globe<sup>2,4</sup>. Adoption and use of digital technologies follow social trends. To examine the extent to which different types of social media fulfill different user needs, the present study compares the gratifications obtained from social networking sites among undergraduate students.

Studies have provided insight on different forms of user gratification on the use of computer related technologies. Comparative works are not done with age

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groups and thus this study contributes to identifying the user gratification commonalities and differences among high school and undergraduate students. In addition, allow us to extrapolate reasons that explain why students employ social media both in their personal and professional scenarios. Social media gratifications are involved with deeper interactions with students' contacts, sharing and discussing personal problems, learning about social events and sharing information for their professional growth<sup>5</sup>. Although previous studies in India have looked at motivations of using social networking sites, they have mostly measured the time spent on these sites and frequency of use. The objective of the study is to understand what motivates students to join social networking sites moving beyond the general usage of social media. Another goal of the study is to compare the gratification received from the high school and undergraduate students. To explain questions of "how" and "why" students use social media and gratification they receive from the ongoing use, researchers have used to the uses and gratification (U&G) approach.

User and gratification is a theoretical framework that researchers use to explicate individual users' need fulfilment while engaging with social media<sup>6</sup>. U&G theory was earlier used in the traditional media settings such as newspaper and television<sup>7,8</sup>. Later with the advancements in technology researchers applied the same theory on new media<sup>9,10</sup>. A key characterizing feature of new media is interactivity, which enables the users to provide content in response to a source or communication partner<sup>11</sup>. Later, U&G perspective was employed by Lampe and his colleagues<sup>12</sup> to explain the motivation for use of content-generation online community. In the recent years, scholars have studied the application of U&G approach to Internet use including use of various online sites and services such as MySpace and Facebook in order to identify a wide range of motivations that activates the use<sup>13</sup>. According to theorists, human need gratification can be categorized into five groups<sup>14</sup>.

- Cognitive needs - information sharing, acquiring knowledge from the surrounding, exploring and curiosity to know.
- Affective needs - Pleasure, emotional experiences
- Personal identity - develops social status, improve self- confidence, need for self-respect
- Integration and social Interaction - build family and friends, connect with the outside world.
- Escapism - the need to escape from unpleasant activities to pleasant.

In a similar study<sup>13</sup> used factor analysis to extract nine distinct scales of motives for using Facebook: habitual pass time, cool and new trend, escapism, expressive information sharing, relaxing entertainment, companionship, professional advancement, social interaction and meeting new people. In the light of earlier studies conducted in the area of social media, we have analyzed the antecedents contributing to user gratification with a comparison among high school students and undergraduate students in India.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Sample

The sample for this study is categorized into school students and college students from Chennai, India. The analysis in this paper utilizes survey-based data collected from over 560 students in total. Considering the literacy of the respondents, the self-administered survey questionnaire was in the English language. For a total of 260 school students, 133(51.2%) were male respondents and the remaining 127(48.8%) were female respondents between the age group of 15 to 18. The next category being under graduate students with a total of 256 respondents, 144 (56.3%) were male respondents and 112 (43.8%) were female respondents between the age group of 18 to 21. Thus 260 (50.4%) respondents were higher secondary students and 256 (49.6%) respondents were under graduates. With regards to the population of the school and under graduate students, the sample is almost equal in size. Out of 635 surveys distributed 560 (88%) complete and usable surveys were returned. Respondents from both school and college were residing in the urban area and had access to the social media via their personal smartphones or via the desktops provided by their institutions. These respondents commuted daily to school from their home as they were residing in various parts of Chennai.

### 2.2 Measures

To measure the variables, a standard questionnaire was used in the literature. Respondents were requested to rate the items on a five-point Likert scale which ranged from to strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The web 3.0 scale consisting of 20 items were adapted from<sup>13</sup>. For all measurement scales, standardized Cronbach's alpha was examined and Principal-components factor analysis (Varimax rotation) was conducted. To compare

the differences in user gratification among school and undergraduate students, at-test was used.

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1 Social Media usage Behaviours

The study included the social media usage behaviours of high school students and undergraduate students by observing the browsing hours, frequency of use of social media, and overall time spent on social media by the students in a week. Table 1 brings in the details regarding the different social networking sites that students use for their personal and professional growth.

**Table 1.** Usage Behaviour of students

How long have you been using social media?	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 6 months	132	25.6
6 months - 1 year	299	57.9
1-2 years	48	9.3
2-4 years	22	4.3
More than 4 years	15	2.9
How often do you use social media?	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	88	17.1
2-3 times a week	139	26.9
2-3 times a month	114	22.1
Once in a month	175	33.9
On average, how many hours do you spend in a week to use social media?	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour a week	345	66.9
2-4 hours a week	99	19.2
5-6 hours a week	21	4.1
7-9 hours a week	27	5.2
10-20 hours a week	14	2.7
Over 20 hours a week	10	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2.** Rotated Factor Matrix

Factors	Items	Factor Loadings	Reliability
Factor 1	To look fashionable To look stylish Because everybody else is doing it.	0.809 0.760 0.595	0.675
Factor 2	To provide information To share information that may be of use or interest to others. To tell others a little bit about myself. To present information about a special interest of mine.	0.725 0.703 0.648 0.610	0.687
Factor 3	To get away from pressures and responsibilities Because it is fun Because it relaxes me Because it is entertaining To get away from what I am doing	0.718 0.703 0.654 0.536 0.473	0.635
Factor 4	To communicate with distanced friends. To provide personal information about myself. To keep in touch with friends and family	0.827 0.759 0.617	0.649
Factor 5	To help me network with professional contacts. To post my resume and/or other work online. It is helpful for my professional future	0.841 0.752 0.491	0.645

#### 3.2 Variables contributing to gratification

Twenty Likert scale items were used in the questionnaire to capture the dimensions of social media gratifications among the high school and undergraduate students. Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on these items to ascertain their underlying factors. As a result of the analysis two items, “To not look old-fashioned” and “To feel involved with what’s going on with other people” were discarded because they did not stand the reliability test and inappropriately loaded. All items were standardized to ensure they were on equal footing. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis. As we can see, there are five factors representing the underlying dimensions of user gratification among students.

##### 3.2.1 Factor labelling and Interpretation

The factors obtained for social media gratification are labelled by the authors under the following headings:

a) *Fashionable* - Fashion was the first factor identified with three items measuring social media as trendy. Students think that by using social media they are also being a part of the social trend. When their peers have used social media they also want to try it and not feel out of the scene. This helps students to be relevant in their social groups and thus they achieve a sense of togetherness.

b) *Cognitive needs* - Students in this generation use social media to share and acquire information. Cognitive needs are identified with four items in the study. Through social media students find it easy to search for information that they require and are able to present their interest through wall posts, status updates, tweets etc.

c) *Relaxing entertainment* - This factor comprises

of<sup>15</sup> original study factors - “escape”, “relaxation” and “entertainment”. Students use social media to get rid of their boredom or when they feel they should do something which diverts their mind apart from academics. Thus, social media acts as an entertaining factor.

d) *Social interaction* - Chatting, commenting, and messaging are features of social media in which students are mostly interested in. Students can join their interest groups or make their own with the social networking sites which help them develop the social interaction and expressive information sharing. They find it easier to interact with their distant friends, real time supports exchanges, discuss problems, share pictures and have a two-way communication with anyone across the world. In this study, three items contributed to this factor.

e) *Professional advancement*- This factor emphasises on the importance of students on their career development and job opportunities when they use social media. Students feel that their friends who are connected through social media might help them out in professional development. They consider social media as a networking tool to keep in touch that might be helpful to them in the future. Than a two-way communication, social media helps students to target a particular individual for a more focused attention<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.4 Differences among High School and Undergraduate Students

Table 3 shows as independent sample t-test; mean level difference were found between undergraduate students and school students for the factors influencing social media user gratification. There was no significant difference on two factors i.e., relaxing entertainment and social interaction. When compared between undergraduate and high school students there was a significant difference between the factors such as fashionable, cognitive needs and professional advancement.

## 4. Conclusion

In order for the researchers and educators to assess the benefit of social media use by students it is essential to understand how students perceive the social media, what they use it for, and what gratifications they receive from them. Some interesting results arose from this study although there are no major surprises in the usage of social media by the school and college students. Relaxing entertainment and Social interaction have no significant different between the two student groups as per this study. The purpose of keeping in touch with friends and family, being entertained, having fun and relaxing is viewed in the same way by both the college and school students because they are still under the category of the students. Due to the availability of many gadgets such as smart phones, notepads, tablets, laptops etc. in affordable prices in the markets contribute to this increased use of technology. Also, the mobile network providers offer a bundle of Talk, Text, and internet package for a reasonable price under various plans and attractive offers. This helps the students to have easy access to social media.

The factors such as Fashionable, Cognitive needs, and professional advancement has shown a significant difference between the school students and college students in this category. There is a drastic difference between the usage of social media among the college and school students. 50% of the school students are new to the internet and to the usage of social media. Whereas 29.7% of the college students have been using social media for around two to four years and 33% have been using social media for more than four years. College students have a feeling of left alone among their friends when they are not using the trending social web sites or apps such as Whatsapp, facebook, google plus, twitter, youtube. This is because they may not be updated with the latest news, topics of interest among their friends and may be looked down by their friends as a boring and out-dated person.

**Table 3.** Mean (SD) and independent sample t-test

Factors	Under graduate students	School students	Mean difference	t	Significance
Fashionable*	2.72(.92)	3.1(.80)	-.37	-4.949	.000
Cognitive Needs*	3.75(.68)	3.09(.82)	.66	9.989	.000
Relaxing Entertainment	3.43(.72)	3.52(.67)	-.09	-1.561	.119
Professional Advancement*	3.66(.79)	3.04(.95)	.62	8.007	.000
Social Interaction	4.10(.69)	4.10(.73)	-.004	-.077	.939

Transfer of study materials, ideas for assignments via social media is very common and frequent among the college students rather than school students because the school students have a standard book to be followed than the college students. Since the college students are about to graduate in a couple of years it becomes mandatory for them to prepare a proper resume and build a professional network to begin their job hunt. Video resume being popular now a day, along with the creative use of various applications college students try to prepare an eye catchy resume to enter their dream jobs. Finally, this study provides an in-road for future studies that could draw the social media network usage and preferences among different groups of people. Social media truly puts technology in the hands of the students and focuses on using technology to help students make their education their own. It is also about encouraging students to be lifelong learners and engaging parents, teachers, and students into a larger learning community.

The present study has a number of limitations that provide opportunities for future research. Future researchers can also include the effects of age, gender, education qualification, exposure to social media. The gratifications factors could be measured expanding the number of items. This kind of comparative studies between different age groups of students provides a comprehensive idea of the gratification leading students to adopt social media. Also, highlights of the present study contribute to the theoretical implications of social media practice.

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