

# Motivations for Social Media Use By Life Stage and Gender

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## ABSTRACT

The paper reviewing the main motivations that drives people in different life stage and gender to use social media. Through reviewing of previous literature, this paper finds that access to information is the main motivation for using social media for almost all age and gender groups. Similarly, self-expression is a common motivation, particularly for women and young college students, who are much more likely to post news and status on social media than other categories. Therefore, young people and women of all ages and genders are the most widespread and consistent users of social networks. The homosexual community as a special group. In today's society, they are more interested in expressing themselves on social networks to gain social acceptance and to satisfy their need for self-identification and finding people who are similar to them. The limitation that remains at this stage is that the population studied is not broad enough and there are many influencing factors such as culture or job difference that have not been taken into account.

**Keywords:** social media; motivation; gender; life stage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social networks can be one of the many media tools through which people articulate their culture. They can be ways people can connect and share with others that are closed to and have other functions as well [1].

It's hard not to notice that with the rapid spread of social media, it seems to be an indispensable part of normal life. Karl Heinrich Marx used to say that man is a social animal in the truest sense of the word, not only a conformist animal, but one that can only be independent in society which shows that people have to social and build relationship with other people in the society if they want to live in a formal life. In today's life, especially because of the global epidemic, social media is playing an increasingly important role in connecting people with the outside world. However, overuse of social media has side effect such as social isolation.

The motivation of using social media is quite different and in this paper are mainly divided by two core determinants which are the life stages and gender. Life stages are the ages and stages people go through as they learn and grow, from infancy to adulthood. Because of people's main task in the society, they may use social media because of varied reasons such as maintain

relationships or communicating with colleagues. Gender is defined back to the traits of male, female, young girls and boys which might be constructed socially. As a type of social construct, gender's definition is quite various from one society to another and might alternate over time. Women may not post content about themselves on social networks if they live in societies that have discriminatory attitudes towards women. In general, the paper listed five categories for the use of social media which are gratification, socializing, entertainment, information seeking and self-presentation [2]. Sense of belonging to the whole society is defined as the motivation that forms all motives.

This paper reviewing research papers which focus on different groups of people and comparing motivations for use by different research subjects.

In the body paragraph, this paper first explores the social media usage among different groups, then discusses a few of these main motivations for social media use as identified in this article, followed by an exploration of the motivations of people at different life stages, and finally a discussion of the motivations of people of different genders.

## 2. SOCIAL MEDIA DEPENDENCE

Dependence is a psychological state that may lead to certain behavior, which sometimes can be described by the term addiction. As a reason, these two words are interchangeable [3]. However, dependence is actually a harmless behavior but addiction usually have negative meanings which prefers to over use of social media and make people feel anxious and self-reproachful.

The evidence shows that compulsive users feel guilty for not completing their tasks due to excessive social media usage. Therefore, the paper may define dependence in using social media as a kind of soft addiction. The paper assumes that social media dependence to begin with emerges as an innocent dependence and its bad consequences are much more likely to be universal via way of means of the ones involved. Wright delivered the nomenclature of gentle dependence to consult the ones kinds of hassle behaviors that fulfill superficial dreams or drives whilst ignoring some deeper needs [4]. It can be commonly accepted since the society think it is a normal activity and the individual who have soft addiction usually ignore the negative impact it can have [5].

### 2.1. Social media usage by age

Age is strongly correlated with usage of social media. In America, it is very obvious that 18- to 29-year-olds have always been the most likely social media users. Youth whose ages are between 18 to 29 are the maximum probable to apply social media which completely 90% do. The post-00s in the US are no more limited to their neighbors and classmates, 57% of 13- to 17-year-olds have met friends online and 29% have more than 5 online friends [6]. Meanwhile, in 2005 only 8% of people ages 30-49 use social media. The data rise to 77% now with a 69-point bump. Nevertheless, during this upward period, the figures began to stabilize in 2010 and even declined a little after 2014 [7]. Compare to the usage of 11% in 2010, elderly users who above 65 years old tripled. In 2015, 35% of 65 and older age elderly are using social media. This is a significant increase compared to 2005 when the usage rate was only 2% [7].

### 2.2. Social media usage by gender

There are also gender differences in social media use. In 2005, only 6% of women and 8% of men use social media [7]. The proportion in men is bigger than that of women. In 2009, women began to use social media at a higher rate than men. In general, women have greater possibility to use it than men. The gap between the usage of men and women decreased year by year and since 2014 the gap is modest. In 2015, among all American adults, 62% of all men use social media while 68% of all women [7]. In conclusion, women depend on social media more than men.

## 3. MOTIVATION OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

When people take actions, they must have motivations to drive them to do so. Using social media is becoming a more and more important method to conduct social activities. So those who use social media have their own motivations. It's hard to know their detailed and clear individual motivations, so this paper is looking at the general motivations of the group. Social media enable people to maintaining relationship, hearing from recent news and obtaining large network with less effort [8]. In western countries, the most popular social media are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google, Whatsapp, Snapchat and Youtube [9]. The motivation of using social media is due to individuals. However, they can be all classified into two types which are building and sustaining the online and offline relationship [10]. For example, generally, people who have built relationship in the offline social life will add each-others' social media accounts at the same time to enable them maintain relationships when they can't communicate face to face. Some relationships are built only on the social media such as people meet new friends online by browsing and interacting with their posts. In studies on individual motivations, uses and gratifications (U & G) are commonly the base [11]. There are four main categories of motivation in social media based on the U & G approach [12]. They are: firstly, entertainment, such as using for satisfying personal enjoyment or entertainment; secondly, socializing that is defined as developing and also maintaining relationships with others online; thirdly, information seeking, which aims to satisfying information needs through social media applications; and fourthly, status seeking and self-presentation, i.e. using social media to present oneself and receive reputation [13]. In this paper, sense of belonging is defined as the motivation forms all motives.

### 3.1. Sense of belonging

Belonging is an important need for building relationships and preserving them [14] and the main motivation that may drives individual to use it is because they want to feel the sense of belonging with the surroundings or the whole world by the interaction on the social media. Knowing these social media provide a way for people to be better accepted by their peers and to establish relationships with them [15]. People gain information, socializing, present or entertain themselves to make them feel they are belonging to the whole society.

### 3.2. Gratification

Users also use social media to gain gratification by killing time, social information and sociability [16]. Although a range of gratifications are the main target of analysis that continuance intentions and studies actual

usage of social media users, self-improvement, relationship building, informational effectiveness, and delight are among the foremost usual gratifications relate to the use of social media [17]. They refer to be the value users derive from having the ability to efficiently and simply contact with people [18]. This kind of relation development has been seen as a core determinant in driving user engagement [19] and also a key factor that influence users' satisfaction to this social media [20].

### **3.3. Self-presentation**

Social media can be seen as an excellent platform that is provided for people to showcase themselves to others by expressing their alternate selves, posting photos and improving their profiles. Based on McKenna, Green, and Gleason [21], some individuals, especially those who are trouble with high levels of social anxiety, feel capable of expressing hidden aspects of the self which are traits that are now part of the self but are not typically presented later in daily life on the social media. Ideal selves can also be expressed online [22]. In addition, research has also shown that users who seek for popularity are more likely to disclose their information on Facebook [23]. They may think it is a good method to establish more relationships.

## **4. MOTIVATION IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE**

### **4.1 Middle school students**

As students are more and more willing to social online and learn to use internet technology at an early age, they are becoming a user group that cannot be ignored. From the research conducted by Florence et al. [24], the top three social media they like to use are Instagram (72.85%), Snapchat (64.92%) and YouTube (64.92%). They also record what activities they usually do on the social media. 83.31% of them post pictures, 66.95% of them read others' post, 56.16% delete video and comment on others' post. In addition, the survey demonstrates that students' favorite activities that are divided into three categories: the information category, the communication category and the entertainment category. Absolutely, the communication category (e.g.: interacting/ communicating with others, seeing what people post, sharing/ receiving information) takes most of the proportion.

Thus, it is clear that secondary school students are motivated to use social media to satisfy their need for self-expression and to get information from others. They use it more as a communication tool.

### **4.2. University students**

There is a study found that university students' motivation levels for using online social media were, in

descending order, gaining information, entertainment, life and leisure, socializing and the need to work [25]. Their main motivations are obtaining all kinds of information and information and eager for entertainment and leisure. The result is the same in another research on the needs university students want to satisfied when using Weibo [26].

University students often use it for both seek information and academic [27]. What's else is that the older university students get, the more they feel that online social media can meet their work needs. This suggests that university students do want to use online social media as a platform to help them find or do their jobs, rather than purely for entertainment and recreation [28].

### **4.3. Elderly people**

China is that the country with the most important old population within the world, it's conjointly the country with the quickest growing aging population. By the tip of 2018, China' population with 167 million people aged over 65 which is 11.9% of the total and aged over sixty is about 249 million which accounting for 17.9% of the whole population. China has entered a totally aging society. In the meantime, living standard of elderly people is growing and they need to find the gratification in mental. That's the reason why there are more and more elderly people begin to use social media. These elderly people who update themselves spontaneously are thought to have positive attitude to life and already gratified with current living standard.

Their motivations can be mainly divided into three categories: sense of loneliness, subjective well-being and kill time [29].

Sense of loneliness refers to an individual's subjective feeling of isolation or lack of interpersonal contact which makes them feel upset. As adults and middle age adults have the care needs of children in their own families, they spend less time with their parents, so the elderly can feel lonely. For example, WeChat in China is becoming an important communication tool among elderly people because of simple and clear operation page.

Subjective well-being is a field of study in positive psychology and means a person's overall assessment of the quality of his or her life as one. Presenting themselves on social media and receive positive feedback from outside will make elderly people feel they are participating with the society which gives them the sense of belonging to the society. Internet use among the elderly is focused on communication and information acquisition. The data from Tencent National survey and big data research center shows that 75.8% of elderly users read news and information online, while 45.9% of them follow and browse WeChat articles. They enrich the life

of the elderly, and thus achieving the purpose of killing time.

## **5. MOTIVATION IN DIFFERENT GENDER**

### **5.1. Female and Male**

The research conducted by Shi [30]. also shows that female students use online social media more than male students and have higher dependence on social media. Compared to their male peers, female students are more emotionally focused and have a narrower range of lives and activities, making online social media an important tool for socializing, entertaining and learning about the world.

Among researches about the use of university students, there were both good and bad results on the influence of gender on personal preference in seeking information online [31]. In fact, gender variations in the use of social networks seem to be more obvious. Women are much more likely to use it in general and to seek information in particular [32]. They're also likely to comment on others' posts and update status frequently [33]. Although female students are more active on social networks, the study found that female students are less active on internet forums, wikis, and blogs when comparing to male peer [34]. Females are also circumspect about the information quality on online platforms such as Baidu [35].

By the report from Optimum Media Direction, when using social media, men are more likely to be driven by functional motivations (such as health and wellness), while women are more likely to seek enjoyment and entertainment. In addition, men trust opinion leaders (Key Opinion Leaders) more than women and also have more social media accounts and use them more frequently.

### **5.2. Homosexual**

The homosexual community has always been a special group because of the mixed attitudes of society towards it, which can lead to different motivations when using social media for social purposes. Their motivation can be classified as five aspects: physiological needs, social needs, self-realization, safety needs and self-esteem needs [36].

Physiological needs are mainly about their sexual needs and a large part of them need temporary sexual relations. Social media provides them a platform to choose their temporary partner.

To safety needs, homosexuality is still not a widely accepted group of people and there are still many people in society who have a distasteful attitude towards homosexuals. Therefore, some people want to be able to

hide who they are offline, but be able to admit their identity online.

On social media, they can find groups of people like themselves and meet their desired social needs within this group. At the same time, as this group grows on social media, they feel the social acceptance of the gay identity group and gain the satisfaction of their self-esteem needs.

In Maslow's theory of needs, self-realization is the highest level of need. They are more likely to be the motivation of the organizers of the gay community on social media, and satisfied this need through the building of communities and organizations on the social media.

## **6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

In the past research, researchers focus on different life stages and gender in detailed. Nevertheless, when people are researching on life stages, they mainly focus on teens and the youth but pay less attention to the age stages above them. Adult and middle age adult actually have a large proportion in the users of some social media. In these two life stages, almost all the people are working. Different jobs and social responsibilities may be factors that influence their motivations, as a reason, their motivation will be more complex. Additionally, gender itself has become difficult to define in today's society because it's not clear that whether should distinguish physiological and psychological gender or not.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This paper looks at the motivations for using social media across age groups and genders and focuses on four main categories of motivation and corresponds to them. It is difficult for people to live apart from society, so they have to relate to it, and a sense of belonging is an important need, which is considered in this paper as the reason behind these four motivations for using social media. In a conclusion, it is clear from the main body that access to information is the main motivation for using social media for almost every age group and gender. Similarly, self-expression is a common motivation, especially for women and young students, who are much more likely to post messages and statuses on social media than other categories. Young people and women are therefore the most widespread and persistent users of social media across age groups and genders. For the elderly, growing up with children and limited mobility leads to a lonely life. They want to use it as a platform to connect with their children and also the outside world. Over time, social media will become more and more widespread among older people. For men and some of those entering society, they are using social media more as a functional tool to help them with the elderly people's lives, work and achievements. Younger people are more interested in the entertainment aspect of satisfaction. The

homosexual community, as a special group in society, is more interested in expressing themselves on social media to receive social acceptance and to satisfy their own need for self-identification and to find people who are similar to them.

The main limitation nowadays is that the middle-aged age group has not been researched in detailed, and they are actually one of the main groups using social media. However, research on them is likely to be more complex, as this age will have more variables, such as job, marital status, social status, etc.

This paper is hoped to help people who have the aim to research more on the motivation of using social media. It is one of the fastest growing areas in recent years and there is still much research need to be done on the motivations for social media use in more detailed. Apart from the groups reviewed in this article, there are many other groups that researchers could start to study, including many factors that influence it, such as geographical differences and household income differences, which deserve to be studied in more depth and detail. In addition, the shift of many work and teaching tasks online due to the epidemic has increased the social media usage, and the data on the time and frequency of use by different groups needs to be updated.

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