



Motives and Enjoyment of Watching Dash Cam Videos on Social Media: A Phenomenological Study on Generation Z in Semarang

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Abstract.

The consumption of user-generated dash cam footage has surged on social media, yet the specific psychological drivers behind this niche viewership remain underexplored. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, this study investigates the underlying motives and enjoyment derived from watching dash cam videos. Adopting a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach, the research focuses on the lived experiences of Generation Z. As digital natives for whom media integration is seamless, nine participants were selected for in-depth interviews. The thematic analysis reveals eight distinct motives driving viewership: 1) Passing time, 2) Companionship, 3) Escape, 4) Enjoyment, 5) Social Interaction, 6) Relaxation, 7) Information acquisition, and 8) Excitement. These findings suggest a complex viewing behavior where audiences seek both utilitarian values, such as road safety awareness, and emotional gratification. Consequently, the results validate the application of Uses and Gratifications Theory to this genre, demonstrating that dash cam viewers are active participants satisfying specific psychological needs rather than passive consumers of viral content.

Keywords: Dash Cam Videos, Social Media, Generation Z, Phenomenology, Uses and Gratification

1 INTRODUCTION

The increasingly advanced digital era has made the use of social media an integral part of human life. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram are not only used to share personal moments but have also become spaces for various kinds of video recordings, including dash cam videos. Dashboard camera videos, or dash cam videos, are recordings made using a memory card installed in a surveillance camera placed inside a motor vehicle. This device is a type of onboard camera that continuously records through the vehicle's windshield and sometimes the rear window or other windows. Dash cams can be considered as an extension of static surveillance cameras or Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), which are commonly installed in various types of buildings, such as homes or office buildings. CCTV typically uses magnetic tapes or Hard Disk Drives (HDD) to store recordings.

Developments in digital technology have changed the way humans record, store, and access audio and visual data. New technologies continue to emerge, and recording media continue to evolve to meet modern demands. Recording media encompass various types of media used to record and store audio or visual data. In the digital era, broadcast media such as online streaming, on-demand services, and social media platforms have become popular recording media for delivering audio and visual content. [1]

Dash cam video recordings, which were originally used as evidence in traffic accidents, have now become increasingly popular as entertainment content that attracts public attention. The phenomenon of dash cam videos on social media is interesting to study for several reasons. First, dash cam videos often feature unexpected and unique events, which can attract large audiences. Second, dash cam videos can serve as reflections of human behavior on the road, as well as broader social issues. Third, despite their growing popularity, there has been little research specifically examining the experience of watching dash cam videos across various social media platforms.

Generation Z, often referred to as digital natives, have grown up in a highly digital and interconnected world, where consuming and sharing online content has become an inseparable part of their daily lives. Social media platforms designed for video sharing, such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, have become mainstream choices for many audiences seeking video-based information. YouTube viewership has grown rapidly in Indonesia, with the average Indonesian spending 31 hours and 28 minutes per month on the platform in 2024 [2], making YouTube the second most frequently accessed video-sharing platform in Indonesia.

In addition to YouTube, TikTok users in Indonesia spend an average of 38 hours and 26 minutes per month on the platform, while Instagram users spend an average of 16 hours and 10 minutes. Preferences for watching video content on social media may be driven by users' needs for information [3]. Moreover, what a social media account offers also plays an important role in motivating users to access certain content [4].

Watching videos provides entertainment for audiences. Many videos on the internet are created with the aim of entertaining viewers—for instance, mukbang content, where viewers often seek entertainment and derive various forms of satisfaction from the videos [5]. According to Choe [6], one of the main pleasures for viewers is the enjoyment of eating sounds produced by *mukbangers*, such as slurping and chewing.

This kind of pleasure can also be experienced by people who watch videos from surveillance cameras installed in motor vehicles, commonly known as dash cams. Dashboard cameras or dash cams are used to monitor and record events that occur during driving. Often, the footage from these cameras can serve as evidence when incidents occur, such as traffic accidents or disputes on the road.

Dash cam footage can serve as an important source of digital evidence in vehicle-related contexts, especially during traffic accident investigations. Vehicle sensor videos have become increasingly important since the widespread use of closed-circuit surveillance cameras [7]. Surveillance cameras are considered an effective strategy for enhancing crime detection, as they enable temporal and spatial analysis [7].

Similarly, dash cam can help improve road safety by recording dangerous driving behavior [8]. Recently, more people have shown interest in recording their vehicle movements using onboard surveillance cameras. Video recordings obtained from

these cameras are often referred to as dash cam videos. The trend of sharing dash cam videos has attracted significant public interest, both for accident investigation purposes and entertainment [7]. A study conducted in South Korea found that the main motivations for sharing dash cam videos were reciprocal altruism or social justice and financial rewards [8]. Another study noted that dash cam content opens broader discussions about traffic safety, technological change, and how surveillance has become increasingly normalized in South Korea. Such content shapes defensive mindsets and more vigilant driving behavior. By integrating surveillance technology into safety systems, dash cam content helps legitimize surveillance as a tool of self-protection and a source of truth, thus being viewed as a necessary defense against future threats [9].

Audiences, as consumers of information from the media, are assumed to be active audiences who consciously seek information from specific media for specific purposes, which ultimately provide them with the highest level of gratification. One form of information they may seek is video content. Social media offers many viewing options for users, and dash cam videos are one of the viewing choices available. From the background above, the research problem can be formulated: what motivates viewers to watch, and what forms of enjoyment are experienced by audiences who watch dash cam videos on social media?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

As a conceptual foundation, this study uses the Uses and Gratification theory as its basic theoretical framework. In the Uses and Gratification theory, audiences who consume information from media are assumed to be active audiences who consciously seek information from specific media for specific purposes, ultimately obtaining the highest level of gratification for themselves [10]. This theory also states that the gratification obtained by audiences from consuming media may change over time, even if the type of media and content consumed remains the same.

However, scholars further developed these assumptions and added several other important points: 1). Media influence on behavior occurs through psychological factors, 2). Media use is goal-oriented, 3). Media are selected based on the belief that they can fulfill users' needs and desires, 4). Media always compete with other forms of communication, 5). Because users have control over the media, the media have a significant influence on them [11].

The Uses and Gratification theory also provides a basis for examining what motivates users to adopt social media and the gratifications they expect to obtain from its use. As with traditional media, individuals' reasons for adopting social media may vary depending on the media they choose and its characteristics [12].

The Uses and Gratification theory was first introduced by Elihu Katz in 1973. In this theory, he proposed five basic assumptions: 1). Audiences use media for specific purposes, 2). Audiences seek to fulfill their needs through media, 3). Media compete for audiences' attention and time, 4). Media have different effects on each audience member, and 5). Audiences can explain in detail their motivations and activities in using media [13].

In 1981, Alan Rubin proposed eight typologies of media users—in this case, television viewers—to complement this theory. He argued that audiences choose to watch television for: 1). passing time, 2). companionship, 3). escape, 4). enjoyment, 5). social interaction, 6). relaxation, 7). information, and 8). excitement [14].

2.2 Generation Z and Social Media

Generation Z includes individuals born between 1995 and 2012 [15]. As a generation that has truly grown up in the digital era, they have been familiar with the internet, social media, and mobile technology from an early age [16]. The use of media as a source of information cannot be separated from users' preferences and needs; for Generation Z, social media is the medium most closely integrated into their daily lives. For them, social media provides a space for interaction that transcends physical boundaries. Generation Z uses these platforms to communicate with friends, family, and communities that share similar interests [17].

This form of interaction strengthens social bonds and fosters a sense of belonging, which is crucial in their social development process. Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, X, and LinkedIn are the social media platforms accessed by Generation Z, with Instagram being the most frequently used, followed by Facebook and TikTok [18].

Moreover, social media also functions as a main stage for shaping public opinion and disseminating information. As a generation that actively uses social media, Generation Z plays a strategic role in creating narratives and influencing emerging trends in society. The ways they choose to share or respond to various issues reflect their values and perspectives on the world.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative exploratory method, which is employed to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems [19]. The qualitative exploratory method also explains that this research seeks to uncover information and knowledge in an area that has previously been under-researched. This approach aims to identify basic knowledge and ideas within a new field. In its process, this qualitative exploratory research uses data collection instruments in the form of in-depth interviews with informants.

This study also applies a phenomenological approach, which is used to understand how a person experiences and gives meaning to an experience [20]. Thus, this study is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research uses a natural setting with the aim of interpreting phenomena that occur, combined with specific methods. Presenting the social world and various perspectives within it—covering concepts, behaviors, perceptions, and personal issues—is an effort inherent to qualitative research [21].

In phenomenological research, there are seven stages of the data analysis process [22], which are: 1). Listing and Preliminary Grouping, 2). Reduction and Elimination, 3). Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents (Thematic portrayal),

4). Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes through Validation, 5). Individual Textural Description, 6). Individual Structural Description, 7). Textural-Structural Description.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section will describe the research findings and discussions conducted using Moustakas' phenomenological analysis structure (textural, structural, and composite description) [22]. Each result will be presented in the form of a table consisting of thematic clusters, textural descriptions, structural descriptions and a paragraph of synthesis of meaning.

4.1 Subject Descriptions

The subjects in this study comprised nine individuals belonging to Generation Z, aged between 18 and 21 years. The group consisted of five females and four males. The first informant, ADR, an 18-year-old female, is an undergraduate student at a private university in Semarang. She has been exposed to dash cam video content for approximately nine years, beginning in 2015. The second informant, ADN, a 21-year-old male, is a final-year undergraduate student who also works as a freelance graphic designer. He has been exposed to dash cam video content since 2014, amounting to roughly ten years.

The third informant, ANP, a 20-year-old female, is an undergraduate student at a public university in Semarang. She has been exposed to dash cam content since 2018. The fourth informant, AYP, an 18-year-old male, is a first-year undergraduate student in Semarang. His exposure to dash cam content began during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The fifth informant, NPP, a 21-year-old female, is an entrepreneur managing an online business in the fashion and accessories sector. She has been exposed to dash cam video content since 2017.

The sixth informant, SDP, a 19-year-old female, is both an undergraduate student and a fashion model. Her exposure to dash cam video content began in 2022, totaling approximately two years. The seventh informant, CG, an 18-year-old male, is an undergraduate student at a public university in Semarang. He is relatively new to dash cam content, having first encountered it in early 2024, or approximately one year.

The eighth informant, NH, a 21-year-old male, is a final-year student at a private university in Semarang and works part-time as a barista. His exposure to dash cam content also began in early 2024. The ninth informant, SDS, an 18-year-old female, is an undergraduate student at a private university in Semarang. She has been exposed to dash cam video content for a considerable period, beginning in 2017.

4.2 Media Uses Purpose

From a phenomenological perspective, the motivations underlying participants engagement with dash cam video content reflect diverse forms of meaning-making shaped by personal interests, emotional responses, and interpretive frameworks. Anchored in the uses and gratifications theoretical lens—which positions audiences as active agents in

fulfilling their media-related needs—the findings illustrate how dash cam videos are appropriated by members of Generation Z for purposes that extend beyond mere entertainment. Instead, each participant articulates a specific experiential orientation toward the content.

Table 1. Thematic Clusters of Media Uses Purposes

Theme	Core Meaning	Participants Associated
Incidental Exposure and Algorithmic Encounter	Dash cam videos appear unexpectedly during routine scrolling; viewing emerges from algorithmic recommendation rather than intentional search.	P1, P7
Aesthetic and Sensory Appreciation	Viewers appreciate unique visual qualities (e.g., low resolution) and experience dash cam videos as aesthetic or artistic content.	P2
Curiosity Toward Risk, Conflict, and the Extraordinary	Viewers are drawn to accidents, interpersonal conflict, or paranormal events captured unexpectedly.	P3, P4
Moral Evaluation and Reflective Learning	Videos are used to assess fairness, consequences of violations, and as reminders for cautious driving.	P5, P6, P8, P9

Table 2. Textural Descriptions Media Uses Purposes

Participant	Textural Description
P1	Experienced dash cam videos as <i>incidental entertainment</i> emerging from routine scrolling. She did not intentionally seek the content but enjoyed what appeared on her feed. The experience was casual, spontaneous, and integrated into daily digital habits.
P2	Experienced dash cam videos primarily as <i>aesthetic objects</i> . He appreciated the low-resolution quality and perceived it as having artistic value. His engagement was rooted in sensory pleasure and visual texture rather than narrative or informational content.
P3	Experienced dash cam videos as <i>curiosity-driven viewing</i> , particularly focused on accidents and interpersonal conflicts. Her experience involved heightened attention toward dramatic or suspenseful interactions captured unexpectedly.
P4	Experienced dash cam videos as <i>access points to paranormal phenomena</i> . His viewing was driven by interest in supernatural sightings, making the experience thrill-oriented and centered on the extraordinary.

P5	Experienced dash cam content as <i>narratives of human events</i> , especially positive or altruistic acts. She was emotionally drawn to videos depicting people helping others and saw the content as morally uplifting and meaningful.
P6	Experienced dash cam videos as <i>entertaining moral lessons</i> , especially when reckless drivers faced direct consequences. She perceived these moments as humorous and satisfying, blending entertainment with ethical evaluation.
P7	Experienced dash cam videos as <i>emergent digital encounters</i> similar to ADR—content that appeared due to algorithmic patterns. He viewed the videos as part of the normal media environment rather than intentional consumption.
P8	Experienced dash cam videos as <i>reflective reminders of road safety</i> . Watching accidents invoked awareness and caution about driving, creating an experience grounded in practical learning and risk consciousness.
P9	Experienced dash cam videos as <i>both cautionary and engaging</i> , focusing on traffic accidents. Her experience blended emotional engagement (shock, concern) with self-reflection about safety and personal vulnerability.

Table 3. Structural Descriptions Media Uses Purposes

Theme	Structural Description
Motivations for Media Use	Experiences occurred within contexts of free time, breaks between tasks, and moments of cognitive fatigue. Media provided structure during unoccupied moments.
Social and Relational Gratifications	Participants’ sense of social presence was shaped by digital environments that allowed interaction without physical presence. Group chats, comment sections, and shared content created relational closeness.
Cognitive and Informational Needs	Media use was driven by situational demands such as assignments, deadlines, or urgent informational needs. The accessibility and speed of digital platforms shaped these experiences.
Emotional Regulation	Participants used media in response to emotional triggers—stressful events, overwhelming tasks, or a need for distraction. Media environments enabled quick emotional shifts.
Habitual and Routine Use	Media was integrated into daily rhythms, often mediated by technology proximity (smartphones) and environmental cues (notifications).
Identity Expression and Self-Presentation	Experiences were shaped by social norms, platform affordances, and expectations of visibility. Participants navigated curated identities through posted content and interactions.

Composite Description - Media Uses Purpose

Across participants, the experience of watching dash cam videos on social media is characterized by a dynamic interplay between algorithmic exposure, sensory interpretation, affective curiosity, and moral or reflective engagement. Generation Z does not consume dash cam content passively; rather, they actively negotiate meaning through diverse interpretive frames, ranging from visual aesthetics to moral evaluation, emotional stimulation, or behavioral caution. The dash cam video becomes more than a recording device; it becomes a mediated site where risk, conflict, justice, and everyday life interweave, enabling viewers to construct personal significance from glimpses of real-world events captured in motion.

In sum, the essence of this phenomenon lies in how Generation Z integrates dash cam footage into their digital routines and cognitive landscape, and using it to satisfy curiosity, affirm values, stimulate emotions, and derive insights relevant to their own lived experiences.

4.3 Type of Gratifications

Within the framework of uses and gratifications, media users seek a variety of experiential benefits that align with their personal needs, intentions, and situational contexts. Classic developments of the theory identify eight forms of gratification—passing time, companionship, escape, enjoyment, social interaction, relaxation, information, and excitement—which together offer a conceptual map for understanding how individuals engage with media content.

When viewed through a phenomenological lens, these gratifications are not merely functional categories; they represent lived meanings that emerge through the participants' embodied and interpretive encounters with dash cam videos.

Table 4. Thematic Clusters of Gratifications

Theme	Core Meaning	Participants Associated
Information Seeking	Viewing dash cam videos as a source of factual, situational, or confirmatory information regarding road events (e.g., accidents, routes, public incidents).	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7
Relaxation and Restoration	Using dash cam content to unwind, relieve cognitive load, or take mental breaks from academic or work routines.	P1, P2, P3, P6, P9
Enjoyment and Entertainment	Watching for pleasure, amusement, or aesthetic satisfaction.	P1, P4, P6, P7
Passing Time	Consuming dash cam videos incidentally while scrolling or to fill idle time.	P1, P4, P5
Social Connection / Companionship	Using dash cam videos as shared viewing material to strengthen social bonds or create communal experiences.	P8

Escape from Routine	Using dash cam viewing as a temporary detachment from daily responsibilities, stress, or repetitive activities.	P8
Excitement / Arousal	Seeking stimulating affective experiences (surprise, thrill, shock).	P6

Table 5. Textural Descriptions of Gratifications

Partici- pant	Textural Description
P1	Experiences dash cam videos as enjoyable, relaxing, and informative; often emerges during casual social-media scrolling.
P2	Experiences relaxation and informational clarity; uses videos to confirm real-world incidents.
P3	Experiences curiosity-driven engagement with trending incidents; finds relaxation in low-effort viewing.
P4	Experiences pleasure in altruistic or orderly road behavior; uses videos to fill waiting time.
P5	Experiences dash cam videos as sources of practical travel information and light entertainment.
P6	Experiences relaxation, information verification, and excitement from authentic emotional expressions.
P7	Experiences information seeking and enjoyment from observing driver conflicts or behavioral dynamics.
P8	Experiences companionship through group watching; uses videos for emotional escape.
P9	Experiences relaxation after academic activities; uses content as a mental cooldown.

Table 6. Structural Descriptions of Gratifications

Theme	Structural Description
Digital Environment	Experiences emerged within algorithm-driven social media feeds (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube).
Temporal Structures	Viewing occurred during breaks, idle time, or post-activity unwinding periods.
Social Contexts	Experiences shaped by individual routines, peer-group interactions, and family environments.

Affective Conditions	Participants sought relief from boredom, stress, academic fatigue, or emotional tension.
Cognitive Orientation	Driven by curiosity, desire for real-world validation, or observational learning about road behavior.
Media Characteristics	The “raw,” spontaneous nature of dash cam footage supports perceptions of authenticity and credibility.

Composite Description – Type of Gratification

The lived experience of Generation Z in consuming dash cam videos on social media is characterized by the intersection of information-seeking, emotional regulation, moral meaning-making, and curiosity-driven engagement. Participants do not merely watch dash cam videos as passive spectators; rather, they encounter them as authentic visual narratives that help them interpret the unpredictability of public life, evaluate social behaviors, and negotiate their own safety and emotional states.

Dash cam videos function simultaneously as informational artifacts, emotional buffers, social mirrors, and sources of spontaneous fascination. The phenomenon is situated within digital routines shaped by algorithmic feeds, occurring predominantly in transitional daily moments that allow Generation Z to integrate these videos into their broader sense-making processes.

Ultimately, the essence of this experience is the active construction of meaning from real-world visual evidence, mediated through the immediacy, authenticity, and unpredictability that dash cam videos uniquely provide.

4.4 Competing Media

The Uses and Gratifications theory posits that media compete not only with one another but also with non-media activities for individuals’ limited attention and time. The assumption that different media vie for users’ engagement provides an initial framework for understanding how individuals ultimately select specific media platforms for consumption [10]. This competitive dynamic was clearly reflected in the participants’ accounts of their preferred platforms for accessing dashcam video content.

Table 7. Social Media Platform, Exposure Duration, Viewing Frequency, and Start Year of Dash cam Video Exposure

Participant	Primary Platforms Used	Year First Exposed	Viewing Frequency	Average Viewing Duration
P1	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube	2015	Every two days	5–10 minutes
P2	TikTok, Instagram	2014	Once per week (rare)	3–5 minutes

P3	TikTok, Insta-gram	2017	2–4 times per month	~15 minutes
P4	TikTok, YouTube	2020 (COVID-19 pandemic)	Daily (algo-rithm-driven)	~20 minutes
P5	TikTok	2017	2–4 times per week	~15 minutes
P6	TikTok, Insta-gram, Facebook	2023	Frequent; sev-eral times per week	30–60 minutes
P7	TikTok	2024	Daily (FYP-driven)	10–15 minutes
P8	Instagram, Tik-Tok	Mid-2024	Daily (follows dash cam ac-counts)	~10 minutes
P9	Instagram, Tik-Tok	2020	3 times per week	~5 minutes

Table 8. Textural Description – Competing Media

Par-tici-pant	Textural Description
P1	Experienced dashcam content for nine years; encounters videos every two days on TikTok and Instagram; watches 5–10 minutes per session; per-ceives dashcam videos as readily available through algorithmic exposure.
P2	Has consumed dashcam videos since 2014; experiences infrequent encoun-ters (weekly); watches short sessions (3–5 minutes); primarily exposed through TikTok and Instagram.
P3	Has been exposed since 2017; experiences dashcam content two to four times monthly; typically views around 15 minutes per session across Tik-Tok and Instagram.
P4	Began exposure during COVID-19 (2020); experiences daily algorithm-driven encounters on TikTok; spends ~20 minutes watching per session; uses TikTok and YouTube.
P5	Has watched since 2017; experiences encounter two to four times weekly; typically, 15-minute viewing sessions; exposure largely through TikTok.
P6	Began in 2023; experiences frequent, multi-platform encounters (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook); watches significantly longer sessions (30–60 minutes).
P7	Started watching in 2024; experiences daily TikTok exposure driven by recommendation algorithms; watches dashcam videos for 10–15 minutes.
P8	Has engaged for six months; experiences daily exposure through Instagram due to following multiple dashcam accounts; watches ~10 minutes per ses-sion.

P9	Has consumed since 2020; experiences dashcam content three times weekly; session duration ~5 minutes; exposure mainly via Instagram, then TikTok.
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Table 9. Structural Description – Competing Media

Theme	Structural Description
Platform Affordances & Algorithmic Curation	Participants’ experiences were shaped by short-form video ecosystems, rapid content updates, and algorithmic personalization—especially on TikTok and Instagram. Algorithms surfaced dashcam content without active searching, generating routine, effortless exposure.
Temporal Availability & Competing Daily Activities	Engagement durations (5–60 minutes) were influenced by academic schedules, leisure time, and moments of waiting. Media consumption competed with non-media tasks, leading to varied frequencies—from daily scrolling to monthly viewing.
Historical Onset and Exposure Trajectory	The year of first exposure (2014–2024) shaped familiarity, confidence navigating platforms, and habitual viewing patterns. Early adopters integrated dashcam content into long-term routines, while recent viewers exhibited algorithm-driven discovery.
Cross-Platform Ecosystem	Some participants (e.g., P6) engaged with multiple platforms, while others stayed within one primary app. Platform diversity shaped the depth, duration, and type of dashcam content encountered (e.g., TikTok for short clips, YouTube for longer compilations).
Algorithm-Driven Passive Consumption	Several participants (P4, P7, P8) experienced passive exposure due to TikTok/Instagram’s recommendation systems. The structure of feed-based, infinite-scrolling environments created unintentional yet sustained consumption.
Interest Reinforcement Through Following Behavior	Participants who followed dashcam accounts (e.g., P8) experienced intensified exposure as platform algorithms amplified similar content. This structure encouraged daily encounters and shaped duration of viewing sessions.

Composite Description – Competing Media

Across participants’ experiences, dashcam video consumption emerged as a dynamic, algorithm-shaped media practice woven seamlessly into the rhythms of daily life. The essence of the phenomenon lies in the interplay between habitual scrolling behaviors, platform affordances, and momentary gaps of time that invite quick, low-effort engagement. TikTok and Instagram—through their rapid, personalized content delivery—acted as primary gateways, allowing dashcam videos to surface not through intentional searching but through the ambient flow of algorithmic suggestion.

Participants experienced these videos as brief yet meaningful encounters that offered entertainment, curiosity satisfaction, incident verification, or simple relaxation. The structural conditions of their lives—academic schedules, work routines, transitions between activities—created natural openings into which dashcam content was absorbed. Over time, these patterns solidified into individualized habits, with long-term

viewers cultivating stable rhythms of exposure and newer viewers developing interest through automated recommendations.

The essence of the experience, therefore, reflects a convergence of media competition, personal routine, technological mediation, and micro-motivations: dashcam videos function as background companions to everyday life, occupying and shaping small pockets of time while subtly integrating into evolving digital consumption habits.

4.5 Media influence different people differently

Human beings possess varied responses and perceptions toward information they consume through media. The Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasizes this premise, proposing that individuals are affected differently by media content, even when the information and media accessed are similar. In this study, however, one common experience emerged across all participants after watching dash cam videos on social media: each participant reported becoming more vigilant when driving on public roads. This heightened vigilance was shaped by distinct perceptions formed by each participant after viewing dash cam footage.

Table 10. Thematic Clusters of Media Influence

Thematic Cluster	Core Meaning	Participants Associated
Heightened Road Vigilance	Increased general caution- Attentiveness to surrounding traffic- Anticipation of potential hazards	P1, P8, P9
Fear of Being Recorded / Visibility Awareness	Concern about appearing in someone else's dash-cam- Self-monitoring in public driving contexts	P2
Behavioral Adjustments Based on Observed Risks	Consistent use of turn signals- Yielding to emergency vehicles- Careful lane-changing	P3, P4
Recognition of Specific High-Risk Situations	Intersections as danger points- Motorcyclists' unsafe maneuvers- Traffic-light crowding	P6, P7
Minimal Perceived Influence	Dash-cam videos seen as informational but not transformative- Limited behavioral change	P5
Mediated Awareness of Collective Road Behavior	Understanding patterns of risky driving- Perceiving traffic as a shared risk environment	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8. P9

Table 11. Textural Description Media Influence

Participant	Textural Description
P1	Experienced heightened vigilance while driving, shaped by the realization that many road users lack adequate competence. Dash cam exposure made her more alert to unpredictable behavior from others.
P2	Experienced increased caution due to fear of being recorded by others’ dash cams and potentially becoming part of online viral content. This sense of perpetual visibility made him drive more carefully.
P3	Experienced increased alertness, especially when encountering ambulances. Dash cam videos depicting emergency vehicles navigating traffic made him more responsive in yielding.
P4	Experienced behavioral adjustments in daily driving, specifically ensuring the consistent use of turn signals and lane-change communication, modeled after incidents observed in dash cam recordings.
P5	Experienced only minimal behavioral changes; although she found dash cam videos informative, they did not strongly influence her sense of caution or driving habits.
P6	Experienced heightened vigilance toward motorcyclists who weave through traffic. Frequent exposure to accidents involving such maneuvers shaped his sense that these behaviors pose significant danger.
P7	Experienced increased caution at intersections after repeatedly seeing dash cam footage of collisions occurring at crossroads. Intersections became cognitively marked as high-risk zones.
P8	Experienced a general increase in traffic awareness, becoming more observant of surrounding vehicles and potential hazards after repeated exposure to accident content in dash cam clips.
P9	Experienced heightened attentiveness while driving, shaped by continuous viewing of dash cam videos depicting near-misses and accidents, prompting increased situational awareness.

Table 12. Structural Description Media Influence

Theme	Structural Description
Vigilance Shaped by Observed Risk	Participants internalize recurring patterns of risk displayed in dash cam footage—such as unpredictable motorists, sudden collisions, or emergency vehicles navigating traffic. These mediated scenes become interpretive frameworks that structure how participants orient themselves on the road, prompting heightened anticipation of danger and more attentive scanning of their surroundings.
Self-Monitoring and Awareness of Being Observed	Exposure to videos depicting everyday road events being recorded and circulated on social media leads some participants to develop a sense of “ambient surveillance.” This awareness that their own behavior could be captured and publicized shapes their driving choices, encouraging more cautious, rule-consistent conduct to avoid becoming part of viral content.

Behavioral Adjustment as a Response to Perceived Norms	Participants translate the driving norms inferred through dash cam videos—such as yielding to ambulances, using turn signals, and maintaining lane discipline—into their own behavioral modifications. These adjustments arise from seeing what “ought” to happen on the road and recognizing the consequences when such norms are violated.
Differential Influence Based on Personal Relevance	While many participants experience meaningful shifts in risk perception and behavior, others report minimal impact. For these individuals, the videos offer information but do not deeply restructure their driving consciousness. This variability reflects individualized meaning-making processes emphasized in phenomenological and Uses and Gratifications perspectives.
Awareness of Traffic Vulnerabilities	Repeated exposure to dash cam footage highlighting vulnerable traffic situations—such as motorcyclists weaving through gaps or intersections prone to collisions—sharpens participants’ sensitivity to specific environmental hazards. This structural awareness guides moment-to-moment decision-making, particularly in contexts they now perceive as risk centers.
Embodied Re-orientation in Driving Experience	Across participants, dash cam videos act as mediating artifacts that reshape the embodied experience of driving. Participants describe a more grounded awareness of their physical presence in traffic, heightened situational monitoring, and a recalibrated sense of bodily risk as they imagine themselves within the scenarios depicted in the videos.

Composite Description – Media Influence

Across participants, the experience of watching dash cam videos emerged as a mediating force that subtly but consistently reshaped how individuals inhabit and interpret the act of driving. Although participants approached the videos for varied purposes—relaxation, information, entertainment, verification, or passing time—their interpretations converged around a transformed awareness of risk and responsibility on the road. Exposure to recurring visual narratives of accidents, near-misses, and critical moments fostered an embodied sense of vulnerability, heightening attentiveness to situational cues such as intersections, emergency vehicles, unpredictable motorists, and lane-changing behavior.

This heightened vigilance was not merely cognitive but sensorial and affective: participants described becoming more attuned to traffic flow, anticipating hazards, and consciously adjusting driving practices, such as signaling earlier, maintaining distance, or monitoring blind spots more carefully. The videos functioned as experiential simulations, allowing participants to “feel” the consequences of other drivers’ actions and integrate these impressions into their own bodily schema of driving.

At the same time, the meaning structures shaping vigilance varied across individuals. For some, the videos evoked empathy and moral responsibility—such as giving way to ambulances—while for others, the awareness of being potentially recorded by someone else’s dash cam elicited a form of self-regulation grounded in social visi-

bility. A smaller subset experienced the content as informative but not behavior-changing, reflecting the selective and personalized nature of media effects emphasized in Uses and Gratifications theory.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the lived experiences, motivations, gratifications, and perceived behavioral influences associated with Generation Z's engagement with dash cam videos on social media. Using a phenomenological approach grounded in Moustakas' textural-structural analysis, the findings reveal that dash cam videos function as far more than incidental entertainment. Instead, they operate as meaningful mediated artifacts that shape how young viewers interpret digital content, understand road behavior, and construct personal significance from ordinary and extraordinary events captured on camera.

From the perspective of media use purposes, participants demonstrated varied experiential orientations shaped by algorithmic exposure, aesthetic appreciation, curiosity toward conflict, and moral evaluation. These textural accounts were supported by structural conditions such as routine digital habits, emotional regulation needs, academic demands, and platform affordances. Together, these factors illustrate how Generation Z integrates dash cam videos seamlessly into their daily media routines, treating them as sources of sensory pleasure, moral instruction, and informal learning.

In terms of gratifications, the study found that participants used dash cam videos to fulfill multiple psychological and social needs—information seeking, relaxation, enjoyment, passing time, social connection, escape, and excitement. Rather than consuming these videos passively, participants actively negotiated meaning based on their emotional states, personal values, and situational contexts. The authenticity of dash cam footage played a central role in shaping these gratifications, offering viewers a sense of real-world immediacy rarely found in curated digital content.

Analysis of competing media and platform preferences revealed that TikTok dominates as the primary gateway for dash cam exposure due to its algorithmic design, short-form content, and habitual use patterns among Generation Z. Instagram serves as a complementary space, while YouTube is preferred for longer or more curated compilations. These choices reflect the competition between media forms for attention and the ways in which viewing behaviors align with life rhythms, available time, and platform-specific cultures.

The final theme—media influence—demonstrates that dash cam videos shape viewers differently, affirming a key premise of the Uses and Gratifications theory. While forms of influence varied, nearly all participants reported heightened alertness and vigilance when driving or navigating traffic spaces. This vigilance was shaped through different meaning structures: awareness of others' unpredictable behavior, caution about being recorded, moral sensitivity toward emergency vehicles, or internalization of risk schemas. Even those reporting minimal impact still used dash cam content as a cognitive reference point for evaluating road conditions.

Taken together, the composite essence of this phenomenon suggests that for Generation Z, dash cam videos constitute a unique form of mediated real life witnessing. They provide authentic visual narratives that resonate with viewers' personal experiences, values, and concerns, enabling them to make sense of risk, conflict, moral responsibility, and public visibility. Through repeated exposure, these videos cultivate a subtle yet impactful reorientation of how participants perceive safety, social behavior, and their own agency in public road environments.

Ultimately, this research underscores that the consumption of dash cam content is both deeply experiential and meaning-laden. It reflects how digital natives engage with contemporary media ecosystems not simply to be entertained but to learn, to interpret social worlds, to regulate emotions, and to navigate real life uncertainties. In doing so, dash cam videos become a critical site where mediated experience intersects with lived experience, shaping how individuals understand themselves and the environments they inhabit.

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