5th CCCMS 2019

Exploring Desires and Maneuvering on Instagram Life:
A Phenomenology Study

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Abstract

Social networking sites have emerged as one of the most powerful technology advances many years ago. Instagram, has increased its popularity among different age groups of people, is version of the traditional photo album or scrap book only photos are uploaded through the Internet, using a smartphone as a vital tool. Instagram is the main tool to be investigated because; 1) Instagram has more monthly active users than Twitter (in January 2016), and a higher number of posts, 2) the number of posts is always higher in Instagram and Instagram is among the most popular applications have used for social networking. Issues with Instagram includes dysfunction well-being – to fulfil a need, disconnectedness – dependable and FOMO, sexual mismanagement – revealing clothes to gain likes and comments and presenting perfect appearance – to show nice images. This qualitative study is investigating university students' age 18 to 29 years, using semi-structured interview questions. 10 informants will be selected from this study. The sampling technique is a non-probability sampling. The qualitative method is selected due to the appropriateness of the study matter as it adds depth, details, and meaning. The study is exploring the lived experience of students toward Instagram consumption and identified the outcome of the dysfunctional satisfaction. This study employs a uses and gratifications theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to seek the students' gratifications when using Instagram. The instrument will be borrowed by several authors and will be pilot tested.

Keywords: Instagram, qualitative, gratification, well-being, uses and gratifications

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) is one of the most popular internet-based services, a phenomenon which is proven from the fast growing experienced by other SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace, and Friendster (Ku et al., 2013). The concerns that the internet may separate individual user from others, social connections are evolving, maintained, and strengthened in the cyber world through the internet (Humphreys, 2007). There are certain hurdles when using SNS which leads to psychological wellbeing (Jackson & Luchner, 2017). Instagram, however, its main concentration is on photo sharing, image enhancement, and nonreciprocal relationships (Jackson & Luchner, 2017). Instagram is the second most popular social media platform, with 59% of online adults ages 18-29, based on a recent survey (Pew Research Center, 2016).

The researcher intents to investigate the problem because Instagram users are consuming it as a norm and a trend, which is part of a lifestyle (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). Not being part of Instagram can be seen as missing out current events. This relates to individual's self-esteem. The definition of self-esteem is as feeling that one is a worthy person who is as good as anyone else rather than feeling like a "loser" (Karapanos, Teixeira, & Gouveia, 2016). Previous researchers have highlighted a bigger range of gratification, individuals need for pleasure, escapism and the easing of boredom and to satisfy their self-esteem through the portrayal of their perfect image (Dunne et al., 2010).

2. Characteristics of Instagram

According to Sheldon and Bryant (2016), the reasons for using Instagram are unique as compared to using other social networking sites such as Facebook. The authors mentioned that Instagram is used to document a person's life via online, which is similar to scrapbooking and offline photo albums. The researcher focuses to explore in case there are other motivations for Instagram consumption, other behavior obtains relating to Instagram and intents conducting the research in Malaysia.

Instagram feature is quite similar to Snapchat, the feature supports a range of purpose that includes self-expression, support relationships, recording unlimited memories, and self-presentations (Litt & Hargittai, 2014). Instagram can be viewed both ways, either mobile or laptops, or desktops (Chang, 2017). Another unique feature is portability (Chang, 2017). This means users could share their photos and videos due to mobility and is convenient for using regardless of space and time (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck & Falk, 2016).

3. Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

An increase number of researchers have adopted UGT theory by understanding the gratifications to achieve from SNS (Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016). Diverse gratifications have been extracted due to different contexts. The context are information seeking, enhanced social interaction, entertainment, escapism (McQuail, 2010), passing time, information sharing, meeting friends (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). A growing number of media studies that adopt UGT theory examining user behavior such as SNS (Krasnova, Veltri, Eling, & Buxmann, 2017), Facebook (Krause, North, & Heritage, 2014), Instagram (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), Twitter (Chen, 2011), and Snapchat (Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche, & Young, 2016).

Prior studies categorized the gratifications obtained when using different media. For example, Dhir and Tsai (2017) found that using Facebook by adolescents and young adults are motivated by information seeking and entertainment. A recent study by Rauschnabel, Rossmann & Dieck, (2017) revealed that enjoyment, nostalgia, the flow experience, and physical activity were obtained when playing mobile games. Another study by Bae (2017) found socialization, social support, and entertainment were obtained from SNS usage. This study seeks to provide specific gratifications from Instagram usage.

Uses and gratifications. *Uses and gratifications theory (UGT)* is used to investigate why people use media and the gratifications that are derived from media consumption (Luo & Rumus, 2014). This theory has been widely used in the research field of mass communications (Gan & Li, 2017). Investigating the "why" of media use in UGT has been used for many years to learn about the mass media audience (Herzog, 1944; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, 1949; cited from Niekamp, 2003). UGT also emphasis on the user of mass media an *active audience,* the one who makes decisions about media consumption and intent to reach a goal. This study employs uses and gratifications theory because many communications researchers have applying quantitative methods and statistical analysis about general patterns, trends, and relationships for decades (Ruggiero, 2009). Thus, communication researchers should frequently employ UGT and be encouraged in conjunction with qualitative methodologies in a holistic approach (Ruggiero, 2009). Prior studies categorized the gratifications obtained when using different media. For example, Dhir and Tsai (2017) found that using Facebook by adolescents and young adults are motivated by information seeking and entertainment. A recent study by Rauschnabel, Rossmann & Dieck, 2017) revealed that enjoyment, nostalgia, the flow experience, and physical activity were obtained when playing mobile games. Another study by Bae (2017) found socialization, social support, and entertainment were derived from SNS usage. This study seeks to provide specific gratifications derived from using Instagram.

4. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is about exploring how and where meaning originates, happens within our lives, and provides reflective thinking of the experience and the life world with the researcher's findings (Tyre, 2016). According to Tyre (2016) points that phenomenology with the principle of examining an experience in the way experience happens and, on the experiences, own terms were found by Husserl. The intent is exploring the experience and gain knowledge with depth and rigor on the experience, identifying the vital qualities of the experience. One study by Hegel (2015) about phenomenology found that there was positive meaning in messages on Facebook from their female friends according to three major themes, (a) catching up with the news, (b) happy messages, and (c) funny messages. The negative messages have three other major themes (a) inappropriate messages, (b) mean messages, and (c) dramafied messages. The outcome of these messages has brought to physical, emotional, social, mental, and spiritual dimension. This is because physical dimension not only led to self-esteem or overall well-being also students' behaviors having short-term and long-term effects in the classroom and campus climate. Another factor that will also affect self-esteem and overall well-being is emotional dimension.

5. Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow suggested that people actively look for satisfaction from the hierarchy of needs, thus, people are only able to move to the next level once they achieved their goals they find on one level of the hierarchy (West & Turner, 2010). Maslow has classified five levels of need, each develop on another from lowest to highest. There are physical needs, safety and security needs, belonging and love, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Thielke, Harniss, Thomson et al., 2012).

Figure 2.2: Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (1970)

6. Self-Esteem

The concept self-esteem is referring to the positive or negative attitude towards one self (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem can be considered a complex, multi-dimensional and global construct (Richardson, Ratner, & Zumbo, 2009). Moreover, when it comes to social acceptance, circle of friends play an essential role (Erikson, 1950; cited from Hegel, 2015), so as social support, another word *moderator of life stress* serving as a *protective* factor (Cobb, 1976; cited from Hegel, 2015). Warrington and Younger (2011) points out that when friends are seen or become as one's everything, the concept is called as cool and uncool, considered as a complicated process such as *perceptions of appearance, personality, behavior* and *ability,* and the popular imperative of gender norms that *do boy* and *do girl.*

7. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based from the analysis from the literature. Firstly, the study concentrates on Instagram users who are university students' age 18-29 years. To explore student's shared experiences, their motivations and perceiving others. Concepts are cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs and tension release needs. The researcher will question about student's self-esteem. This will question about student's high self-esteem or low self-esteem that resulted the behavior outcome. This conceptual framework provides a gap in exploring students' and their usage of Instagram.

8. Discussion

Four different universities will be collected to address the issue of Instagram usage. This is to answer the concerns among young students. The researcher uses qualitative research methods and techniques are most suitable when collecting and analyzing data because interviewing, observing, and analyzing individuals are activities central to qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research gives meaning at a very personal level of experience even much smaller sample of open-ended interviews that add depth, detail, and meaning (Patton, 1990). To recruit informants, the researcher intents to advertise an interview session through WhatsApp invitation that consist of all communication students. Students who volunteer to be interviewed will need to answer a short closed-ended survey will be given and vetted prior to proceeding to the in-depth interviews. This survey ensures participants meet the following criteria to participate: who owns a smartphone, familiar with Instagram, active user of Instagram and agreed to be interviewed.

The researcher understands that Instagram has a list of concerns. First, uploading the perfect appearance is about physical beauty to friends (Hui, Chua & Chang, 2016). There are evidences found by researcher where Instagram users tend to compare themselves especially their appearance which develop an intense motivation (Hendrickse, Arpan, Clayton, & Ridgway, 2017). This is known as a desire manner to show pretty edited photos based on self-presentation (Hui, Chua & Chang, 2016). Second, a feeling of disconnected with the online world develops a FOMO feeling. FOMO stands for fear of missing out. The FOMO concept is about keeping Instagram

users up with the current updates with others are doing (Blachnio & Przepiorka, 2017). Third, being dysfunctional consist the needs of self-presentation, self-expression, communicating, maintain and nurture social relationships, are reasons why many Instagrammers spend time contributing online (Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016). However, the relationship between the internet and well-being is a complicated factor (Apodaca, 2017). Gordon, Juang, & Syed (2007) suggest it is not how much amount of time spent online effecting well-being, instead, what is done online that develops the effects.

9. Conclusion

The millennials also known as emerging adulthood are facing a high level of pressure in identifying self-disclosure among friends (Pampek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). These students are recognized as heavy users of social networking sites (Alt, 2015) and represent over one third of Instagram users (Duggan & Smith, 2014). It is essential to comprehend how the millennials behave on Instagram and how they feel when using Instagram as their daily routine. The researcher adopts a qualitative method for an in depth understanding to figure how and why millennials behave when Instagram is in use.

10. Summary

Instagram is a mobile location-based social network that offers users a way to snap photos, apply filters, in other words, manipulation tools and share it instantly online and has quickly emerged as a new medium (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012). It also allows users to add captions, hashtags, and tag or mention other users before a photo is published (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). This study is to investigate the phenomenal of Instagram consumption among university students in Malaysia. Issues found by researcher are dysfunction well-being disconnectedness, and presenting the perfect appearance on Instagram. It is important to understand the reason behind such issue.

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