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Uses and Gratifications in Online News: Comparing Social Media and News Media Use by Users

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Abstract

This study investigates the uses and gratifications obtained from reading news online in News Media and Social Media. A comparison is done between these two (News Media and Social Media) related to what type of needs does each of these media fulfil. It also examines the trust and interactivity that participants illustrate in reading news online. A questionnaire was distributed and quantitative analysis was conducted in order to examine the above. A sample of 156 university students completed the questionnaire. A factor analysis on uses and gratifications obtained from News Media and Social Media revealed four factors i.e. Information, Discussion, Entertainment and Surveillance. Results also revealed that (a) Social Media is more about Entertainment whereas News Media is more about Surveillance. No statistical significant differences were obtained related to the gratification of Information and Discussion between the media (b) the intensity of reading online news in News Media depends mainly on how well informed the users would like to be (c) the intensity of reading news in Social Media depends mainly on the age of the user (d) the users trust more News Media rather than Social Media concerning the news they read online.

Keywords: uses and gratifications, News Media, Social Media, trust, intensity, university students

1. Introduction

The conversations around the Media and their social consequences start around the year of 1920, when the School in Frankfurt made its appearance (Serafetinidou, 1995). The term ‘‘School of Criticism’’ is the one that differentiates this school with the corresponding American Positivism School about communication, which developed the empirical, quantitative analysis without dealing with critical theories.

On the other hand, the theorists of the School in Frankfurt take into consideration the organization of the society and the economic-political system; they support the theory of criticism and consider that with only this theory the emancipation of humans and the social reversal is feasible (Carrier & Aslanidou, 2004; Smith, 2001).

What is really interesting regarding the approach of the School in Frankfurt about the Mass Media is that it has developed a philosophy around the dominative nature of the Mass Media-as companies associations now-that regulate the management and conveyance of the message to the society basis. Therefore, what it is developed, basically, around this consideration is that this particular school of pensiveness supports the passiveness of the audience, which accepts any information or any stimuli from the Mass Media and hence, the message itself that the Media aim to pass across to the audience.

In other words, this dominative relationship by the Media and their associations functions against the audiences, making them weak to react in any stimuli of the messages that come from the Mass Media.

Certainly, a basic question that arises here is the extent to which the new technologies affect the level of participation of the audience in the content of Media.

2. Literature Review

The Positivistic approach of the ‘‘uses and gratifications’’ and the New Media
On the other side, the philosophical way of thinking of the School in Frankfurt constitutes the approach of the ‘‘uses and gratifications theory*’’*, which-approaching the subject of inclusivity in a positive way of thinking- supports that the Users use the Media for their own benefit based on their own needs and requirements. The authors believe that this is perhaps one of the most powerful characteristic of the theory of uses and gratifications, namely, the communication element that establishes the relation between the users and the media on the base of their needs and their requirements. This is supported by the research of Quan-Haase and Young (2010) that they applied this theory on the case of Facebook and Instant Messaging. It is vital to mention that a special attention would be given to the term of “user” since this term is linked with the aforementioned theory. The reference of the term ‘users’ has a great importance as this term actually replaces the traditional term of the auditor, the viewer and the reader.

The traditional term fits more in the concept of the audiences’ passiveness in contrast to, the contemporary term of the word ‘user’, which fits in the concept of the active audiences, such as the audiences that insert in an interactive procedure with the Medium and the content of this Medium, in general. What really matters regarding the approach of the ‘‘uses and gratification’’ is the one that has already been mentioned above, that the users use the Media to service their concrete needs and of course, these needs vary and differentiate according to the influences (Shao, 2009).

These uses – in case of a research- can be categorized in parameters in order to be applied practically. In other words, the approach of ‘‘uses and gratifications’’ in order to have a methodological and therefore, practical and applicable value will have to be relied on applicable parameters. In the current research, four basic parameters are being examined i.e. Information : the users of the News Media/Social Media who want to collect information, Discussion which is in fact an interactive parameter as basically within the conversation you interact with the other users as well as with the Medium itself or with the journalists, the parameter of Entertainment refers to the users who satisfy their recreative needs within the use of the online Media, and finally, the parameter of Surveillance which refers to the need of users to learn about what's happening in the world (Lain, 1986).

One of the possible elements however that result through the theory of uses and gratifications – especially if we can apply it in the case of online media and social media – is that of Interactivity as it results from the following terms: Toffler (1980) created the term Prosumer (which is derived from the composition of the words producer and consumer) in order to be referred to the new trend that defines the users as partly producers and consumers, a trend that is presented, for example, at the news portals, where for instance the users can upload their own reportage (Van Dijk, 2009). Bruns (2007, 2008) in his attempt to state that the production and the use are now, confusing concepts, as their meaning in the new digital and interactive interface is the same; he used the term produsage (<production + usage) and the terms Produser (<producer + user) and Co-Creator to describe the increasing production of the content-of the news and other kinds of content- by the users of New Media.

The users’ active role in the processing, the dissemination and the interpretation of the news content is described by the definitions of networked journalism (Jarvis, 2006), a term that shows the range of journalistic records and mostly of online journalism and this range is attributed to the use of new technologies. Participatory journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003), is used to indicate the inclusivity of joint management, production, promotion and sharing the news content by the users, and citizen journalism (Bruns, 2007) is used to highlight the involvement of the citizens in the particular procedure of production. These definitions precisely demonstrate the new

relationship that is created between the user and the content of the news based on new potential and options.

New technologies and on-line media

Radical changes have been noticed in the last century; changes that mostly were caused by the evolution of technology. Nowadays, trends require new sources of journalism; therefore Social Media and online news have become very important in everyone's life in order to be updated and be informed from the very first moment when the news do happen. Social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have conquered the internet. There are widely known all over the planet as the fastest source of diffusion of information in the modern world. According to Keen (2007) many discussions are made in order to examine whether social media are reliable as sources of news to other ways of disseminating information. They have changed the overall way politicians and famous people approach their audience, later this led the professional journalist to provide the news in a different way rather than in the traditional one. Various critical events like elections, deaths of celebrities or well-known politicians, acts of terrorists, hurricanes, earthquakes and many more were first announced to social networks making them very indispensable for the modern professional journalism.

Although, the majority of people questions the reliability and the quality of the provided information/news their popularity is increasing every single day. A recent research of Nielsen and Schroder (2014) who was based on a cross-country online survey, showed that despite the popularity of Social Media the younger generation do not use those tools to produce, comment or share news. However, the time spent using Facebook, YouTube and Twitter is basically for entertainment. These widely disseminated tools offer to the users interaction with every posted information hence they have the opportunity to express their opinion, feelings and participate in conversations giving the news a different dynamic and perspective.

An alternative way to read news online is the News Media. Between the Social and News media there is a great literature on which is considered to be the most accurate and credible source of news. (Leskovec, et. al. 2009; Becker, et. al., 2010; Mathioudakis, et al. 2010).

A research was prepared in the ISLA, University of Amsterdam (Tsagkias, et. al., 2011) in order to understand the relationship between the Social Media and the online news. This research examined the analysis of a news article in the Social Media and the fact that one needs to cross reference the reliability of the information posted from these distributed tools going through the edited content to the unedited. Also, one may wonder for the number of news posted in the social media in contrast to the online newspapers that specialize in providing the news. Overall, both sources of news were the result of the new technological era. Social media provide the freedom to people to use this internet tools to actively engage on sharing and producing news. Then again online news offer the unedited information to the readers allowing them to share it on the social media, edit it and interact with other users. All the above lead to the linked relationship between these two news sources.

3. Methodology and Analysis

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part included demographics, the frequency and intensity of users in reading news online. It also included 21 items that correspond to the four variables related to the uses and gratifications of reading online news in News Portals i.e. Information, Discussion, Entertainment and Surveillance. It also included the same 21 items referring to the uses and gratifications of reading online news in Social Media. Participants responded on a 5 point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagreement) to 5 (strongly agreement). Some items out of these 21 were taking from the research of Quan – Haase and Young (2010) and Froget et. al (2013). For the purposes of this research items for each variable as aforementioned were summed up. The second part included questions related to the trust that

participants show in online News Media along with the participants interactivity. Items were assessed using a five point likert scale where 1 corresponds to no trust and 5 corresponds to a very high degree of trust.

The questionnaire was translated in Greek and then back translated in English by professional linguistics. A pilot study was conducted with a sample of 7 questionnaires. The questionnaires were given to university students in order to check the validity of the questionnaire. Small modifications were done as necessary.

Sample

The study used a cross sectional survey with a representative sample from university students. The survey was conducted anonymously. In total 192 questionnaires were administered (81% of the questionnaires were valid). The sample is constructed by 156 university students, 90 females and 66 males, where 74.4% are less than 25 years, 21.8% are between 26-44 years old and 3.8% are above 45. Seventy nine percent of the sample is undergraduate students while the rest are postgraduate ones. The vast majority of the sample is expert on using the internet as 60% uses the internet for more than 7 years and actually 93% of the sample read news online. The majority of the students read online news of social content. Table 1 represents their preferences.

Table 1. Preferences of the participants in reading online news

	Percentage (%)
Social Content	50.3%
Athletics	21.3%
Politics	16.1%
Other	12.3%

Principal component analysis with Varimax (orthogonal) rotation was performed on the 21 items of the News Media part but also for the Social Media part. The factor analysis referring to the News Media was supported by Bartlett's test of sphericity, χ^2 *(210) =1256.59*, $p < .05$ and Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of *.87* above the recommended value of *.6.* Factors with an eigenvalue more than 1 were retained. A four-factor solution was obtained. The first factor included 8 statements on Information which accounted on the 35% of the variance, the second factor included 6 statements on Entertainment accounted for the 11% of the variance, the third factor included 4 statements on Discussion accounted for the 8% of the variance and the fourth factor included 1 statement on Surveillance which is accounted for the 5% of the variance. The 21 statements of the News Media explain 59% of the variation (see Table 2). Principal Components analysis with the Varimax rotation for the Social Media part revealed a four factor solution with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 37%. 12%, 6% and 6% of the variance respectively. Bartlett's test of sphericity, χ^2 *(210) =1414.98*, $p < .05$ and Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of *.88.* The first factor included 8 statements on Information, the second factor included 6 statements on Entertainment, the third factor on Discussion included 4 factors and the fourth factor included 3 statements on Surveillance. The four factor identified explain the 61% of the total variance (see Table 3). Not all questions loaded on the appropriate factor as a more representative sample should be obtained. However, the analysis the appropriate loadings were considered.

Table 2 and 3 show the internal consistency within the current sample and the means and standard deviation referring to the uses and gratification of the online news by News Media and the Social Media.

Table 2. Principal Component Analysis for uses and gratifications related to News Media

Item	FACTOR			
I. Information	I	II	III	IV
To get with current issues (14)	**,793**	,090	,005	-,015
Its easy to get information (18)	**,787**	,183	,085	,041
To get information I need (20)	**,781**	,026	,144	,075
To search for information that I need (15)	**,740**	,022	,239	,188
To search for information (2)	**,728**	,143	,061	,088
To get information for free (4)	**,715**	,174	,038	,065
Online news is a source of current information(11)	**,697**	,186	,036	,134
To get answers to specific questions (12)	**,692**	,095	,285	-,104
To find out things I need to know (8)	**,656**	,264	,189	-,218
Online news is a source of trustworthy information	**,523**	,312	,068	,012
To occupy my free time (1)	**,445**	,398	-,016	,376
II. Entertainment				
Because it passes time away particularly when I'm	,160	**,860**	,137	,086
When I have nothing better to do (21)	,109	**,838**	-,012	,070
To pass time when I am bored (6)	,215	**,746**	,187	-,074
Because is a habit just something to do (17)	,323	**,601**	,045	,186
To entertain my self (10)	,001	**,546**	,438	-,041
III. Discussion				
To give my opinion on a topic of discussion (13)	,188	,036	**,757**	-,032
To participate to group discussions related with	-,077	,066	**,748**	-,032
To discuss topics/news I care about (16)	,353	,202	**,574**	,109
To respond to others discussion on topics of interest	,328	,180	**,554**	,282
IV. Surveillance				
Reading online news is a way to learn about people	,022	,077	,065	**,868**
Coefficient alpha	**.89**	**.8**	**.68**	**.24**
Mean	**29.86**	**18.06**	**12.48**	**11.34**
Standard Deviation	**6.60**	**4.92**	**3.51**	**4.13**

Note: Factor loadings in bold in the same column load on the same factor.

Table 3. Principal Component Analysis for uses and gratifications related to Social Media

Item	FACTOR			
I. Information	I	II	III	IV
To get information I need (20)	**,776**	,119	,365	,015
To search for information that I need (15)	**,773**	,016	,250	,160
Its easy to get information (18)	**,704**	,148	,360	,091
To get answers to specific questions (12)	**,689**	,134	,323	,308
To discuss topics/news I care about (16)	**,674**	,183	,035	,390
To search for information (2)	**,627**	,043	,353	,101
To respond to others discussion on topics of interest	**,552**	,237	-,014	,318
To give my opinion on a topic of discussion (13)	**,473**	,377	-,192	,395
II. Entertainment				
Because it passes time away particularly when I'm	,103	**,870**	,095	,048
To pass time when I am bored (6)	,105	**,820**	,114	-,082
To entertain my self (10)	,212	**,730**	-,082	,014
Because is a habit just something to do (17)	,180	**,698**	,234	,177
To occupy my free time (1)	-,092	**,664**	,371	,283
When I have nothing better to do (21)	,039	**,371**	-,010	,110
III. Discussion				
Online news is a source of current information (11)	,369	,188	**,690**	,217
To get information for free (4)	,251	,165	**,667**	,068
Reading online news is a way to learn about people	,238	-,013	**,618**	,198
Online news is a source of trustworthy information	,124	,074	**,335**	,757
IV. Surveillance				
To participate to group discussions related with	,397	,177	,005	**,689**
To find out things I need to know (8)	,225	,104	,430	**,621**
To get with current issues (14)	,393	,085	,349	**,444**
Coefficient alpha	**.88**	**.65**	**.76**	**.69**
Mean	**28.66**	**20.71**	**12.6**	**10.34**
Standard Deviation	**6.64**	**6.62**	**3.61**	**2.58**

Note: Factor loadings in bold in the same column load on the same factor.

Using paired t-test, mean-level differences were found for News Media and Social Media related to the factors of Entertainment and Surveillance. The other two factors did not show a statistical significant difference. Thus, the results suggested that readers are more entertained reading news in Social Media rather in News Media. Contrary News Media provide more Surveillance rather than Social Media (see Table 4)

Table 4. Means (SD) and paired t-test results

	Online News in News	Online News in Social	d
Information	29.86 (6.6)	28.66 (6.64)	.18
Discussion	12.48 (3.51)	12.62 (3.61)	-.04
Entertainment*	18.06 (4.92)	20.71 (6.62)	-.45
Surveillance*	11.40 (4.09)	10.34(2.58)	.30

*Note: p<.05

Instead of using the frequency, intensity scale of online news is employed (Froget et. al, 2013). Intensity, measures how reading news online is integrated on the users' daily routine , how engaged is the user reading news online i.e. " Reading online news is a part of my every day activity", "Reading online news has become part of my daily routine", "I feel out of touch if I do not read online news" (Froget et. al, 2013). Multiple regression was used in order to explore the relationship between the intensity of reading online news and age, gender and the four variables related to the uses and gratifications of News Media (Information, Entertainment, Discussion and Surveillance). The overall model was significant with $R^2=.29$, *Adjusted* $R^2=.259$, $F(6,149)=10.04$, $p<.001$(see Table 5). The variables Age, Information and Entertainment were statistically significant with Information being the most important variable to explain the intensity of reading news online. In addition, all of the aforementioned variables were positively related with the intensity.

Table 5. Results on Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting the Intensity (News Media)

Variable	B	SE	β	T
Constant	2.77	1.192		2.325
Age*	1.305	.391	.246	3.334
Gender	.163	.4	.029	.0409
Information*	.117	.038	.271	3.083
Discussion	.005	.068	.006	.075
Entertainment*	.117	.048	.202	2.407
Surveillance	-.004	.054	-.006	-.075

Note: *p<.05.

Multiple regression was also used to explore the relationship between the intensity of reading online news and the uses and gratification of online news in Social Media. Again the overall model was significant ($R^2=.25$, *Adjusted* $R^2=.22$, $F(6,148)=8.31$, $p<.001$) with Age, Entertainment and Surveillance being the statistically significant predictors of the Intensity with Age being the most important one (see Table 6).

Table 6. Results on the Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting the Intensity (Social Media)

Variable	B	SE	β	t
Constant	2.55	1.38		1.84
Age*	1.66	.39	.31	4.27
Gender	.6	.43	.1	1.4
Information	.08	.04	.19	1.83
Discussion	-.10	.08	-.13	-1.3
Entertainment*	.09	.03	.22	2.78
Surveillance*	.16	.1	.14	1.55

Note: *p<.05.

Trust and Interactivity

Differences on the trust that participants show in reading online news in News Media and Social Media was investigated by using a paired t-test. Analyses suggested that there is a statistical significant difference on the average trust that participants show between the two *(t(154)=-10.773, p<.05).* Namely, the average trust for the news presented in News Media *(M=3.8, SD=0.07)* is higher than the trust for the news in Social Media *(M=2.8, SD=0.86).*

The participants also did not show a high interactivity related with the news. The vast majority of the sample just read the news (M=3.11, SD=1.1), rather than like, share or comment the news.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In this article we explored the uses and gratifications obtained from a) News Media and b) Social Media. A factor analysis of uses and gratifications from News Media and Social Media revealed four factors i.e. Information, Discussion, Entertainment and Surveillance. Despite the increased interest in Social Media, most studies focus on uses and social implications of the social media Quan – Haase and Young (2010). However, there is no research related to online news concerning different types of media.

Both News Media and Social Media are seen as important tools in reading news online, but the type of needs that each Media fulfil definitely is not the same. Even though their differences are small, they are central to the way in which users experience the two tools and use them. No differences were obtained between the two types of media related with Information and Discussion. Information may be derived either through the authentic or original news from the News Media, or via notifications in Social Media (secondary data sources). Mean level differences exist for the gratification of Entertainment. Higher values were obtained in Social Media as it was expected (Park et. al, 2009). Social Media essentially shape this need and drive the use of it for the purpose of Entertainment. Another mean level difference was obtained on Surveillance with a higher average for News Media.

In this study it was also investigated which individual factor (Age, Gender, Information, Discussion, Entertainment and Surveillance) predicts the intensity of reading news online in News Media and Social Media. Results have shown that Information is the variable that has the highest impact and is positively related on the intensity of reading news in News Media. Contrary for the intensity of reading news online in Social Media, age is the most important factor to predict the intensity. The fact that the sample is restricted to university students this may regulate to some degree that age is the most important factor. In general, younger people are in favour of using Social Media as opposed to the News Media. The research data also showed that the intensity of using Social Media for online news, if you overlook the age factor, is for entertainment.

The degree of trust shown by the users a) on the News Media, and b) on the Social Media was also discussed. The survey revealed that users trust News Media (for reading online news) compare to the Social Media. This is actually related to the validity and the name of the source that determines significantly the reliability of the news content. However, a recent research by the Reuters Institute (2013) demonstrated that users in UK on a regular basis search the Social Media for news. Despite this fact it is important to mention that only few people trust the Social Media as their primary source for getting information.

This research is the kick start for the extension of the uses and gratifications theory for online news but also for the interaction of the users with online media.

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