

Usage of social networking sites: Interpersonal communication motives of youth

Yasir Waseem Iqbal¹

Abstract

Social Networking Sites (SNS) have gained popularity in recent years and opened new horizons of communication. This study conducted at International Islamic University, through cluster sampling determines the motives for using the social networking sites. An instrument based upon the Interpersonal Communication Motives (ICM) scale, used in past uses and gratifications research, measured motivations for SNS use. Through descriptive research method the study affirms the Katz and Blumer's Uses and Gratification approach which states that different people use same media messages for different purposes to gratify their social and psychological needs to attain their goals. The study found that people go to SNS to fulfill needs which are traditionally fulfilled by other media, and for their interpersonal communication needs. "Pleasure" was the prime motive whereas "Relaxation" and "Affection" were also important motives for SNS use.

Key words: *Youth; Social networking sites; uses and gratification; Interpersonal communication motives scale*

Introduction

Social Networking Sites have gained popularity in recent years and opened new horizon of communication. These networks are not bound by time and space as one can freely communicate anytime anywhere, enabling people to form new relationships. Social networking also facilitates its members to communicate any kind of information with the liberty of quantity and security. People stay in touch with each other through an interactive process, which is not available in face-to-face environment. According to world researches and statistics young generation is major user of social networking sites. It is the most favorite and popular topic being talked about by the youth. There are many students all over the world who always log in to their accounts on

¹Yasir Waseem Iqbal is a *PhD scholarat* Department of Media Studies, Islamia University of Bahawalpur – Pakistan.

different social networks as a routine matter. It would be a shocking figure if you count young adults logged-in in a single day. It would be millions of young adults logging in social networking sites. Here the question arises why millions of adults are interested on these sites? This study assesses the usage of Social Networking Sites through Interpersonal Communication Motives of Youth based on Rubin, R.B., Perse, E.M., &Barbato (1998) interpersonal motives scale including pleasure, affection, escape, control, relaxation and inclusion.

Literature Review

Social networking website means the communication between friends through computer mediated communication initiated by user. This definition covers more types, such as journal writings and blogging (Sheldon, 2008), virtual places that fulfill communication need of similar interest of specific population that share and discuss ideas (Raacke, and Bond -Raacke, 2008, p. 169). Coley (2006) defines cyber communities in three different categories. The first type of cyber world is chat system, second is social networking sites such as MySpace, friendster, Twitter and Facebook where people create their account with personal information and then reveal that information to their "cyber community". Third category is blogs, personal website with frequently updated observation, commentaries recommended links and news (Coley, 2006).Joinson, 2008 concluded that uses and gratifications are the motives behind selection of specific media for obtaining satisfaction from their choices (Joinson, 2008).The assumption of Uses and Gratifications Theory based on that individual's use media to gratify wants or needs (Papacharissi& Rubin, 2000, p. 176). In audience activity, motives are fundamental elements and are the universal dispositions as defined by Uses and Gratifications theorists. According to scholars, users' motives, influence users to take action to fulfill their want and needs (Papacharissi& Rubin, 2000, p. 178).While studying internet using motives research identifiedthat interpersonal needs were prime motives (Papacharissi& Rubin, 2000). Rubin, Perse, and Barbato (1988) developed (ICM) scale based on previous studies which explore six interpersonal communication motives, comprising of affection, pleasure, relaxation, escape, control and inclusion. Flaherty, Pearce, and Rubin (1998) found that people use new media to seek their needs which sought by traditional media such as passing time, seeking information and entertainment. Sheldon (2008) study results

showed that people use computer mediated communication to seek their similar needs including passing time, entertainment, relationship maintenance and information seeking. Valkenburg et al., (2006) observed college students gratification and self-respect in an effort to determine their result on SNS. According to different scholars adoption of SNS and its response are key elements to observe comfort and satisfaction of youngsters; they believe that both individual's adoption and personal interaction are basic factor of SNS. Study concludes that youngsters mostly believe on self-image and other's opinion toward them. SNS opens more information to its user. Hampton and Wellman (2003) endorse that, that societies can improve and social capital can be built through rapid use of new information technology. Studies conducted on the usage of internet have shown that social relationships could be improved through information technology. On and offline socializing is flourishes through new media. Researches indicate that the quality of on line experiences also improves neighbors' relations. In a longitudinal study from August 2005 to January 2006 conducted at Michigan State University, it was found that peers group view their profile more frequently than that of other groups. In the development of offline connection, prior class membership and other social interactions played a vital role in user's profile. Generally users considered information given in their profile is exact and real, as they view themselves (Lampe et al., 2006, p.169). Researchers state that user could be as aware about his own action as about his friends. Ellison et al., (2007) conducted a study on undergraduate college students that Facebook Enhance and maintain old relationships and build new ones, while making his profile a user quotes all about his previous information which his buddies to find him out so easily. In the light of the above results, researcher concludes that Facebook is different than other computer mediated communication and SNS. Researcher adds that suggestions are responded on Facebook because of its structure. Individual requires an email which Facebook uses to keep the user to sign in and using this email, Facebook suggest individuals and group based upon this address. It helps the user to be in touch with its peer group. Joinson (2008) conducted a survey research on college students who used Facebook in UK, as mostly respondents replied that they use Facebook because they want to be in contact with their friends and Facebook is passive form of communication because they remain in touch through features of Facebook which it offers without communicating directly to each other. Users can

monitor the events, upload picture, and change current status of profile and browse the data. These are such salient feature offered by Facebook which helps them keep in touch. Ruggiero(2000) says that Maslow indicates five levels of hierarchy of human needs. According to Maslow apart from the needs of food, water and safety; he also identified three needs of social belonging ego, self-esteem and approval. Maslow hierarchy triangle model of ascending human needs has greatly influenced scientific research into human behavior. (Papacharissi& Rubin, 2000) argued that according to uses and gratification theory, social and psychological factors influences communication motives. Researchers have attempted to find out how attitude influence audiences' behavior in addition to gratification obtained and sought. Papacharissi& Rubin (2000) say that internet use is influenced by social and psychological factor and user perception of the internet. Ruggiero (2000) says that Uses and Gratification is fundamental approach while studying computer mediated communication (e.g. social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook) Ruggiero (2000).Raacke and Bond Raacke(2010) identify different categories of SNS user. Vary Max rotation method was used in their study. They concluded three dimensions of uses and gratification. The first dimension is to get information which includes academic purposes, posting pictures and comments on walls, getting information about events, having approximately 22% of whole variance. Secondly, friendship component was observed, the aim of second component was to be in contact with old and new friends on the other hand to locate pervious friends as well, having approximately 44% of total variance. Finally the third component was making new friends. Final component encompass 63% of total variance (Raacke, and Bond Raacke, 2010). Media scholars are hypothesizing that audiences are gratified by selection of media content. Effect of media consummation and exposure pattern can be calculated psychologically and social needs (Garramaone 1984). Uses and gratification theory is generally applied to understand the pattern of use as well as attitudes including duration of use, type of use and amount of use are associated elements for studying the internet and SNS (e.g.,Papacharissi& Rubin 2000; Sheldon 2008).

According to Schutz , (1966) people communicate with each other because they need affection, inclusion and control. To fulfill the needs of emotions, one builds or maintains mutual interest in and acknowledgement of others. On the other hand behavioral interactions build good relation with others. In interpersonal

communication motives control is a behavioral need to influence and preserve power over others, and emotionally it is used to maintain mutual respect of others. Behaviorally affection maintain relationships in love, adoration and devotion, while emotionally it is maintained with mutual support and connection with others. Grahamah et al., (1993) conclude that interpersonal communication needs should be compatible with the method of gratification. The method of fulfilling interpersonal need is modified due to communicator's personal approach, for example, people looking to fulfill need of inclusion. By measuring the motives most often found in numerous mediated relationships, this study hopes to further explore the interpersonal communication motives of youth on social networking sites.

Theoretical framework

For this study, it has been found that uses and gratification approach propounded by Blumer and Katz is the most suitable theory to base the research and its findings. According to uses and gratification theory different people use the same media messages for different purposes to gratify their social and psychological needs to attain their goal (Katz & Blumer 1973). The theory explains how audience differ in the gratification they seek from the media. On the basis of needs and gratification, people can be classified or grouped into following categories which includes, personal relationship (social utility of information in conversation, substitute of the media for companionship), diversion (escape from problems emotional release), surveillance and personal identity (value reinforcement, self-understanding), (Mc Quail, Blumer, and Brown (1972). Haridakis and Rubin argued that many research conducted after 1972 indicate that different motives are linked different preferences, leading to different patterns of media exposure and use to different outcomes. Recent study added few more categories. Motives for media use, factor that influence motives and outcome from media related behavior is main focus of uses and gratification theory. (Haridakis, and Rubin, 2003).

Significance of the study

New patterns of constant communication in shorter periods of time, that social network sites are capable of providing, may influence a number of elements typical of messages delivered via computer. This act is even more poignant in the most recent

trends of social networking communication. As this new technology gives students more types of media choices, satisfaction and motivation become even more critical to analyze. It is important thing that whole researches which conducted on Social Networking Sites were conducted in abroad, but this research conducted on Pakistani youth who are among high numbers of internet users. Apart from this Social Networking Sites are very important phenomena in the life of Pakistani youth, by identifying these motives we utilize youth in a better way.

Research Questions:

1. What are youth interpersonal communication motives (gratify) for using SNS?
2. What are the prime motives of youth for using SNS?

Research methodology

To investigate the youth's interpersonal communication motives for the usage of social networking sites descriptive survey research method was used. Data was collected through survey method by using a close-ended questionnaire. The instrument was developed to explore the youth interpersonal communication motives to gratify their needs for using SNS. The instrument was derived from interpersonal communication motives scale developed by Rubin, R. B., Perse, E. M., &Barbato in 1988. Ordinal level of measurement wherein, attributes were rank ordered and Likert scale were used to measure the interpersonal motives. The population under investigation was Social Networking Sites users from International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan. Both male and female students of International Islamic University are selected to inquire about the phenomenon under investigation. Since, International Islamic university is the blend of different cultures, colors, creeds international as well as national students, therefore this university was selected for the study. Cluster sampling technique was used for this research study. User of Social Networking Sites are diverse and discrete so it is almost impossible to investigate whole population , so researcher used cluster sampling technique to collect a sample of 200 students from International Islamic University Islamabad , 100 from each gender. Both genders divided into five faculties' social sciences, management sciences, language & literature, applied sciences,

engineering & technology. SPSS software was used for data analysis.

Operationalization of interpersonal motives

Motives are described as something as a need or desire, emotion, physiological need or similar impulse that causes a person to act. To collect data on motives, researcher replicated Rubin, et al. motives of pleasure escape, affection, inclusion, control and affection in context of Social networking use. Interpersonal motives are conceptualized and operationalized in the following way.

Pleasure

Pleasure is usually described as the broad class of mental states that humans and other animals experience as positive, enjoyable, or worth seeking. It includes more specific mental states such as happiness, entertainment, enjoyment, ecstasy, and euphoria. For this research point of view pleasure is operationalized as individual actions for fun, enjoyment and entertainment.

Affection

Affection is fond feeling, attachment, devotion, or love but in this study affection is an act of showing appreciation and care for others.

Relaxation

Relaxation stands quite generally for a release of tension, a return to equilibrium", and it is operationalized as an activity to chill out.

Control

According to Think dictionary "Power or authority to check or restrain; restraining or regulating influence" control is operationalized as a desire to gain compliance or obedience from other.

Inclusion

According to world English dictionary "the provision of certain rights to all individuals and groups in society" and researcher conceptualized as the desire to be with someone.

Escape

According to a quote, escape is “To get free from that which confines or holds” and in this study escape was operationalized to pass the time to avoid other activities.

Analysis and interpretation of data

There were 200 respondents selected for this research 100 male and 100 female respondents. Out of them 23% respondents were between the ages of 18-20, 47.5% were 21-23 and 23% were in 24-26 years age and 6.5% over 26 years age. Statistic results show that 34% respondents were undergraduate 42.5% were graduate 18% were post graduate and 5.5% respondents belonged to other categories. With the help of cluster sampling whole university students were divided into the following categories, Social Sciences, Management Sciences, Language & Literature, Applied Sciences and Engineering & Technology and took 40 students (20 male and 20 female) from each faculty. 100% respondents were users of Social Networking Sites.

However, in the response of preferred Social Networking sites researcher found significant difference between Facebook and other social networks. Most of the respondents used Facebook as compared to any other social networking site. 75.5% respondents gave preference to Facebook while 9.5% to twitter, 5.5% to YouTube, 4% to Google Buzz and remaining 5.5% to other sites. According to the analysis more than 80% users spent less than an hour to maximum two hours on Social Networking Sites every day. Study sample reflect that 37.5 user logged in their account several times in a day, while 29% once in a day. Majority of the students changed their profile occasionally, while 7% changed on daily basis. Approximately 50% users logged in between 1800-2400 hours. Analysis indicates that 50% users used their SNSs account for 2 years. The majority of students have 50-100 SNSs friends and 53% people reported that they have more friend on SNSs as compare to real life. Students’ responses reflect that 53.5% students’ members of 1-5 groups or Social Networking Communities.

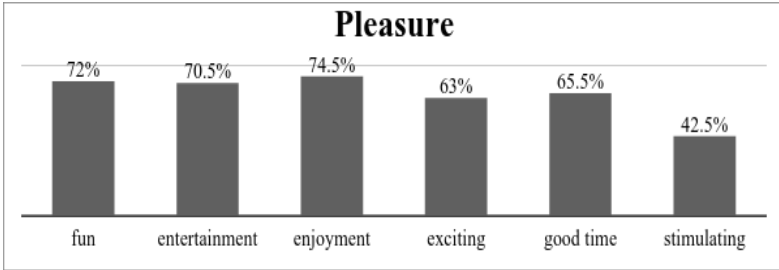
Social networking motives

Interpersonal communication motives for SNS uses were calculated on the basis of Rubin’s interpersonal communication

motives scale of pleasure, affection, escape, control, relaxation and inclusion; as earlier mentioned in methodology.

Pleasure

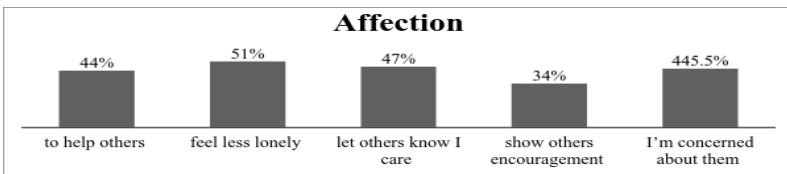
Figure-1



First interpersonal motive labeled, “Pleasure” contains six indicators which are reflected in the figure 1. The enjoyment is the most important indicator of the ‘pleasure’ motive. Similarly, fun and entertainment have found to be equally reflected indicators of ‘pleasure’ and exciting and good time also represents above 60% user. People are less interested in simulating indicator. Indicators like enjoyment entertainment and fun depicts that people use SNS for “pleasure’, because our society, culture and religion give less freedom and opportunities to get pleasures in real life. So our youth spend most of their time on SNS to gratify their pleasure needs.

Affection

Figure -2

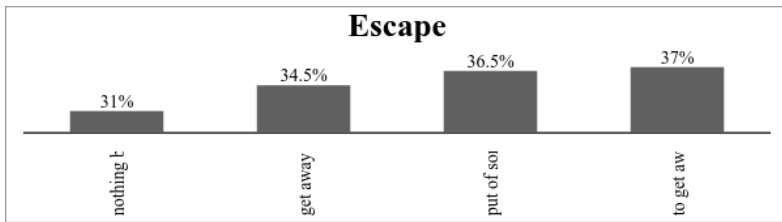


“Affection” motive contains five indicators in which ‘feel less lonely’ is the most important indicator, while ‘help others’, ‘others know I care’ and ‘concerned about them’ found equally reflected. Result

shows (Fig.2) that people are less interested in indicator ‘show other encouragement’ of affection motive. “Affection” is closely associated with social feelings. Most of the users go on SNS to kill their loneliness, as in our society females are bound to spend their lives in homes. For this reason higher number of females uses SNS to kill their isolation. Nearly half of the respondents reported they use SNS to let other know we care. Research explores that people show care and concern about others, who are much closed to them, they may be bounded in blood relation or belong to their peers groups.

Escape

Figure 3



Third motive for this study was “escape” which included four indicators in which (i) *get away from pressures and responsibilities*, (ii) *and out of something I should do*, are the most important reasons to use SNS for “Escape” motive. The world around the clock is in evaluation and revolution, everyone is in the state of competition to win the race, meet the deadlines of different errands and this hustle and bustle of life creates stress, anxiety and mental agony. In order to get rid of pressures and responsibilities, people use SNS. Small number of people use SNS because they have nothing better to do. Although, majority of people engaged in work uses SNS to get relief from fatigue and frustration.

Control

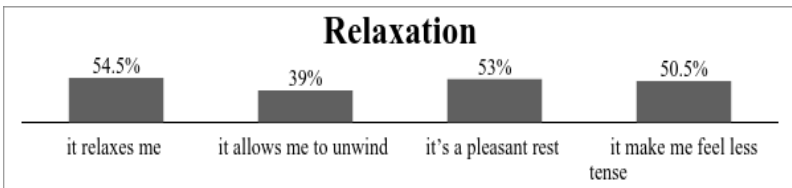
Figure 4



Fourth motive of interpersonal communication was labeled as “Control”. “Control” contains three indicators in which *tell others what to do* is the most significant indicator. Resttwo indicators were also closely reflected. Findings show (Fig.4) that a large number of respondents were neutral while responding to control motive as they found uncertain about their feelingswhether they use SNS to gratify their interpersonal motive “control” which was operationalized as a desire to gain compliance or obedience from others or vice versa.

Relaxation

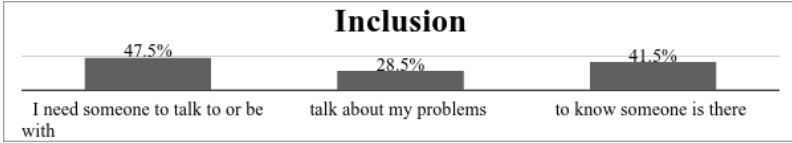
Figure 5



“Relaxation” motive consisted of four indicators in which (i) *it relaxes me, it, (ii) it's a pleasant rest (iii) and it make me feel less tense*, considerable number of population (more than 50%) has been found to be used SNS for relaxation motive (Fig.5). Social media offered a lot of opportunities for relaxation such as people can chat with their buddies; see shared links, which amused for a while.

Inclusion

Figure 6



“Inclusion” was the last motive in interpersonal motives and it also consisted of three indicators in which ‘need someone to talk’ or ‘be with’ is the most important indicator and indicator ‘to know someone is there’, also reflects importance but people are less interested to talk about their problems on SNS (Fig.6). Humans are social animals they can’t live alone. Every human needs to express their thoughts and emotions for catharsis and they talk to each other to accomplish their goals. So our results also indicate that more people are interested to talk with others or to know someone is there to whom they express their feelings.

Table 1. Summary of interpersonal communication motives of youth for SNS use.

Motives	Percentage
Pleasure	25
Affection	17
Escape	13
Control	11
Relaxation	19
Inclusion	15

When we look at the overall picture of interpersonal motives for SNS users, findings show that one fourth of the study’s population

practices SNS to gratify their "pleasure" need. "Relaxation", "affection" and "inclusion" are reflected equally, while people were less interested in "escape" and "control" on SNS use. Our society impose certain restrictions on practicing things which are against our ethical, religious, regional & national and cultural norms, such as male female interaction without legal relationship. Besides this, people are offered very few facilities from government, they have limited opportunities for get-to-gather to get "pleasure", "affection" and "relaxation". So, people prefer computer mediated communication like SNS to interact and communicate matters related to various aspects of everyday life covering political, social, economic and personal issues freely and openly. Another reason is that presently no country is in a position to censor online communication at a greater level. One other reason is people are living a life of uncertainty, hustle bustle and traumatic situation, so they log into SNS for some respite.

Conclusion and recommendations

Young spend more time on Social networking Sites as compared to any other age groups. With the extensive use of SNS by youth it is important to know the motives that are gratified from these online networks. Media experts and researchers indicate about "digital natives" addiction to the SNS. However, there are few researchers who put light on social networking users to assess, why they use, and what is the outcome of their SNS use. To explore the motives of youth (gratification sought) for using SNS, the researcher conducted a survey of 200 students at International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Most of the students go to SNS for pleasure, for fun, entertainment, enjoyment, and excitement, stimulating time. Female respondents visit SNS for relaxation more than males, whereas, male respondents visit SNS for "control" and "inclusion" motives. A large number of students, go to SNS for "relaxation" when they are bored. A significant number of students use SNS for "pleasure", "affection" and "escape". A small number of people operate SNS for "Control" Motive. These findings strengthen what Althaus and Tewksbury suggested in 2000 that "pleasure" and "relaxation"-gratification is generally associated with TV and newspaper prove to be significant predictors of using SNS. Parks and Floyd also reported similar findings in 1966, students who often log into their SNS account are the ones who go

there to gratify “escape” and “control” motives. Young adults interested in “pleasure and “relaxations” through SNS have more friends than others. In 1996 parks and Floyd observed that whoever used SNS for “affection” motive had developed greater number of personal relationships. The data of this research also reflected that people did not go to SNS for “escape” from real world problem, but “affection”.

According to uses and gratification model people use social media due to social and psychological factors. In the light of uses and gratification theory, this study found that people visit SNS to fulfill their needs by new media as they attain it through traditional media. People use SNS to gratify their interpersonal communication needs and use SNS mostly for “pleasure”, “relaxation”, “affection” and “escape” motives.

Recommendations

Researcher suggests following grounds where future studies could be conducted.

- Comparison of users and non-users of SNS demographic characteristics.
- Social capital (bridging and bonding) in online and offline contexts.
- Motive Comparison for sites’ use between high school and college students.
- What extent mass communication is a substitute for interpersonal communication and how people use false identities to communicate on SNS.

Studied on SNS should be conducted using other theoretical approaches, such as the social penetration theory and agenda-setting theory.

References

- Bonds-Raacke, J., & Raacke, J. (2010). Myspace and Facebook: Identifying dimensions of uses and gratifications for friend networking sites. *Individual Differences Research*, 8(1), 27-33.
- Brainyquote.com. Retrieved on May 18, from <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/escape.html>
- Coley, T. (2006). *Students and cyber communities*. University of South Carolina.

- Dicionary.com. Retrieved on 18 May, 2012 from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/affection>
- Dicionary.com. Retrieved on 18 May, 2012 from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/inclusion>
- Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends": Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(3).
- Flaherty, L., Pearce, K., & Rubin, R. (1998). Internet and face-to-face communication: Not functional alternatives. *Communication Quarterly*, 46(3), 250-268.
- Garramone, G. (1984). Motivation models: Replication across media for political campaign content. *Journalism Quarterly*, 61(3), 537-691.
- Graham, E. E., Barbato, C. A., & Perse, E. M. (1993). The interpersonal communication motives model. *Communication Quarterly*, 41, 172-186.
- Hampton, K., & Wellman, B. (2003). Neighboring in netville: How the internet supports community and social capital in a wired suburb. *City & Community*, 2(4), 277-311.
- Haridakis, P. M., & Rubin, A. M. (2003). Motivation for watching television violence and viewer aggression. *Mass Communication & Society*, 6, 29-56.
- Joinson, A. (2008, April 5-10). *Looking at, looking up or keeping up with people? Motives and uses of Facebook*. Proceedings of the twenty-sixth annual SIGCHI conference on Human components in computing systems, (pp. 1027-1036). Florence, Italy. DOI: 10.1145/1357054.1357213
- Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509.
- Lampe, C., Ellison, N., & Steinfield, C. (2006). *A face(book) in the crowd: Social searching vs. social browsing*. Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 435-444). New York, NY: ACM Press.
- McQuail, D., Blumler, J. G., & Brown, J.R. (1972). *The television audience: Revised perspective*. In D. McQuail (Ed.), *Sociology of mass communications* (pp. 135-165). Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin.
- Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. (2000). Predictors of internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44(2), 175-178.
- Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008, April). Myspace and Facebook: Applying the uses and gratifications theory to

- exploring friend-networking sites. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 11(2), 169-174.
- Rubin, R., Perse, E., & Barbato, C. (1988). Conceptualization and measurement of interpersonal communication motives. *Human Communication Research*, 14(4), 602-628. DOI:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1988.tb00169.x.
- Ruggiero, T. (2000, Winter). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 3-37.
- Schutz, W.C. (1966). *The interpersonal underworld*. Palo Alto, CA: Science & Behavior Books.
- Sheldon, P. (2008). Student favorite: Facebook & motives for its use. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal*, 23, 39-55.
- Thinkexist.com. retrieved on May 18, 2012 <http://thinkexist.com/dictionary/meaning/control/>
- Valkenburg, P., Peter, J., & Schouten, A. (2006, October). Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, 9(5), 584-590.
- Wikipedia. Retrieved on May 18, 2012 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasure>
- Wikipedia. Retrieved on May 18, 2012 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relaxation>