

WOMEN'S FACEBOOK USES
AND GRATIFICATIONS

by

Christian Hunold

An Abstract

of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

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With over one billion users worldwide, Facebook is leading the social media revolution and women account for the majority of users. But why are women so enamored with Facebook? Based on uses and gratification theory, the aim of this research is to identify the reasons female college students use Facebook in comparison with Herta Herzog's seminal study of women's uses and gratifications of radio serials from the 1940's. After conducting in-depth interviews with 20 female college students, their uses and gratifications are analyzed to determine if there is a relationship to Herzog's findings. In spite of the inherent technological differences between radio and the internet, the in-depth interview results upheld the relevance of Herzog's original study by identifying wishful thinking, emotional release, and information and advice as three primary uses and gratifications of Facebook users. The implications of these findings and this approach are discussed.

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APPROVED:

Thesis Chair:



Thesis Committee Member:



Thesis Committee Member:



ACCEPTED:



Chair, Department of Communication:

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During the run up to Facebook's IPO stock offering in April of 2012, Facebook was buzzing with protests and petitions among women users frustrated with Facebook's all male board of directors. Women are more active users of Facebook, they contribute more content to Facebook and they update their Facebook account more often than men (Pew 2012). Despite this, females had no representation on Facebook's corporate board of directors. Some women felt Facebook's male dominated board was insensitive to women's issues. Specifically, the women pointed to Facebook's decision to ban breastfeeding pictures from its website as a clear example of gender bias. As a result, Ultraviolet, a women's advocacy group, organized protests and boycotts of Facebook and gathered 53,000 signatures demanding Facebook take action and diversify their board with a woman. Ironically, to raise awareness, Ultraviolet posted their petition, started groups, and advertised their boycott of Facebook on Facebook itself. On April 26, 2012, the online Facebook protest reached the real world as protestors gathered at Facebook's New York headquarters to deliver the petition. Two months later Facebook added its first woman to the board of directors. In this case, women used Facebook to empower themselves and other women for the purpose of gender equality in the workplace.

In this thesis the researcher is exploring the extent of women's uses and gratifications on the social network Facebook.com. This research is modeled after Herta Herzog's seminal 1941 study, in which she gave nomenclature and substance to a theory called Uses and Gratifications (U&G). In that seminal work, she described the U&G of women radio listeners who regularly listened to

dramatic serial programs. In her 1941 study, she found three specific uses and gratifications in radio programming: 1) Wishful thinking; 2) Information and advice; and 3) Emotional release.

Although radio serial programs and Facebook may not seem related, there are similarities that tie both together. Listeners of radio serials and Facebook users are predominately women. Second, radio serials and Facebook have been used as social media platforms. Lastly, radio serial listeners and Facebook users share U&G commonalities which will be discussed. The purpose of this current research is to analyze college women's patronage of the social networking website Facebook through a U&G lens. The researcher intends to generate findings that would bear relevance to and expand current knowledge of the U&G sphere. A more detailed outline of what the researcher hopes to achieve follows.

Social networking sites (SNSs) have increasingly gained popularity. Overall, 71% women use SNSs and the majority of Facebook users are women (Pew, 2013). According to web information company Alexa.com (2013), Facebook is the most popular SNS and is also the second most popular website in the world. In comparison with men, women spend more time on Facebook, are more intense contributors of content, and they feel Facebook is more important (Pew, 2013). Women are clearly being drawn to Facebook, but why?

As will be shown, previous research is not sufficient to identify and explain deeper U&G for women. According to Smock, Ellison, Lampe, and Wohn (2011), this is so because "previous research has looked at how motivations affect general use of SNSs [such as Facebook], often measured as overall time spent

on the site, little is known about what motivates users to utilize particular site features" (p. 2322). Furthermore, there is a dearth of peer reviewed research investigating gender differences in SNSs (Thompson & Loughheed, 2012). Thus, there is a need to study SNSs in more depth through U&G in order to get beyond traditional measures of general Facebook usage.

Literature Review

The primary principle for conducting this research through the lens of U&G theory is to understand Facebook's value to college women. This chapter begins with a historical overview of the U&G theory, followed by an exploration of social networking sites and women users, and the chapter concludes with research questions.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The U&G sphere is an integral part of basic communication theory. Herzog (1941) first posited these ideas in her seminal study about women who regularly listened to serial programming on the radio. Herzog (1941) found that media consumers are not passive receivers of media messages; instead, they actively seek to fulfill gratifications by choosing media programs that satisfy specific needs. Herzog identified three distinct types of listening patterns that identify why women tuned into daytime radio serials: Listening as a form of emotional release, listening as a form of wishful thinking, and listening to gain information.

With regard to emotional release, Herzog found listeners used radio serials to express feelings of surprise, happiness, sadness, or to give themselves

“a chance to cry” (p. 142). Furthermore, Herzog found that listeners enjoyed hearing about the problems and struggles of others. To compensate for their own problems, listeners responded that “it made them feel better to know that other people have troubles too” (p. 142).

With regard to wishful thinking, Herzog found listeners used radio serials to “fill in the gaps” in their lives (p. 146). Listeners superimposed themselves on the characters in the serials to satisfy missing aspects of their own lives. Listeners relived the past, or imagined a happier situation vicariously through the serial actors. Herzog explained that serial listeners used the events portrayed in the programming to compensate for their own failures. Therefore, through wishful thinking, the successes of serial characters became successes for the listener as well.

With regard to information gain, Herzog found listeners used radio to explain things or teach appropriate patterns of behavior. The serials provided recipes for adjustment in three main forms: First the programs gave meaning to the world by offering a continuous sequence of events; secondly, the programs gave the listener a sense that the world is not as threatening as it might seem by supplying them with formulas of behavior for various troublesome situations; and three, the program explained events, emotions, or activities by providing labels for them. Ultimately, listeners utilized these programs for information because the way the stories were told about the world seemed to comfort the listeners.

With Herzog's uses and gratifications groundwork in place, other researchers expanded upon her findings. Katz (1959) noted that “research

should move from what media do to people, to what people do with the media” (p. 686). At that time, as Katz pointed out, researchers were only focusing on one half of the U&G equation. The U&G theory was best explicated in a 1972 study by McQuail, Blumler, and Brown who found that media consumers have free will to decide how they will use the media. McQuail et al. (1972) introduced significant additions to the theory that identified four primary factors for media use: 1) Diversion (escape from routine or problems, emotional release); 2) Personal Relationships (social utility of information in conversation or media companionship); 3) Personal Identity (value reinforcement, reality exploration and self-understanding); and 4) Surveillance (information that might help accomplish something). Recognizing and identifying these needs indicated that users are actively seeking to obtain gratifications from the media they consume.

Gratifications sought versus gratifications obtained are the fundamental tenants of the theory, which was outlined by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973): “In principle, a distinction may be drawn between a) expectations about content formed in advance of exposure, and b) satisfactions subsequently secured from consumption of it” (p. 25). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) discovered that audiences are goal-directed and, thus, they choose specific media to satisfy their needs. As a result, the media makers are beholden to the media audiences who pick and choose their own U&G in the media they consume. The media makers are consequently at the whims of the consumers for their success or failure.

To be sure, a person’s media needs are subjective to a certain extent, which can make it difficult to predict a media fulfillment model. However, there

are also common, innate human elements that cause individuals to gravitate toward specific mediums.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) delineated five components comprising the U&G model. First, the audience is actively seeking, rather than passively consuming, media. Second, during the mass communication process, linking gratification and media choice is the responsibility of the audience member. Third, media is competing with other sources of satisfaction. Fourth, many of the goals of mass media use can be gleaned from information supplied by audience members. Lastly, audiences are free to determine the cultural significance of mass communications.

According to Blumler (1979), the U&G methodology was born out of frustration and disappointment from failed attempts to measure effects on people from exposure to mass media campaigns. The failed attempts at quantifying these effects led researchers to the conclusion that consumer's media choices are made based on how that particular medium will make them feel.

Thus, gratifications have been extensively studied in conjunction with uses. Gratifications sought are labeled as motivations in U&G theory. According to McQuail (1984), the type of motive along with the strength of the motive for media use affects the gratification. Rubin R. and Rubin A. (1992) explained that "motives and the needs which motives are predicated, determine people's choices of communication channel content" (p. 306). The consumer is, therefore, consciously choosing the medium that best fulfills a specific want, need, or desire, rather than just passively absorbing the media content.

The U&G theory continued to be utilized by communication researchers throughout the 1990's with regard to audience activity (Massey 1995), telephone (O'Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995), and television commercials (Stafford, M. & Stafford, T., 1996). In the midst of technological advances in computers and the mainstream adoption of the Internet, scholars employed and praised the U&G theory throughout the 1990's. Lin (1996) proclaimed "the uses and gratifications perspective can still be hailed as one of the most influential theories in the field of communication research" (p. 574).

The abundance of empirical U&G research offers convincing evidence that the U&G theory is a useful methodology regardless of changes in media technology. The U&G approach can be effectively applied to modern mass media to analyze consumer motivations and satisfactions. According to Ruggiero (2000), "U&G has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium" (p. 27). Although many technological changes have occurred throughout the years, the U&G perspective is still a highly regarded theory and remains a popular research tool.

Social Media

The advent of the Internet was a huge technological change, but one that the U&G approach is well suited for. The Internet, because of its interactive features, lends itself to the U&G methodology (Ruggiero 2000). There are diverse options for communication via the Internet. The Internet is the conduit through which specific channels of communication such as email, instant messaging, blogging, and SNSs are created. The content gratifications derived

from the aforementioned internet uses are different from those of traditional mass media (Stafford T., Stafford M., & Schkade, 2004).

The open nature of the Internet lends itself to the U&G approach. Haythornthwaite (2005) explained “the Internet and its media open new lines of communication” (p. 140). Other mass media such as television or radio are not nearly as free and open because the content provided must abide by strict guidelines, and must be approved by the FCC. Also, programming on radio and television is generally created by networks, which homogenizes content. There are no such programming regulations on Internet content.

The openness and accessibility of the internet has resulted in people using SNSs as gateways to online communities which serve users as virtual second lives. Valkenburg, Peter, and Shouton (2006) explained that SNSs have become important mediums for relationship building and development. According to Acar (2008), “online social networks allow their users to connect with people who have common interests while giving them power to be independent communicators” (p. 63).

By offering a myriad of features, SNSs differ from conventional one dimensional social communication tools such as email or instant messaging. U&G research by Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) revealed that specific “uses and gratifications such as ‘to learn about events’ and ‘to post social functions,’ and ‘to feel connected’ indicate that users are meeting a need by using the site as a source of information” (p. 174). Clearly, SNSs provide more communications options, but they also offer intangible advantages. According to Acar (2008),

“Findings have shown that online social networks are not only larger than regular social networks, but also structurally different since they are not highly influenced by some demographic factors such as income and attractiveness” (p. 77). Acar’s findings also highlighted gender differences among SNS users. Acar (2008) stated “It seems that woman have larger online social networks, spend more time communicating with network members, and are less worried about adding new people” (p. 78).

Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) applied the U&G approach to Facebook and found that students learn about campus events and information regarding products and services through social networking sites. Park et al. (2009) also found that women college students were more likely to use Facebook groups to obtain information.

Political information is also an important Facebook use. Facebook has been used in local, state and federal elections as a forum to inform constituents, promote, and disparage political candidates. Williams and Gulati (2013) analyzed Facebook’s role in the 2006 and 2008 elections and found: “In 2006, only 16 percent of major party candidates running for the House personalized their Facebook profile in some way. By 2008, a large majority of both Democratic and Republican candidates had a presence on Facebook” (p.61). Similarly, a content analysis of Facebook groups during the 2008 Presidential election indicated that users actively participated in Facebook groups to discuss and spread political information related to candidates and campaign issues, rather than discussing their own personal social issues (Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers, & Neely, 2010).

Facebook users obtained information from the group discussions and passed it onto their friends or other Facebook patrons. This information forwarding influences both the sender and receiver of information. According to Woolley, Limperos, and Oliver (2010) “because political groups [on Facebook] may enhance the richness of social information provided to fellow users, they may influence how people form impressions and perceive one another” (p. 638).

Facebook provides a platform for socialization which makes it convenient to connect with friends. Papacharissi (2009) described Facebook as the “architectural equivalent of a glasshouse” with an “abundance of tools that members use to leave cues for each other” for the purpose of community building and identity expression (p.199). U&G research conducted by Park et al. (2009) found the four most popular reasons for Facebook group usage were socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information. According to Leung (2009), digital self-expression through content generation online gives SNS users the “opportunity to be recognized, gain respect, publicize their expertise, learn more of the world, socialize with friends and be entertained” (1337). Other gratifications sought and obtained from Facebook usage include: Killing time, affection, problem sharing, sociability, and information (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). These fundamental needs are powerful motivators for Facebook utilization.

One of the many of the uses for Facebook center around the social network users’ profile. A users’ social network profile is the most important personal characteristic of online communities. The profile is a carefully crafted focal point with all the users’ information, likes, dislikes, pictures, career,

education, and relationship status. According to Dunne, Lawlor, and Rowley (2010), users have complete control of the content they share, which means they try to present themselves in positive ways and in some cases, the user “can aspire to an ideal-self through his/her SNSs profile” (p. 48). Mehdizadeh (2010) stated “online environments enable individuals to engage in a controlled setting where an ideal identity can be conveyed” (p. 358).

Information seeking is a popular use for Facebook. Sparrow, Liu, and Wegner (2011) stated that “we are becoming symbiotic with our computer tools, growing into interconnected systems that remember less by knowing information than by knowing where the information can be found” (p. 4). With Facebook, women have access to social information such as gatherings, meetings, birthdays, job listings, digital coupons, and personal ads.

The information women obtain via Facebook impacts real world social experiences. Cyber communities and online conversations often times become the centerpiece of real world discussions. Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2011) explained that “interaction that occurs face-to-face, is predicated on online information” (p. 876). Consider, for example, two women who before meeting in real life discovered each other through similar friends or Facebook groups online. In this case, the social information gleaned via Facebook becomes the foundation for their real world relationship. Facebook can be utilized for viable information because users are surrounded by friends, peers or co-workers with whom they are comfortable.

Facebook provides a trusted friends forum to open up and share emotional responses. According to Ellison et al. (2011), Facebook intrinsically facilitates “giving and receiving emotional support through one’s friend network” (p. 878). For example, a woman updating her status detailing her struggles with a belligerent child will usually elicit empathy and emotional support from her social network. Empathy towards others can easily be reciprocated by “liking” or offering emotional support in other ways such as commenting, poking, or sending private messages. Using Facebook as an emotional outlet to express frustrations or to share exciting news is commonplace, but it does not only occur between friends. After the famous Casey Anthony murder trial verdict, Facebook became the social epicenter for people to vent their emotions. According to Richey (2011), the discussion, predominately angry comments and frustrations, were most boisterous and visceral on Facebook.

The customizable nature of online identities results in hyper-awareness of a user’s digital self-image. According to Stefanone, Lackoff, and Rosen (2011), “online spaces such as social-network sites and media-sharing sites can be understood to heighten people’s consciousness of the ways in which their identities are socially constructed” (p. 43). In essence, when users see their ideal online character, some feel better about themselves in real life. According to Stefanone et al. (2011), “Rather than simply being the target of mediated messages, [SNS users] can see themselves as protagonists of mediated narratives who actively integrate themselves into a complex media ecosystem” (p. 43). To enhance their self-esteem, some individuals use Facebook to improve

upon their real world self-status. To attain this gratification, Facebook users can vicariously live through an ideal digital self in order to seek the reward of improved self-worth. According to a study by Gonzales and Hancock (2011), "Whereas a non-edited view of the self (i.e., mirror) is likely to decrease self-esteem, these findings suggest that the extra care involved in digital self-presentations may actually improve self-esteem" (p. 82). Therefore, a possible gratification obtained through Facebook use may be creating the optimal self.

Although self-esteem can be improved through Facebook's staged self-presentation, there are some potentially harmful side effects. According to Davis (2012), online identities on SNSs are customizable and easy to create, which can lead to self-multiplicity. Users can create cyber-selves who diverge from their true selves completely. For some users, the relative anonymity of maintaining online personas facilitates diversion and escape from real world difficulties. According to Muhr and Pederson (2012), some individuals create entirely fake online identities to avoid real-world problems and frustrations; they use SNSs to live vicariously through their alter-egos. Others use online social networking to empower themselves and reinforce established perceptions. Sometimes, however, the virtual world selves overlap with real world personalities and this can lead to confusion and the blurring of identity. Davis (2012) stated that the main problem with virtual and real world overlap is that "in some cases, online identities are so rooted in offline contexts that they require knowledge of those contexts in order to be interpreted" (p. 636).

Craig and Wright (2012) discovered that many users supplement their online Facebook interactions with face-to-face communication in order to clarify misunderstandings or simply to maintain relationships.

According to Craig and Wright (2012):

Social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, have become overwhelmingly popular in recent years, and previous research suggests that these sites aid individuals in the maintenance of preexisting relationships and provide opportunities for individuals to form relationships with new people via their connections with existing friends. (p. 119)

This literature review has provided background on the current research regarding women's uses and gratifications of Facebook. Most of these studies are quantitative in nature, which has mitigated the effectiveness of U&G research. Typical research studies created to measure U&G are constrained by the questions asked. According to Lometti, Reeves, & Byebee (1977), "One reason for these methodological inadequacies is that most studies use gratification dimensions defined *a priori* by the researcher" (323). Therefore, those U&G not selected by the researcher will not be measured, thus leading to incomplete or inaccurate conclusions.

Extant in-depth qualitative research regarding Facebook U&G has not kept pace with the rapidly growing network. As Facebook evolves, other U&G may gain more importance. According U&G research by Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan (2012), "Facebook is initially used for interpersonal communication and

then probably as a source of entertainment, thus demonstrating that motives for SNS use change over time” (p. 198). Therefore, as motives change, alternate research approaches and methodologies could be helpful to understand the U&G landscape of Facebook. This thesis seeks to answer the following questions that are in alignment with Herzog's original 1941 study:

RQ1: Do women use Facebook for an emotional release?

This question corresponds with Herzog's category of Emotional Release. Here, information is sought to assess whether or not women use Facebook for excitement, aggression, or the chance to cry. Additionally, do women use Facebook because they enjoy seeing the struggles of others because it makes them feel better knowing they are not alone and other people have problems too.

RQ2: Do women use Facebook as an escape?

This question corresponds with Herzog's category of Wishful Thinking. Do women use Facebook as an escape, to relive the past, or as a diversion from their daily routine?

RQ3: Do women use Facebook for political, social or life improvement information?

This question corresponds with Herzog's category of Information and Advice.

Methodology

Participants

While Herzog studied more than 100 women across the United States, in the interest of convenience and greater depth, this author chose to do in-depth personal interviews to apply Herzog's U&G findings to Facebook. The researcher attended several classes on campus to recruit participants. Twenty female students volunteered for the in-depth interviews. The demographic characteristics of the participants in this study were female college students from a small Midwestern university campus. Herzog studied only women, so women on campus were the preferred population. The Human Subjects approval is attached in Appendix I.

Participants in this study came primarily from general studies communication courses in the Department of Communication, such as Introduction to Mass Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Film Appreciation. Students enrolled in these courses came from a variety of majors across campus and were a variety of ages; therefore, the majority of the sample represented a diverse cross-section of female students. The sample was a non-random, convenience sample due to the availability of the participants. In order to procure volunteers, the researcher briefed potential participants about the nature of the research and asked them to submit their email address if they were interested in participating. Interviews were then scheduled at the subject's convenience. Students did not receive any compensation for their participation.

Research Design and Procedures

A qualitative research methodology using in-depth personal interviews was employed to procure Facebook patron's uses and gratifications. According to Kvale (1996), qualitative research interviews are based on the conversations of everyday life with structure and purpose defined and controlled by the researcher. Their goal is to explore in depth a respondent's experiences, feelings, and perspectives on both a factual and meaning level. According to Hesse-Biber (2006), "The in-depth interview seeks to understand the 'lived experiences' of the individual. We are interested in getting at the 'subjective' understanding an individual brings to a given situation or set of circumstances. In-depth interviews are issue-oriented" (p. 118).

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview paradigm during the questioning process. According to O'Leary (2004), semi-structured interviews contain specific questions, but at the same time, additional questions might be asked depending on the previous answer in order to clarify some points. Semi-structured interviews are not tightly controlled, which encourages spontaneity from the researcher and interviewee (Hesse-Biber, 2006). For this study, the researcher asked the same questions to all participants, although the order in which the questions were asked varied.

The questions replicated Herzog's original research methodology which she used to identify general appeal of radio listening. For this study, her interview

questions were adapted to Facebook. There were 15 questions total and each question corresponded to one of three categorical themes.

The first theme, emotional release, encompassed questions 1-6 and was intended to identify the emotional connections women have to Facebook.

Question 1 was intended to determine which types of emotions are primary factors of Facebook use. Questions 2-5 were intended to understand whether women used Facebook for other types of emotional release such as stress reduction, companionship, something to look forward to, and something to do. These four questions are all forms of emotional release as described by Herzog. Question 6 was intended to understand whether women used Facebook to see other people's problems as a means of mitigating their own troubles. See questions 1-6 below.

1. Do you use Facebook as an emotional outlet for excitement, aggression, or crying?
2. Do you use Facebook to reduce stress?
 - a. How does using Facebook enable you to de-stress?
3. Do you use Facebook to have company when nobody else is around?
4. Do you use Facebook because you can count on something happening every day?
 - a. Does this make you excited?
 - b. Does this give you something to look forward to?
5. Do you use Facebook because there is nothing else you can do at the time?
6. Do you use Facebook to see somebody else's problems?
 - a. Does seeing other people's problems on Facebook make you feel better about your troubles?
 - b. Do you feel better knowing other people have problems too?

The second theme, wishful thinking, encompassed questions 7-12 and was intended to identify whether women use Facebook as a means of escape. Questions 7-10 sought to determine if women use Facebook to fill the gaps in their lives by escaping to past experiences or imagining a better future through their Facebook interactions. Questions 11-12 were intended to understand whether women use Facebook to augment their reality by living through the successes of others and giving themselves the chance to start over. See questions 7-12 below.

7. Do you use Facebook for the purpose of nostalgia to reminisce about past experiences?
 - a. Do you revisit old photos?
 - b. Do you frequently talk to others about how things used to be?
8. Do you use Facebook to help you fill the gaps in your life?
 - a. Do you use Facebook to interact or communicate with others in ways missing from your life?
9. Do you use Facebook because you like to hear about work, romance, or family life, which has happened to you in the past?
10. Do you use Facebook because you like to hear about work, romance, or family life that might happen to you in the future?
11. Do you use Facebook as an escape from real life?
 - b. Do you become someone else?
12. Are you seeking lifestyle changes through Facebook?
 - a. Does Facebook give you the chance to start over?

The third theme, information and advice, encompassed questions 13-15 and was intended to identify whether women used Facebook to gain information or advice. Question 13 focused on political information gain via Facebook.

Question 14 intended to identify whether Facebook rendered advice to make a woman's life better or offered information to solve a problem. Question 15 intended to identify women's uses of Facebook for social information regarding friends, family, co-workers etc. See questions 13-15 below.

13. Do you use Facebook to help you learn political information?
 - a. How do you learn about politics on Facebook?
14. Do you use Facebook to get advice or life improvement information?
 - a. If something came up in your life would you refer to Facebook friends or resources as a guide?
 - b. Do you find it helpful to your own life to see how other people in the Facebook community solve their problems?
15. Do you use Facebook to keep informed of your friends' social happenings?
 - a. How do you stay informed?

Before each interview, the researcher explained the parameters of the questioning process in detail. The subjects were asked to sign a consent form prior to their participation. In order to ensure accuracy, the interviews were digitally recorded. The recording was transcribed and coded at the conclusion of the interview. The digital recording was permanently erased with a seven pass secure delete after the interview transcription was completed. Results were compared with Herzog's study to determine similarities and/or differences of U&G between the 1940's radio programs and today's social media, Facebook.

Discussion & Findings

Herzog (1941) found three uses and gratifications for radio serial listeners. Primarily it was used for emotional release, wishful thinking, and information and

advice. These three U&G were adapted to investigate why students use Facebook. The questions asked were based on Herzog's original methodology and adapted for Facebook. In this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 20 female college students. After analyzing the research, all three of Herzog's original U&G have emerged as relevant to Facebook to some degree. Although this study is qualitative in nature, the researcher has categorized the results in tables so the reader can get a cursory understanding of the Facebook U&G. The percentages from the tables are intended to supplement the in-depth interview narratives and are intended to be viewed in the context of the qualitative explanation, rather than stand-alone data. An in-depth explanation and comparison of these results to Herzog's findings can be found in the discussion portion of this research. The Facebook questions were divided into three categorical U&G themes explicated from Herzog's findings. The tables below will be explained in the research that follows.

Table 1. Questions 1-6 were categorized as emotional release.

Theme 1: Emotional Release	
Reason for using Facebook	Percentage of respondents
As an emotional outlet for excitement, aggression or crying	60%
To reduce stress	30%
To have company when nobody else is around	65%
Because I can count on something happening every day	35%
Because there is nothing else to do	60%
To see somebody else's problems	65%

Table 2. Questions 7-12 were categorized as wishful thinking

Theme 2: Wishful Thinking	
Reason for using Facebook	Percentage of respondents
For the purpose of nostalgia to reminisce about the past	80%
To help me fill in the gaps in my life	50%
Because I like to hear about work, romance, or family life which has happened to you in the past	80%
Because I like to hear about work, romance, or family life that might happen to me in the future	20%
As an escape from real life	55%
Seeking lifestyle changes	10%

Table 3. Questions 13-15 were categorized as information and advice

Theme 3: Information & Advice	
Reason for using Facebook	Percentage of respondents
To help me learn political information	50%
To help me get advice or life improvement information	50%
To keep informed of my friends' social happenings	100%

Exploration of research questions

RQ1: Do women use Facebook for an emotional release?

Question 1 results indicated that 12 out of 20 (60%) women used Facebook for emotional release. One woman explained she used Facebook to “share my frustration when I had a bad day.” A different interviewee explained she used Facebook “to update my status and post exciting news like getting a good grade on a test.” The feedback of peers and viewing photos were popular uses that led to excitement. Several interviewees described the exciting emotional rush of leaving comments and getting responses to messages, pictures, and “likes” on their wall from friends. These findings echo Herzog’s results which found emotional release was an important listening factor. Her findings indicated 50% of interviewees became “very excited” from listening to the radio programs.

Question 2 results indicated 6 out of 20 (30%) women used Facebook to reduce stress. Only one interviewee utilized Facebook for an outlet to cry. In contrast, Herzog's study found radio listeners often used radio serials for the purpose of releasing pent up anxieties and stress in the form of crying. A possible explanation for the lack of the crying emotional release or display of sadness on Facebook may be attributed to the nature of Facebook as a public forum where people can be reticent to post sad or depressing information about themselves to avoid embarrassment to save face. One woman explained "I don't want people to see my problems, so I only post positive or exciting things."

Although most women interviewed do not use Facebook to cry for stress release, Facebook was still utilized to relieve stress in other ways such as looking at pictures and watching the news feed. One woman said "looking at pictures calms me down, it's very relaxing." Another woman described using the news feed to reduce stress as "cathartic because it allows me to reach out to other people and see that we're all going through something."

Question 3 results indicated 13 out of 20 (65%) women used Facebook for company when nobody else is around. For these women, having an ecosystem of friends readily available in one place provided emotional fulfillment. One woman explained "I like to use Facebook for company when I'm feeling alone. It's just so convenient and it's always an option when I need someone to talk to." Another woman explained "on Facebook I am connected to my friends, so if I need company I just sign in and I don't feel alone anymore because there are always conversations going on with people I know." Another woman used

Facebook for company when in need of acknowledgement. She explained “I like using Facebook because people pay attention to me.”

Similarly, Herzog found women in the 1940’s regularly listened to radio for companionship. For example, some listeners enjoyed the radio company because they felt it raised their own social level.

Question 4 results indicated 7 out of 20 (35%) women used Facebook because they could count on something happening every day. One woman explained “it’s nice to know that people are waiting for me and looking forward to what I have to say.” Another woman described “getting new friend requests, seeing if people ‘like’ my posts and receiving picture comments gives me something to look forward to.” Facebook is constantly in flux as users are continuously updating profiles, status, pictures, and comments. Although some of the interviewees lamented the menial nature of things posted on Facebook, they continued to patronize it.

This compares favorably with Herzog’s findings. Herzog found listeners enjoyed the ever changing trials and tribulations with their favorite characters and shows as it gave them something to look forward to. Herzog found listeners were enthralled by the programs and wanted their shows to continue indefinitely as they experienced “pseudo-catharsis” through listening.

Question 5 results indicated that many women use Facebook simply because they are bored. A majority of women interviewed (12 out of 20, 60%) used Facebook because there is nothing else to do at the time. The women turned to Facebook seeking to “kill time when I get bored”. To these women,

Facebook functions as an instrument used to pass time between class, at the doctors office, or waiting in the checkout line. One woman described using Facebook when bored as “second nature, because it gives me something to do. Even when I am supposed to be doing something but I get bored like during class, I’ll start checking Facebook.” The most popular Facebook uses to reduce boredom are to play games, look at photos and “creep” on other people’s profiles. Creeping is a term synonymous with stalking used to describe surreptitious surveillance of Facebook members via the gathering of information, searching friend’s lists, picture viewing or profile viewing (Trottier, 2012). One woman explained, “when I’m bored I get on Facebook and creep around and check up on ex-boyfriends and stuff to see what they’re up to.”

Question 6 results indicated that 13 out of 20 (65%) women used Facebook to see somebody else’s problems. However, four of the respondents that used Facebook to see other people’s problems did not do so to enjoy other’s suffering or to make themselves feel superior. These four women’s agenda for viewing other’s problems was to offer solutions because they were legitimately concerned about their friends’ well-being rather than rejoicing in their friends’ struggles. One woman explained “it makes me more depressed to see my friends’ problems and seeing other people having problems makes me want to do more to help them. I can empathize with them but I don’t feel better.” Furthermore, these four respondents said it burdens them and makes them sad when their friends post their problems. One woman explained “when I see my friends having problems I feel sympathy and sadness.”

A distinction should be made here to highlight inherent differences of radio and Facebook. Radio listeners do not actually know the characters in the shows, and although they may develop a rapport with the characters, the actor's suffering would not be as personal to the listener, especially since the show is fiction. However, people on Facebook are typically friends, peers, or relatives expressing real hardships, problems, and frustrations.

Nevertheless, minus those four women, 45% of Facebook users enjoyed the struggles of others primarily to drown out their own misfortune. Several of the women enjoyed the struggles of others because it reaffirmed nobody is perfect. A woman explained "when you see people in real life they don't go around announcing their problems, but on Facebook they do so it kind of puts things in perspective and you realize everyone has problems."

These results are in line with Herzog's findings. She found if listeners were depressed it makes them feel better to know that other people have hardships too. Henceforth, the listeners' gratification was obtained by recognizing that even though serial characters are smart, they still have to deal with suffering.

Most of the women interviewed enjoyed the struggles of others posted on Facebook because it made them feel like they were not struggling alone and it helped put their problems in perspective. One woman said "I like to hear other people's problems and I like to hear other people struggling because it makes me feel like my life doesn't suck so bad." The concept that people receive gratification from mutual problem sharing was identified by Herzog as "the union of sufferers."

RQ2: Do women use Facebook as an escape?

Question 7 results indicated 16 out of 20 (80%) women used Facebook for the purpose of escape into nostalgia to reminisce about past experiences. Most of the women used pictures to rekindle past memories. One woman explained “I like to look at old photos and it reminds me of the good times I used to have with my friends.” Others use the timeline feature which serves as a diary with past comments and conversations in chronological order. A woman described using the timeline to relive the past; “I use the timeline and click through the years and see pictures and status updates or comments I’ve posted and I can live in those past experiences again.” Many women enjoyed looking back as it allowed them to escape current life complications and think about how things used to be. One woman explained “when I look at past experiences on Facebook I think back and things were so much easier then.”

Herzog’s study found radio listeners liked to revive the past to take them back to more pleasant times. Listeners sought out stories reviving the past memories of “home” and recalled familiar and comfortable thoughts when things seemed less complicated.

Question 8 results indicated that 10 out of 20 (50%) women used Facebook to help fill the gaps in their lives. The gaps were described as desires missing from every day life. For example, several women sought out friendships or relationships via Facebook to fill relational or social gaps. One woman explained “a lot of times I go through the motions of everyday life and can’t stay in touch with my friends so I get on Facebook when I’m missing that

connectedness.” Since social networking is the essence of Facebook, this was not surprising. But other women used Facebook to fill personality gaps such as shyness. A woman who wished she was more gregarious explained “Facebook introduces you to a person without actually having to meet them first, which makes it easier for me to make friends.” For these women, Facebook bridged the gaps and allowed them to fulfill their social needs.

Herzog found the gaps are filled with wishful thinking. She explained listeners superimpose themselves upon the character in the story and they accept the story as a substitute for real life. In this type of experience the distinction between imagined reality and actual reality was eliminated by wishful thinking. Women using Facebook shared wishful thinking experiences as well. One woman described, “when my friend announced her engagement, I was happy for her but it made me wish I was getting married too and I wondered when my time would come.”

Question 9 results indicated the majority (80%) of women used Facebook because they like to hear about work, romance, or family life which has happened to them in the past. The responses to this question did not differentiate from question 7 regarding nostalgia.

Question 10 results indicated 4 out of 20 (20%) women used Facebook because they liked to hear about work, romance, or family life that might happen to them in the future. One woman explained “when my friend updated her Facebook status saying she got into graduate school it made me think I could do it too.” Another woman said “in the past couple of years most of my friends have

gotten either pregnant or engaged and that made me think about my future.”

Although some of the women interviewed described using Facebook as a means to plan or daydream about future job opportunities or romantic relationships, most respondents use Facebook for the present or the past experiences.

Herzog found women remained optimistic about the future through radio serial listening. By exposing themselves to positive radio stories, listeners held onto the hope that a “guiding light” may burn for them also (152).

Question 11 results indicated 11 out of 20 (55%) women used Facebook as an escape. These women explained Facebook helped distract them from real world issues with a more playful, benign reality online. A woman explained “when I feel overwhelmed with my homework or my drama, I go on Facebook so I don’t have to think about everything going on in my life.” Some enjoyed the window into their friends’ lives as it allowed them to live vicariously through their experiences. One woman explained “I am a homebody, so Facebook is my outlet to the world without having to go anywhere but I can still see what everyone is doing.” While most women acknowledged they never fully escape from real world selves, Facebook gave them satisfaction by providing an alternate reality of sorts. A woman explained “I don’t really escape but I do post pictures and update my status to make my life seem more exiting than it really is.”

Herzog explained listeners escape to seek glorification of their own lives. There is a desire to use the stories as a means of duplicating what one already has. “The added quantity provides a substitute for an intensity of experience” (145). In agreement with the Facebook results, Herzog too found examples of

complete escape to be infrequent among the women studied. Essentially, respondents use radio programs and Facebook to get similar experiences they enjoy in real life.

Question 12 results indicated that 2 out of 20 (10%) women used Facebook for lifestyle changes. For some women, changing themselves in the real world is difficult but Facebook allows the user to create and manage their image to represent an ideal self and start over. One woman explained “I only put good pictures on my Facebook page and I control who sees my profile and people can’t post anything without me seeing it first. When I moved here I deleted most of my friends and started over.” Another woman created multiple Facebook accounts as a way of starting over. She explained, “I have multiple Facebook accounts so I can hide my secrets because I don’t want my family to see what I post and who my friends are.”

Herzog found women used radio to escape into plots. The listeners fully immersed themselves into the narrative, and the story content served as means to wishfully change the listener’s life.

RQ3: Do women use Facebook for political, social or life improvement information?

Question 13 results indicated that 10 out of 20 (50%) women used Facebook for political purposes. Several women complained that Facebook was flooded with vicious arguments and propaganda during the 2012 presidential election which made them reluctant to log on. Conversely, other women started discussions, embraced causes, and helped campaign for their favorite candidate.

One woman explained “I post and read a lot about politics on Facebook. I like to see other people’s perspectives and post controversial political stories that people may not have heard of.” Other women joined political groups to raise awareness. One woman explained “for the past two years I’ve been involved with a women’s group on Facebook that supports and gives advice to get women involved in politics.” Although most of the women admitted the political information they get on Facebook can be biased, they still consume it. One woman explained “there is just so much left-wing and right-wing fighting going on, I do learn some things, but the arguments really turn me off.

Herzog found 30% of radio listeners were interested in politics.

Question 14 results indicated 10 out of 20 (50%) the women interviewed used Facebook for life improvement information or advice. Examples of life improvement uses include joining groups and organizations to better themselves, their communities, or to raise awareness and fight for what they believe in. One woman explained “I have been trying to live a healthier lifestyle so I joined a Facebook support group for dieting. I also joined a group for creative fashion ideas on the cheap to help me save money and learn about things like that.”

Facebook users get advice in two ways. The first way to obtain advice via Facebook is by directly asking in comments or status to petition feedback from friends. A woman explained “I asked my friends if I should go to graduate school. I was hoping get advice from friends that had been to graduate school and could give me ideas about what to expect.” The second way is by observing the patterns of behavior of others. Facebook users can observe comments or posts

about how their friends deal with their problems, and because they trust and value their friends' opinions, they may apply the solutions learned on Facebook to their own lives when a similar situation comes up. One woman explained "I do use Facebook to see how friends are dealing with issues, because I kind of live in a bubble, so it helps me to understand what's important to them and what they value in their lives."

As explained by Herzog below, if the researcher taken into consideration "potential advice", the results of women using Facebook for advice could have been even greater. Herzog found a majority of listeners learned something from listening to the radio stories. However, when asked whether any of the stories had ever indicated to them what to do in a particular situation or how to get along with people, only one third said they had. The reason for the drop lies in potential advice rather than concrete application. Although the listeners obtained the advice from the serials, they were not yet presented with an opportunity to use it.

Question 15 results indicated that 20 out of 20 (100%) woman interviewed used Facebook to keep informed of their friends' social happenings. The women used the news feed, status updates, and messaging to obtain general information. One woman explained "it's really fun to see what other people are doing. People post things because they want others to see their lives." Women also used Facebook get social information about relationships, gossip, rumors, events, and birthdays. One woman explained "I use Facebook for social information all the time. That is the most used feature for me. I find out what people are doing for spring break, when friends are taking tests, who is dating

whom, and to have relationships with friends.” The fact that 100% of women use Facebook for social information is not surprising since Facebook was created for the sole purpose to share and connect with friends.

For comparison, Herzog’s study found women used information from radio serials in social situations to have something to talk about. The radio programs and characters often became the centerpiece of real world discussions. For example, “a listener that felt her life was too narrow tuned into the serials to have something in common to talk about with her mother-in-law” (142).

Limitations and Future Study

This study was designed to explore whether women’s U&G from 1940’s radio listening could be translated to women’s Facebook behavior. While to a certain extent all of Herzog’s original U&G emerged through women’s Facebook use, there is still more research needed.

Future research would be wise to incorporate middle aged women and seniors in their studies. Although the women Facebook users interviewed for this study are in the 18-29 demographic, (which comprises the largest individual group of Facebook users) middle-aged women and seniors have been steadily increasing their presence on Facebook. Examining the U&G of these emerging demographics would enrich the research community. Furthermore, exploring men’s U&G would be useful to fully compare and contrast differences and identify any correlations between gender and Facebook use.

A few interviewees said they were addicted to Facebook. The researcher has no knowledge of the veracity of their claims or what constitutes “addiction”, but it provokes some interesting thoughts. What role does Facebook addiction play with regard to U&G? Are some Facebook media consumer’s U&G a result of habitual behavior where users no longer consciously seek fulfillment based on U&G, but rather routine? Do women feel a compulsion to use Facebook? This research would shed light on what appears to be a real phenomenon based on the responses of interview participants.

Facebook is constantly evolving from a technological perspective. New applications, features, and services are being added regularly. In fact, the news feed has proven to be one of the most popular features but it didn’t exist until two years after Facebook was created. With the advent of new features, the potential exists that different Facebook U&G may be identified in the future as technological advances alter the Facebook landscape. Ultimately, the Facebook audience, with over one billion users worldwide will continue to be a copious resource for future communication research.

Conclusion

This research study was designed to explore whether women’s 1940’s radio serial listening U&G would still bear relevance when adapted to Facebook. Perhaps the most interesting finding for the researcher is how similar women’s Facebook U&G are to radio, even after all these years. Emotional release, wishful thinking and information and advice all proved relevant when applied to Facebook. The fact that Herzog’s 70- year-old U&G findings still hold true after

vast technological changes, demographic shifts, and a transformed gender landscape is intriguing.

These findings are also a testament to the effectiveness of the U&G theory as a research tool. As Ruggiero explained, the U&G theory is extremely flexible and has been applied to the initial stages of each new mass communications medium. Facebook is no exception, as U&G adaptability has been reaffirmed by this research. The U&G approach is well suited for analyzing Facebook particularly because its interactive features can be easily identified and measured.

Herzog's findings, along with U&G research done by more recent scholars were proven to be mostly accurate by this study. The in-depth interviews yielded convincing evidence that Facebook is important for relationship building and relationship maintenance, as described by Valkenburg et al. (2006) and Acar (2008). Other Facebook U&G findings discussed in the literature review that paralleled Herzog's results and were reaffirmed by the in-depth interviews are as follows: Facebook is used for entertainment and self-status (Park et al., 2009), killing time, affection, problem sharing (Quan-Haase et al., 2010), emotional support (Ellison et al., 2011), and information (Sparrow et al., 2011).

This research indicated few women actually start over, or become someone else by creating an online identity. According to the interview results, women rarely use Facebook to diverge significantly from their real-world selves. Instead, women use Facebook to improve upon their real world self-status. For

the most part, women employ Facebook U&G to supplement their lives, to empower themselves, and reinforce established perceptions.

Overall women were most likely to utilize emotional release as the preferred Facebook gratification. While the advice and wishful thinking themes provided rich feedback, the enthusiasm of the interviewees when describing their emotional connection to Facebook was more passionate and palpable. During the interviews it became clear that Facebook was more than just a social network of friends; these women were genuinely excited about the Facebook ecosystem and they were eager to elaborate on their emotional connections and experiences. Throughout the interviews, the respondents emphasized their reliance on Facebook for emotional stimulation and release. When the women struggled, their network of friends on Facebook offered empathy, and functioned as an emotional support group. The convenience of having a community of friends at their fingertips gave emotional comfort to the women. When the women felt alone, they turned to Facebook and for companionship. When the women needed something to look forward to, Facebook was there. When the women were bored and had nothing else to do, they logged onto Facebook to pass time. When the women were excited, they shared their happiness with their friends. Ultimately, for the women interviewed, Facebook was a constant; both a conduit and a destination that could be relied upon to satisfy their emotional release.

While Facebook's U&G findings compared favorably to Herzog's U&G, the interactive nature of Facebook potentially lends itself to more diverse U&G possibilities. Whereas radio serials render one-way communication (as

evidenced from Herzog's study), Facebook offers multiple channels of communication such as instant messaging, "liking", commenting, groups, photo tagging, poking, games, apps, and status updates. While radio listeners have no ability to directly influence serial characters or programs, on Facebook, the users can easily be influenced since they are both the media makers and the media consumers. This user generated content sets Facebook apart from other mass mediums. Facebook's technological versatility allows its users to create the content that serves as gratifications for others.

Appendix I



Human Subjects Protection Program
Ward Edwards 1800
Warrensburg, MO 64093
Office 660-543-4621
Fax 660-543-4778
www.ucmo.edu

2/5/2013

Christian Hunold

cah95130@ucmo.edu

Dear Christian Hunold,

Your research project, 'Facebook: A Uses and Gratifications Study', was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee on 2/5/2013. This approval is valid through 2/5/2014. Your informed consent is also approved until 2/5/2014.

Please note that you are required to notify the committee in writing of any changes in your research project and that you may not implement changes without prior approval of the committee. You must also notify the committee in writing of any change in the nature or the status of the risks of participating in this research project.

Should any adverse events occur in the course of your research (such as harm to a research participant), you must notify the committee in writing immediately. In the case of any adverse event, you are required to stop the research immediately unless stopping the research would cause more harm to the participants than continuing with it.

At the conclusion of your project, you will need to submit a completed Project Status Form to this office. You must also submit the Project Status Form if you wish to continue your research project beyond its initial expiration date.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the number above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Janice Putnam Ph.D. RN".

Janice Putnam Ph.D., RN
Associate Dean of The Graduate School
putnam@ucmo.edu

Appendix II

1. Do you use Facebook as an emotional outlet for excitement, aggression, or crying?
2. Do you use Facebook to reduce stress?
 - a. How does using Facebook enable you to de-stress?
3. Do you use Facebook to have company when nobody else is around?
4. Do you use Facebook because you can count on something happening every day?
 - a. Does this make you excited?
 - b. Does this give you something to look forward to?
5. Do you use Facebook because there is nothing else you can do at the time?
6. Do you use Facebook to see somebody else's problems?
 - a. Does seeing other people's problems on Facebook make you feel better about your troubles?
 - c. Do you feel better knowing other people have problems too?
7. Do you use Facebook for the purpose of nostalgia to reminisce about past experiences?
 - c. Do you revisit old photos?
 - d. Do you frequently talk to others about how things used to be?
8. Do you use Facebook to help you fill the gaps in your life?
 - c. Do you use Facebook to interact or communicate with others in ways missing from your life?
9. Do you use Facebook because you like to hear about work, romance, or family life, which has happened to you in the past?
10. Do you use Facebook because you like to hear about work, romance, or family life that might happen to you in the future?
11. Do you use Facebook as an escape from real life?
 - d. Do you become someone else?
12. Are you seeking lifestyle changes through Facebook?
 - b. Does Facebook give you the chance to start over?

13. Do you use Facebook to help you learn political information?
 - a. How do you learn about politics on Facebook?
14. Do you use Facebook to get advice or life improvement information?
 - a. If something came up in your life would you refer to Facebook friends or resources as a guide?
 - b. Do you find it helpful to your own life to see how other people in the Facebook community solve their problems?
15. Do you use Facebook to keep informed of your friends' social happenings?
 - a. How do you stay informed?

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