Uses & Gratifications of a Facebook Media Sharing Group

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores uses and gratifications of a content community on a social network service – a music video sharing group on Facebook. In a two-stage study, 20 users first generated words or phrases to describe how they used the group, and what they enjoyed about their use. These phrases were coded into 34 questionnaire items that were then completed by 57 new participants. Factor analysis on this data revealed four gratifications: contribution; discovery; social interaction and entertainment. These factors are interpreted and discussed, leading to design implications and guidelines aimed at informing the design of future online services that combine media sharing with social interaction to create online systems based on a rich and meaningful object-centered sociality.

Author Keywords
Social Media; Music; Groups; Uses & Gratifications.

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.3 [Information Interfaces and Presentation]: Group and Organization Interfaces: Web-based interaction.

General Terms
Design.

INTRODUCTION
Social media is core part of the modern Internet experience. According to Forrester research, 75% of Internet users accessed social media in summer 2008, up from 56% in 2007 [12]. More recent figures indicate that between 79% (Europe) and 86% (US) of online adults engage with social media [8] and Facebook, currently the most popular site, reports more than 900 million monthly active users [9]. To achieve this widespread appeal, Social Network Sites (SNS) focus on enabling their users to communicate and interact with one another in diverse ways and for diverse ends. Indeed, Facebook excels at this, offering a wide range of features including: browsing user profiles; direct messaging services; casual gaming; posting media content and; participating in online groups and forums. Beyond being highly successful, researchers have argued that SNS exert a positive effect on the society by, for example, allowing individuals to manage a wide network of weak ties and thus

boost their bridging social capital [2]. Others have gone further and suggested that SNS have the potential to fundamentally change the nature of our social lives, on both interpersonal and community levels [4].

However, the rapid advent of SNS has raised questions as to the fundamental motivations driving their use – what makes them so popular and what needs are they meeting? One approach to answering such questions has been to adopt methods typically used to explore the motivations underlying the consumption of more traditional media. In particular, Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G) [21], which relates to the how and why of media use, has been extensively deployed. For instance, Lampe et al. [14] used a U&G approach to show that different motivations for use were associated with different patterns of contribution in online content generation communities. Similarly, Joinson [11] studied Facebook and identified a core set of fundamental uses and gratifications for the site while Park et al. [16] focused on Facebook Groups and uncovered a distinct set of uses and gratifications specific to this feature.

This last study highlights a key issue, eloquently expressed by Smock et al. [20] in their argument that uses and gratifications in SNS are relevant not to entire sites, but to specific *unbundled* subsets of site features, such as status updates, messaging services or media sharing. This assertion helps ground the observation that SNS are a rapidly moving target on which novel uses dynamically evolve as new features are introduced. However, the rollout of such functionality is typically tied not to observed user needs, but to technical factors such as increases in computational power, network bandwidth and the sophistication of web technologies. Thus, it is often unclear what value SNS users gain from novel features and services. This paper argues that in order to understand the true worth of such extensions, explaining their use and guiding their evolution, focused investigations that consider them at a granular, unbundled, level are currently required.

Reflecting this point, this paper investigates a widespread interaction pattern in SNS - sharing social media objects such as videos and engaging in conversations around them - that has been enabled due to recent technological advancements. This behavior represents a form of object-centered sociality - a term proposed by Knorr-Cetina [13]. This paper argues that forums organized around such artifacts as a *focus* will engender novel behaviors, not only in the media sharing practices overtly supported but also in

the type and nature of the interpersonal connections fostered among members [6].

We seek to investigate the veracity of this assertion through a study that makes three contributions. These are, firstly, to explore and extend the claim that examining unbundled SNS features exposes novel aspects of use. Secondly, to offer a nuanced account of the role that social media objects play in creating communities on SNS. Specifically, this paper adopts the position that such objects, in contrast to profile and user information, can become an axis around which novel forms of online social interaction occur [15] and seeks to provide a first characterization of this behavior. Finally, this paper synthesizes this material to identify design guidelines to inform the creation of future SNS media sharing communities or social apps. To achieve these objectives, this paper reviews related work and then describes a multi-method analysis of 'Saturday Morning Classics' (SMC) a small Facebook group (comprised of friends and friends-of-friends) dedicated to sharing music videos. It closes with a discussion and a set of design implications derived from this work.

RELATED WORK

Although SNS are widespread, understanding why and how people use them remains a substantial challenge. Researchers have suggested that uses and gratifications theory is a useful technique to address this problem. For instance, Joinson [11] identified seven unique gratifications for Facebook use: social connection; shared identities; photographs; content; social investigation; social network surfing and; status updating. While such sweeping conclusions have value, recent work has argued that a finer grained approach may be more informative – essentially the notion is that, in complex services, different features or feature sets may meet very different needs [20]. Park et al.'s [16] study of Facebook groups supports this point. Their U&G study identified four unique factors (socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking and information) that differ substantially from those described in Joinson's work. The current paper seeks to explore this issue further by investigating (as Park et al. suggest) whether groups with different types of focus will support different motives for (and elicit different patterns of) use.

Kaplan and Haenlein categorize SNS (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and content communities (e.g. Youtube, Wikipedia) as distinct forms of social media [12]. Although extensive research has been carried out in these two areas [e.g. 4, 18], services at their intersection have attracted relatively little attention. Today, enabled by inter-operable media sharing tools, such hybrids are becoming increasingly common. For example, services such as Pinterest (pinterest.com/) allow users to curate and share media from various Internet sources around self-selected topics (e.g. art, recipes, grooming, etc). Similarly Foursquare (foursquare.com/) allows strangers to engage in conversations about and around specific places. Both

services include their own SNS features but also integrate with Facebook to ensure wide dispersal and dissemination of user activities. Motivated by such innovative examples, this paper suggests that content communities on SNS represent a novel type of group that is not only likely to elicit interesting usage patterns but that is also worthy of independent study in and of itself.

This paper focuses on music videos, social media objects that are commonly shared and discussed on SNS. This prevalence reflects the fact that music is a ubiquitous part of our everyday lives [3], serving as a powerful tool for expressing, understanding and sharing identity [1]. Indeed, although the consumption of music is typically seen as a leisure activity, music and related discussions have also been portrayed as important elements in creating and maintaining friendship networks [19]. Online communities are also reported to boost desirable exposure to novel music [7]. With these facts in mind, this paper focuses on music sharing as an example activity through which to explore the broader space of content communities on SNS.

'SATURDAY MORNING CLASSICS' FACEBOOK GROUP

SMC is an online experiment to construct and study a small music sharing community. It is an open Facebook group created specifically for this research in February 2011. It takes the form of a forum for posting and discussing "classic" music videos hosted on media archiving websites such as Youtube and Vimeo. As a specific type of content was targeted, the group was seeded with initial media by the researchers in order to develop critical mass in the community [10]. The group was initially populated through direct invitations but later expanded through referrals by existing members and via approving direct requests to join the group. The group's privacy settings were 'Open' so that new members could easily join and current members could broadcast their activities publically on their newsfeeds.

To support study of this group, a Facebook application was developed. This scanned through the group and extracted attributes such as number of posts, relationship graphs within the group and the degree of social interaction (indicated by likes and comments). The open privacy settings facilitated direct access to this data - it was entirely public. As of May 2012, the group had 167 members, who had posted 833 items relating to classic music from various genres, regions and cultures. These posts elicited 836 "likes" from other members and 355 comments. After establishing these characteristics, study of the group took place via surveys to understand the uses and gratifications in a typical 2-stage process [11]. In Study 1, users were asked to generate lists of words or phrases that represented their uses and gratifications. In Study 2, a questionnaire based on these items was generated, numerical responses captured and factor analysis used to reveal clustered profiles of distinct uses and gratifications.

STUDY 1: EXPLORATORY STAGE

Participants

Participants were selected from a list of group members sorted according to the frequency with which they posted videos. Requests to complete an online survey were sent out to every alternate individual in this sequence in an attempt to ensure that responses were elicited from users with different levels of engagement with the group. Users who had never posted videos were excluded from this preliminary study to ensure that feedback was captured from those who had directly engaged with the group. Ultimately, 35 invitations were distributed and 20 complete responses returned.

Materials

The online survey included demographics (age, gender, occupation, nationality) and usage measures for Facebook and the SMC group (time spent, visit frequency, number of friends, length of usage). We adapted Stafford's free text entry questions [21] (also deployed by Joinson [11]), and asked participants to respond to the following questions:

> What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about what you enjoy most when using the SMC Facebook group?

> What other words describe what you enjoy about using the SMC Facebook group?

> Using single, easy-to-understand terms, what do you use the SMC Facebook group for?

> What uses of the SMC Facebook group are most important to you?

Results

Respondents answered the questions in words and phrases. As in prior work [11], two raters collaboratively sorted the responses based on affinity and identified themes from the emergent clusters. The broad themes identified were: *discovery* (e.g. exposure to music from different cultures, finding rare songs); *social interaction* (likes, browsing user profiles); *content* (e.g. listening to music, watching videos) and *nostalgia* (e.g. remembering past events and people).

STUDY 2: IDENTIFYING USES & GRATIFICATIONS

Item Generation

In total 34 items[1] were generated with six to eight items drawn from each of the four themes identified in Study 1. Duplicate items were discarded and wording was kept as close to the source content as possible. A 7-point Likert scale, labeled from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' was used to elicit all responses.

Participants

Survey requests were sent out to 85 group members who had not participated in Study 1. 57 participants responded to these requests and completed the survey - 37 males and 20

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[1] Complete survey available on request to corresponding author

females. 25 members were in the age group of 21-30, 29 were aged between 31-40 and three were more than 40 years old. More than 80% of the respondents had been using Facebook for more than 2 years; 65% had been SMC members for between 6-9 months and 27% for between 3-6 months. We interpreted this to indicate familiarity with the SNS features and the SMC group in particular.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis on this data was conducted. The initial analysis (varimax rotation) yielded 7 components with Eigenvalues over 1, explaining 79% of the variance. However, an examination of the Scree plot's "elbow" and the distribution of unique loadings led to further reduction and four factors (explaining 61% of the variance) were eventually retained. These were termed: *contribution*, *discovery*, *social interaction* and *entertainment*. Based on the convention of using only loadings greater than 0.5, six markers were identified for Factors 1 and 2, five for Factor 3 and three for Factor 4. A total of 14 items were discarded. The factors are described in Tables 1-4 and as follows:

Factor 1 contained items that relate to participating in the group by *contributing* to and *commenting* on the content. Members reported valuing sharing their knowledge of music by posting videos and participating in conversations around music. These conversations were in the form of comments, often as suggestions about similar or related content or expressions of appreciation about particular media items. This factor relates to users who viewed themselves as collaboratively contributing to an archive of music.

Factor 2 contained items that refer to *discovery* of new music. Items relating to discovering rare songs and music from foreign cultures loaded most strongly. In addition, users valued re-discovering music they had not listened to in a long time. Interestingly, items related to immediate emotional responses also loaded in this factor, suggesting that discoveries often triggered a pleasant emotional response.

Factor 3 contained items related to *social* aspects of using the group. Receiving appreciation (via 'likes') scored the highest loading while showing such appreciation also featured, although not as strongly. Other items loading strongly related to accessing the public profiles of others and to check for mutual friends of SMC posters whom they did not know.

Factor 4 contained items related to *entertainment*. Members appreciated the music genre ("classic") that the group represents. This finding complements Park et al.'s [16] notion that entertainment is a valued gratification reported by users of Facebook groups. Interestingly, listening to music posted by friends also loaded in this factor.

DISCUSSION

The study described in this paper set out to reveal uses and gratifications pertaining to media sharing groups on a social network. The results revealed four main uses and gratifications that people derived from the SMC Facebook group: contribution, discovery, social interaction and

entertainment. The latter two match two of the factors uncovered in Park et al.'s [16] study of Facebook groups. However, the current work's focus on groups as content communities resulted in the emergence of two novel factors: contribution and discovery. This suggests that media sharing groups represent a unique context, in terms of the motivations that drive use, in social networks. It is worth unpacking and discussing the factors in detail. In order to do so most effectively, we merge qualitative observations of behaviors on the group with data from the U&G study.

The fact that contribution served as a key gratification among group members indicated a pleasurable commitment to the social archival, curation and discussion of media content. Conversations on the group often took playful non-verbal forms like 'replying' to content by posting semantically similar content – users responded to media by posting complimentary (or occasionally contradictory) content. This dynamic attracted considerable attention on the site – post threads tended to develop in rapid spurts of activity. It also served a key role in developing and fleshing out particular topics, memes and (ultimately) the group identity. These behaviors suggest, in line with Knorr-Cetina's [13] assertions about object-oriented sociality, that social interaction around media objects has the potential to instantiate in novel forms. An SNS content community allows people to directly and engagingly express their (good) taste and demonstrate their knowledge of a topic. It is worth noting that this finding is likely to have been influenced by the relatively tightly knit nature of SMC – it was largely composed of friends and friends-of-friends.

The discovery of new content was a second novel driver for participation in the group. This is obviously tightly tied to the group's topic – musical discovery is a popular leisure activity both on and offline [1]. It also relates to Garg et al.'s notion [7] that, in the presence of peers, people engage in discovery through observational learning. The social mechanisms of posting, commenting, viewing and following in the group facilitated this activity and stand in stark contrast to the algorithm-based recommendation features common to online music services such as Grooveshark (grooveshark.com) and Last.fm (last.fm). In other words, musical discovery in the group was socially mediated and this proved to be compelling enough to serve as a strong gratification and driver for use. The cultural diversity of the group members (14 nationalities were represented) also contributed to this factor by spurring members' interest in the broad origins of the posted content.

The third factor identified, 'social interaction', mirrored in Park et al's [16] work, also links to what Strafford identified as a gratification that differentiates the Internet from more traditional media – its capacity to serve as a social environment [21]. Direct observations of behaviors on the group and examinations of the final network graphs of members supported this assertion. For example, two

Factor 1: Contribution (α = 0.90)	Mean (SD)	Loading
I often comment on music posted by others on SMC.	2.44 (1.48)	0.775
I like to share my knowledge of music on SMC.	3.16 (1.72)	0.765
I like adding to collection of songs on SMC by posting a song when others post music on a specific theme.	3.75 (1.66)	0.692
I like to share music on SMC.	3.89 (1.87)	0.682
I like the discussion that take place on SMC	4.11 (1.58)	0.645
I like to share videos on SMC.	3.46 (1.80)	0.662

Table 1. Factor 1 – Contribution

Factor 2: Discovery (α = 0.91)	Mean (SD)	Loading
I like discovering music from foreign cultures through SMC.	4.91 (1.84)	0.858
I find music through SMC that I haven't heard in a long time.	5.67 (1.41)	0.513
I like listening to the music people post on SMC.	4.72 (1.64)	0.577
Often the music posted on the group surprises me.	4.72 (1.50)	0.553
Often a song posted on SMC changes my mood in the day.	3.84 (1.74)	0.543
I discover rare songs through SMC.	5.12 (1.68)	0.709

Table 2. Factor 2 – Discovery

Factor 3: Social Interaction (α = 0.89)	Mean (SD)	Loading
I am often keen to see if what I posted on SMC has been liked by others.	3.74 (2.10)	0.801
I often browse the public profiles of people I don't know when they post music on SMC.	2.89 (1.95)	0.782
I like to find out who are my mutual friends when someone unknown to me posts music on SMC.	3.86 (1.95)	0.706
I often try to understand what and why members post certain kind of music on SMC.	3.70 (2.02)	0.594
I often 'like' music posted by others on SMC.	3.56 (1.90)	0.585

Table 3. Factor 3 - Social Interaction

Factor 4: Entertainment (α = 0.85)	Mean (SD)	Loading
I like the music genre that the group represents.	5.07 (1.44)	0.786
The music posted on the group makes me joyful.	4.46 (1.40)	0.629
I like listening to music my friends post on the group.	4.40 (1.66)	0.537

Table 4. Factor 4 - Entertainment

cases were noted in which group members became Facebook friends during the course of the study and after discussing or otherwise engaging around a particular artist or musical genre. While our data is a snapshot of the network and does not allow us to trace the complete evolution of friendship ties between members of the group over time, these anecdotal observations suggest that social media objects can act as foci [6] to facilitate the formation of ties.

Before moving on, it is worth contrasting the presence of social interaction as a factor driving use in SMC against Smock et al.'s [20] assertion that participation in Facebook groups is primarily motivated by expressive information and that social engagement plays a limited role. To explain this discrepancy, we note that Smock's study is agnostic as to the nature of the groups considered. Accordingly, we suggest that the results of the current study provide evidence that SNS content communities form a distinct type of group in which social interaction is a valued driver.

The final factor unearthed in this study was entertainment. This is clearly coupled to the nature of the content – users visited the group to watch music videos. Although this is unsurprising, the other factors highlight distinctions between the qualities of the entertainment sought compared to that available via more traditional channels. Essentially, the group provided socially vetted, tightly themed and personally curated content – the group members valued these qualities.

In summary, the results of this study strongly support the assertion that the nature and type of a group fundamentally shape the motivations that drive its use. This reinforces Smock et al.'s argument for the need to study unbundled SNS features [20] and, indeed, suggests that this point be extended to not only consider specific technical features (e.g. groups) but also distinctions between the different topics and foci for which such functionalities can be used (e.g. media sharing via civic or political engagement). Specifically, the work presented in this paper suggests that groups with different kinds of foci will exhibit different patterns of use in order for their users to achieve different types of gratification. This paper also catalogued and discussed the particular motivations for participating in an SNS content community and now moves on to instantiate those findings as design themes to inform the future construction of such services.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN

Designing for Contribution
Contribution of content and commentary was a key motivation for using SMC. Media sharing services should be designed to best encourage and reward contribution or participation. The literature suggests a variety of techniques for achieving this. Rotman et al. [17], in their study of content curation communities highlight the need to find an active subset within the community and also the need to attribute content to the users who post it. Lampe et al. [14] reinforce this point by arguing that registered users (as opposed to anonymous users) are motivated by a sense of affiliation and identity and are likely to be more committed. These observations speak to the power of combining content communities with meaningful on-site user identities, such as those inherently present in SNS. Such hybrid sites are likely to engender high levels of participation. Moving beyond such foundational points, another trend from the study reported here was the prominence of response chains where a first post elicited a rapid sequence of related material. It was clear that users enjoyed exploring and extending connections and relations among media, and future site designs in this space should explicitly support such activities. For example, one way this could be achieved would to support the collective construction and compilation of playlists, an idea analogous to the content collections of Pinterest (pinterest.com/) but currently unsupported in music-themed online services.

Designing for Discovery
Social media systems need focus on enabling users to discover new content and then to collectively archive this material. This observation ties into Garg et al.'s [7] work showing the positive influence online peers exert on the diffusion of music. However, this idea stands in stark contrast to current implementations offered in online music services that emphasize algorithm-based music discovery (e.g. genre matching) rather than social approaches. Elaborating on this point, the work in this paper indicates that acts of contributing and discovering were tightly intertwined, in that users posted videos and discovered closely related content when other members responded and replied with their own posts and media. This natural dynamic represents a valuable type of highly focused social filtering that could be exploited in future system designs.

Designing for Social Interaction
The combination of content communities and SNS offers novel possibilities for social interaction. Comments, approvals ("likes") and the posting of media responses were all commonplace and valued – indeed, users reported directly seeking the community's endorsement of taste that such activities and responses imply. Designs in this space should emphasize such object-centered sociality by facilitating, for example, the posting of media replies and the navigation around chains of such content. Farzan et al. [5] show how designs that encourage relationships among members or emphasize the community as an entity both increase commitment and retention of group members. Linking this idea to Rotman et al.'s [17] recommendation to target active subgroups within communities, designers could create team-based roles to encourage playful forms of participation. A second novel social interaction highlighted in SMC is investigations of individuals with similar (or simply interesting) taste – indentifying such people, and allowing users to explore their posts and contributions, may help create more compelling social experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper argues that media sharing groups on Facebook represent a unique intersection between social networking sites and content communities. The study presented in this paper revealed contribution, discovery, social interaction and entertainment to be the key gratifications met by such systems – the key drivers of use. The novel nature of these factors suggests there is value in Smock et al.'s [20] notion that SNS features should be analyzed in discrete, unbundled, chunks rather than via examinations of entire services. The factors also represent a valuable exploration of design space intersecting SNS and content communities. This work also led to guidelines and recommendations that future designers of media sharing tools may find valuable.

Limitations of this work include its modest (but typical) sample size; most Facebook groups are small. Accordingly, future work will extend investigations to a larger set of groups, validate the findings presented here and explore issues such as the impact of privacy settings or groups with more diverse demographics. Ultimately, this research will empower users to connect more easily, seamlessly and closely with the media content that they want, seek and like.

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