

## The Uses and Gratification of Facebook among Adolescents, Working ages and Elderly

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### Abstract

**T**his study aimed at examining the patterns of communication and uses of Facebook among adolescents, working ages and elderly. The study was mainly based on the conceptual framework of Katz's Uses and Gratification as a tool for interpreting the phenomena. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with the 3 aged groups: adolescents, working ages and elderly using both sexes – male and female who were residing in Chiang Rai Municipality and regularly communicating in Facebook. The findings revealed that the three aged groups used Facebook when they felt isolated and lonely, and Facebook led them to experience the world and to have more friends. Moreover, each Facebook user group used different communication patterns to get rid of their isolation and loneliness according to their social situations and attitudes based on their age condition. Among the three Facebook user groups, the adolescents' using patterns reflected their selfness and identities; the working groups mirrored their exhaust and success from working, while the elder group focused on how to reunion among old friends.

**Keywords :** Uses and Gratification, Facebook, Adolescents, Working ages, Elderly

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## Introduction

It is likely that the internet has increasingly influenced human ways of life. It becomes the new media that serve education, work, communication, and entertainment purposes. The important function of this new media is to help create the interaction between media and users, as well as among the users themselves. Thus, some website users become the part of content creator in the web pages or web blogs and some of them usually expose to this content. These interactions develop the online social network. On the other way, these networks construct an online community where users are able to exchange or share any information as they have common interests together.

Online social network has been popular and widespread in United States of America since 1997. The social networks are known as: Hi5, Facebook, Twiiter, and Foursquare. In Thailand, there is a survey study showing that Facebook is the most popular online social network in Thailand. Survey of [www.checkfacebook.com](http://www.checkfacebook.com) on January 2014\* stated that Facebook users in Thailand are 17,779,139 persons. These users are male of 48.8% and female of 51.2%. Their ages revealed some significant picture - that is; 18-24 years is the highest number of users (33.3%); 25-34 years old is the second (30.9%) and 35-44 years old is the lowest proportion (11.6%).

Facebook is the online social network that supports users to create their own web pages. Users are able to get to know one another, to make new friends, to find old friends, and to link friends to friends. Moreover, this social network functions similarly to a spider net that connect one user to a number of friends.

In addition, users are able to freely add pictures, profile, any contents, and their own statuses which are shared to their friends who can make some comments immediately. In 2008, Facebook has introduced a new application in the name of 'Facebook Chat' that supports the users with 21 languages from the beginning

and then expanded to 70 other languages in 2009. These features makes Facebook become better well known from worldwide users.

Based on this popularity of Facebook, this article aims to examine the phenomenon of Facebook users in 3 different ages. The samples were drawn through purposive sampling including 15 participants who resided in Chiang Rai Municipality. They regularly communicated with one another through Facebook. The samples were also categorized into 3 different aged groups: adolescents (18-19 years old), working people (25-40 years old), and elderly (55-65 years old) with 5 equal representatives from each group. The in-depth interviews were then used with these 3 aged groups based on the uses and gratification framework to explain how the users in each group used the Facebook to satisfy a variety of personal needs.

## Uses and Gratifications Approach

The uses and gratifications perspective assumes that audiences are active participants in communication process, but they are not all equally activists. In other words, audience activity becomes a variable. The communication behavior of audience members is a goal directed, purposive, and motivated; they make viewing selections based on personal motivation, goals, and needs, and these similar factors influence what they actually see and hear.

This concept emphasizes that audiences use the media for a variety of reasons, sometimes to obtained information about something that interests or disturbs them. It is always used or selected to gratify the needs or wants of its audience member (Bryant and Thomson, 2002: 130).

Katz et al (1974 : 20 quoted in McQuail, 1994 : 318) describes this concept as (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement

\*Sources : Facebook Statistics, by Demographics Report and News (Thailand), 2554 Retrieved 30 March 2014 from [www.checkfacebook.com](http://www.checkfacebook.com)

in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

These assumptions have been revised since then to reflect what we learn about media audiences. A contemporary view of uses and gratifications is grounded in five assumptions (Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann, 2002 : 527-528) as follows.

1) Communication behavior, including the selection and use of the media, is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated. People are those who choose media or media content. That behavior is functional and consequential for individuals and societies.

2) People initiate the selections and uses of communication vehicles. Instead of being used by media, people select and use media to satisfy their felt needs or desires. Media audiences, then, are variably active communicators. Media use may respond to needs, but also respond to wants or interests such as seeking information to solve a personal dilemma.

3) The host of social and psychological factors guides, filters or mediates communication behaviors. Our predispositions, the environment in which we live in and our interpersonal interactions shape our expectations about the media and media content. Communication behavior responds to media and their messages as they are filtered through our personalities, social categories and relationship, potential for interpersonal interaction, and communication channel availability.

4) The media competes with other forms of communication or functional alternatives such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention, and use so that we can seek to gratify our needs or wants. There are definite relationships between personal and mediated channels in this process. How well the media satisfy our needs, motives, or desires varies among individuals based on their social and psychological circumstances.

5) People are typically more influential than the media in this process, but not always. Our own

initiative mediates the patterns and consequences of media use. Through this process, media may affect personal characteristics or social, political, cultural, or economic structures of society and how people may come to rely on certain communication media.

McQuail (1994 :320) describes the motives for and satisfactions from media use as : getting information and advice, reducing personal insecurity, learning about society and the world, finding support for one's own values, gaining insight into one's own life, experiencing empathy with problems of others, having a basis for social contact, having a substitute for social contact, feeling connected with others, escaping from problems and worries, gaining entry into an imaginary world, filling time, experiencing emotional release, and acquiring a structure for daily routine.

### **Meaning Construct of Facebook**

Meanings constructed by audiences are meaningful in communication process. It helps us understand how audiences think and make sense of environment and the world. Thus, this paper starts focusing on how audiences in different ages construct the meanings of Facebook. These meaning constructs explain the uses and the gratifications of audiences more clearly. It is to address the way in which audience think and express their behaviors on Facebook.

1) Adolescents : Facebook is the area where the users can release their feeling and communicate with their friends

In the view of adolescents, they use Facebook as the area to express or release their emotions, ideas and expressions. One of the respondent said that "I have released my depression to Facebook". "Facebook seems to be a part of my life, because it is the best area where I can release my emotion. It listens to me at anytime but it can say nothing. As other respondent said, "It is the wall where I can voice my feeling and share something to my friends, my girl friends or my relatives".

In addition, adolescents view that Facebook is the kind of media which they can find some information and contact their friends. One of the respondents said that, "Facebook is the necessary communication tool in the present time", while the other said that she has followed the activities of her friends in Facebook. "...to watch my friends' activities: where they are, what they are doing, how they are. Like me, what I do, where I go, what I see, they are posted to my Facebook". Nowadays, Facebook is a kind of routine activity in the adolescents' daily activities. As mentioned by one of the respondents that, "Facebook is the routine activity which I must watch it in everyday". "When I wake up, logging in my Facebook is the first thing that I do."

While some adolescents view that Facebook is the diary which records some of their important events and activities. "Facebook is the something which presents my events what I did and where I went. It records my memory by pictures and video."

2)Working ages : Facebook is the private zone in public

Working ages constructed the meaning of Facebook as private zone in public. In detail, Facebook is the area where working ages express their emotions and feelings. Two respondents who are a painter and a photographer constructed their meanings of Facebook as, "Facebook is public ,but it is also a private zone too. It is the area for expressing my feeling and showing my job." The other respondent addressed that "Facebook is my zone which it is used for displaying my identity." Another respondent said that, "Facebook is as an online diary. If it is a diary book, there is only one reader. For Facebook, those who are our friends, they can read it automatically."

3)Elderly : Facebook is the channel to inform activities and information to their relatives and elderly friends

Elderly, respondents who are more than 55 years old constructed the meaning of Facebook as the channel to inform activities and information to their

relatives and elderly friends who stay in different places and long distance and they rarely contact one another. Moreover, Facebook is the medium that the users can communicate and express their concerns to their acquaintances. Facebook is one of the effective channels where the users can inform good news and bad news, good things, suggestions and advices to one another. In this vein, one of the respondents provided that "to be a channel for communicating some news, information and activities to my friends."

### **Uses and Gratification of Facebook**

Rosengren (1974) describes that uses and gratification are interrelated as: uses contribute to gratification, and in reverse gratification may be received by uses. Studying in this perspective may select only one concept for accomplishing both of them. This article aims to explain how the users utilize Facebook and what the motive is in using this social media.

1)Adolescents : Use the Facebook for chatting, posting status and following their friends wall and fan pages/ playing games

For the adolescents, the respondents addressed three activities which they act to Facebook as : Chat, Post and Follow up their friends and fan pages or playing games. These activities have reflected the life style of adolescents and been consistent to their meaning construct of Faceook aforementioned.

1.1) Chat : filling time when feeling lonely and finding a new friend

Due to the convenience and saving expense, the users are most likely to use Facebook for chatting with their friends. In addition, Chatting among their friends is substituted as an activity when adolescents feel lonely. They sometimes find new friends as they are chatting. "I love to chat more than playing games or watching videos on Facebook, because it makes me find and know the strangers." "I can talk to my friends, my girlfriend, my cousins and it makes me not to be alone" In addition, one of the respondents

also addressed that he could chat and do other activities simultaneously.

### 1.2) Post status: performing identity

Adolescents frequently post their statuses which describe their daily activities, emotions and feelings in that moment, "after waking up, I post status as my pictures, my activities such as having some food with my friends, exercise at fitness, my feeling and emotion" "what I am doing, what I am thinking. I will post them. My status often show my identity" For this reasons, the respondents addressed that they wanted their friends to know what they were doing. But they sometimes intend to significantly send some statuses or messages to somebody who may see and read it. "...sharing my experience on Facebook including my feeling." "I would like someone to know what I am doing, I want her to know that I am slighted or fall in love."

1.3) Follow up their friends wall and fan pages/ playing games : feeling connected with their friends Because of perceiving about activities movement of their friends, adolescents addressed that they frequently follow up the wall of their friends and fan pages/playing games. "I have perceived activities of my friends who stay in a long distance. I am also able to share anything with my friends" "I would like to know any movement both individual and hot current issues."

In addition, the adolescents frequently used Facebook as news media. They followed up the pages which especially interested them such as : news fan pages, sport fan pages, well-known person fan pages, IT fan pages etc. To help them relaxed, they may also use it for playing games.

2)Working ages : Use Facebook for posting status and getting information and advices

Working ages are fully maturity and more responsibility on their families and duties. This age group has their life style different from the adolescents. Thus, Facebook is used for communicating, getting information

and advice for application in daily life activities. This age group specifies two uses of Facebook as: posting status and getting information and advice

### 2.1) Posting status: being interactive with their friends and exposing their feeling and duties.

For working ages, they regularly post status of their daily activities in both of their duties and hobbies. The followings are examples: "...update my activity such as yoga" "posted only picture which I take by myself, I don't post information" "up to situation. After having a baby, I have mostly posted about my baby, my family and my job" In addition, this working age group also post or share about suggestions or advices which they used to read it on the other pages, as in "perhaps I read something scratch myself, I will post it"

For the reasons about these posts, the respondents described that they wanted to interact with their friends. Although they don't see their friends in face to face, it seems to stay regularly with their friends, as in "like living room, I post status, my friend comment back to me. Posting useful information, I propose my friends to conduct it." Moreover, one of the respondents addressed the reason that she wanted share to her friend, as in "I want to share, to tell that I am happy. It is a good feeling, it is my feeling. I don't think that anyone must read it" Thus, some of the respondents posted about their responsibilities addressing that they wanted to exhibit their works and success. As in, "...post it, because I want anyone to know that I conduct the arts" "I want anyone to comment on my jobs, especially professional photographers"

2.2) To follow up their friends wall and fan pages: keeping relationship of their friends and getting information and advice To keep good relationship with their friends, the working ages use Facebook as the following-up activities and information about their friends. The examples are, "It makes me close to my friends. Although I don't often see my friends, I know what they are doing. I gain some knowledge and information

from my friends”, “follow that what my friend post about, where they stay” In addition, this age group also uses Facebook for getting information and advices in which they are interested. Wenner (1985) describes this use that it is an orientation gratification. This use of Facebook seems that the audiences traditionally expose like a kind of magazines which they are interested in. One of the respondents said that, “reading news in the pages which I click Like such as technology, IT, explorer, online shopping – new style of shoes” “reading tourism pages and artist idea pages”

3)Elderly : Use Facebook for following up their friends wall and posting their statuses

The elderly is the age group who has less responsibility of both duties and families since their son and daughter grew up and look after themselves effectively. As this elderly is retired from works, the use of Facebook is different from the adolescent and working ages. This elderly specify two uses on Facebook for: following up their friends wall and posting their statuses.

3.1) To follow up their friends wall and fan pages: follow-up activities of their friends in the same age.

Due to their less responsibility of both duties and family, the elderly use Facebook for following up the activities and information of their friends especially those who stay in long distance. The topics posted are health and daily life activities as in, for example, “I follow up the social movement and information of my friends such as who is ill, who is dead. I will express my encourage and regret to them on Facebook”, “...following up in group of friends, greeting, encouraging, and seeing their activities”, “I sometimes acquire the knowledge of health posted by my friends on Facebook or other pages, “I mostly follow the information posted by my relatives such as where they visit, what they do.” This elderly described a reason of this use that it is not to miss the information from their friends and relatives.

3.2) Posting status: communicate their own activities to group of friends.

This age group regularly posts statuses of their daily activities and share the knowledge or information such as health care to one another. The examples are, “post my activity, award that I received”, and “I will mostly post where I visit.” As some elderly use Facebook for complaining or releasing their depression, as in “...releasing my depression, I will say some words without identifying the topic.”

## Conclusion

The approach of uses and gratifications explains the audience members in the communication process and media use by individuals and groups. These media use was based on personal motivation, and needs. The significance of this simulation of uses and satisfaction is not based on the gratification obtained but it is the gratification sought. This paper indicates that three range of age groups have similar activities in Facebook use as chatting, posting statuses and following up their friends wall and fan pages. However, they have different motives of Facebook use. Each group uses it differently as in the followings: the adolescents used it for filling time when feeling lonely and finding new friends; working ages used for interacting with friends and disclosing their feeling and duties; while the elderly used it for following up their friends wall and communicating their activities (as in the summary table).

Based on its characteristics which support the users to interact between the users and other users, it allows them to create their own web pages by using the uses and gratifications approach. The paper explains the phenomenon how different age groups used Facebook. These different ages are counted as the proactive Facebook users in their communication process. A. Rubin (1994 quoted in Bryant, Jennings and Susan Thompson, 2002: 130) states that the heart of the uses and gratifications approach that audiences are the active participants in the communication process, however, they are not all equal activists. In other words, the audiences’ activities are varied. The communication behavior of

the audience members is goal directed, purposive, and motivated; they make viewing selections based on personal motivation, goals, and needs. In brief, the uses and gratifications approach has let us to

better understanding on how and why the users use Facebook. They actively use it to gratify their individual needs.

**The summary table : The Uses and Gratification of Facebook among Adolescents, Working ages and Elderly**

| Group        | Meaning construction  | Use   | Motive  | Content                            |
|--------------|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
| adolescents  | The area which the users can release their feelings and communicate to their friends    | -Chat,<br>-Post status<br>-Follow up their friends wall and fan ages /playing games | -filling time when feeling lonely and finding a new friend<br>- performing identity<br>- feeling connected with their friends   | -own love, friends, and study      |
| Working ages | the private zone in public  | -Post status<br>-Follow up their friends wall and fan ages                          | - having interaction with their friends and exhibiting their feelings ,duties and success<br>- keeping relationship of their friends and getting information and advice | -duties, family and responsibility |
| Elderly      | the channel to inform activities and information to their relatives and elderly friends | - Follow up their friends wall and fan ages<br>-Post status                         | - following up activities of their friends in the same age<br>-communicating their own activities to group of friend  | -health care, and reunion          |

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