Unveiling the Uses and Gratifications of Social Media: A Comparative Study of Thai Generation Y Internet Users in Bangkok and Upcountry

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Abstract

Recent statistics have shown that the number of social media users in Thailand is increasing dramatically. Generation Y is one of the core user groups that stands out as having the highest social media usage. This ever-increasing shift to an online environment is what triggered the present study. Employing the uses and gratifications approach, this study examined how Thais use social media to gratify their needs. It also compared the needs of social media use between Thai Generation Y living in Bangkok and those living upcountry. A total of 1,265 responses were obtained. The results revealed that the top motivation of social media use among Thai Generation Y was to release tension. Differences between Bangkok and upcountry Generation Y were also reported. This study strengthens the cornerstone of uses and gratifications theory (UGT) and will be of interest to media practitioners, content creators, and policy makers.

Keywords: uses and gratifications theory (UGT), social media, Generation Y, geographical differences, Thailand

Introduction

People's increased reliance on digital media has led to an increase in online activity, where users actively search for information, including news, product-related issues, and instructions, as well as generate and upload their own contents. Because of the internet's ubiquity, persistence, searchability, replicability, and scalability, the number of users has grown progressively worldwide, including in Thailand.

Thailand was the world leader for daily time spent on the internet in 2018. Recent statistics have shown that the number of internet users in Thailand is increasing rapidly with 3.4 million new users recorded between 2020 and 2021, an increase of 7.4 percent (Kemp, 2022). In 2021, Thailand ranked eighth out of 24 countries in the number of internet users in the Asia Pacific (Statista, 2022). Currently, there are 54.5 million internet users in Thailand, accounting for 77.8 percent of the total population and they spend about nine hours and six minutes per day online (Leesa-nguansuk, 2022). It is projected that by 2025 approximately 61 million people will have access to the internet (Statista, 2020).

According to the Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) (2023) report, Generation Y spend more time on the internet per day than other generations (8 hours 45 minutes per day). They have been ranked first for the highest online media usage for the past four years. In terms of online activities, Thais enjoy using social media the most; 72.8 percent of the Thai population are social media users. On average, they spent 2 hours and 44 minutes per day using social media (ETDA, 2023). The shift to the online environment suggests not only a new way of information consumption, but media usage, defined as overt media consumption (Peter, 1987).

Central to the concept of media consumption, the theory of uses and gratifications (UGT) provides a useful account of how people use media to gratify their needs. The essence of this theory is that the audience is active and that it selects certain media outlets for different gratification purposes (Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch, 1973; Kim et al., 2015). Gratification is related to the expectation of gaining some benefits out of using certain media (Palmgreen, 1984).

Over the past century, a considerable literature has grown up around the theme of uses and gratifications theory because it taps into the underlying purpose of media usage (Blumler, 1979; Kim et al., 2015; Lin, 1996; Parker and Plank, 2000; Rayburn and Palmgreen, 1984;

Rosengren, Wenner, and Palmgreen, 1985). It is considered a long-established theory that attracts a considerable amount of interest in traditional media usage. A growing body of literature pertaining to social media use also recognizes the importance of UGT (Kim et al., 2015; Lee and Ma, 2012; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000). Thus, UGT, a cutting-edge theoretical approach (Ruggiero, 2000), makes a worthwhile contribution to the modern world.

Social media, despite its ethical dilemmas (Lannin and Scott, 2013), is being used widely and constantly gaining popularity, especially in Thailand. Gratification or motivation of media use varies across different cultures (Lim and Kumar, 2019; Xu, Takai, and Liu, 2018). Past research pertaining to UGT has been conducted with social media users who lived in developing countries (Bolton et al, 2013). There remains a paucity of evidence on social media uses and gratification in the Asian context (Phua, Jin, and Kim, 2017). Considering that Thailand is among the leading internet users among countries in the Asia Pacific and the leading social media countries in Southeast Asia, it is worth investigating why and how Thais actively use social media to gratify certain needs.

Thailand is a developing country where urbanization disparity is common (Ariyaarpakamol, 2019) and each region has its own subculture. Thus, it is important to understand what people in Bangkok and those upcountry do with social media. Moreover, there has been little discussion about geographical differences in relation to social media use (Liu et al., 2018). Therefore, the aim of this study is twofold: 1) to examine the underlying needs of social media use among Generation Y, and 2) to compare the needs of social media use between Bangkok and upcountry Generation Y. Although we aim to compare Generation Y social media users who live in the capital city with those who live upcountry, the focus is on their socio-demographics and psychographics such as lifestyle and culture. Such characteristics can play a role in motivation to use social media (Bolton et al., 2013; Lim and Kumar, 2019; Rayburn and Palmgreen, 1984), rather than the physical aspect of geography.

The digital landscape in Thailand continues to change rapidly. Understanding why Thai Generation Y, the majority cohort, use social media is useful for the media industry, content creators, and policy makers to craft their news and contents to gratify the needs of these target audiences. This study addresses the gap in prior research by applying UGT to examine motivations to use social media in an Asian setting. It also contributes to the growing area of research in media effects and offers new insights into how urban and upcountry Generation Y use social media to gratify their needs, an empirically unexplored issue.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Unlike traditional paradigms, UGT postulates that media users are active in choosing media outlets to gratify their own needs (Katz et al., 1973; Kim et al., 2015). According to UGT, being an active audience includes the following characteristics: 1) utility; the media has some benefits and people use media for that purpose, 2) intentionality; an audience has the intention to consume different contents depending on his/her initial motivation, 3) selectivity; media selection reflects an audience's personal interests and preference, and 4) imperviousness; an audience avoids being controlled by media (Blumler, 1979).

With regards to an audience's needs, the need or motivation is driven by psychological states or by external factors which, in turn, affect the expectation to be gratified by specific media. This expectation then leads to the selection of certain media which, in turn, gratify the need and deliver other unexpected outcomes (Katz et al., 1973; Kim et al., 2015). In general, an audience's gratification depends upon his/her own needs or desires. The more a content can gratify an audience's needs, the more that audience would be exposed to that content or continue using that media (Ku, Chu, and Tseng, 2013).

In 1973, Katz et al. divided needs for media uses into five facets, based on social and psychological functions of media. Cognitive needs deal with the needs for information, knowledge, and understanding

something. Affective needs involve gaining emotional experience, pleasure, or aesthetic experience, such as entertainment. Personal integrative needs are those for strengthening self-confidence or credibility for psychological stability. Social integrative needs are concerned with the need to build relationships with others. Finally, tension needs are explained as the need to escape from tension, from reality, or from boredom (Kim et al., 2015; Palmgreen, 1984). There are three main factors that can drive these needs: demographics (e.g., gender, age, income, religion, ethnicity), psychographics (e.g., personality traits), and external factors that can cause tension or discomfort, such as politics or economic downturn (Katz et al., 1973; Kim et al., 2015).

Despite some criticisms of UGT, such as a lack of internal consistency or being too individualistic (Ruggiero, 2000), this theory is still used widely and still serves as a basis for understanding underlying motivations for media use in this digital era. That is, due to the internet's interactivity, audiences are prone to be actively involved and engaged with social media (Kaye and Johnson, 2001; Ruggiero, 2000). Compared to traditional media, for example, they have to make purposive choices to search for certain sites or information.

Since the cornerstone of UGT lies in an audience being active and goal oriented, the online ecology can reinforce the strength of this theory. For example, Lee and Ma's (2012) study found that the motivations among university students to share information on social media were entertainment, social integration, knowledge gain, and self-expression. Whiting and Williams (2013) interviewed 25 individuals, aged 18-56, in relation to their social media use, based on the UGT approach and found that social interaction was their main motivation.

According to Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), tension release was most correlated to internet usage. Meanwhile, socialization, gaining information, excitement, and escapism needs were reported for internet usage in Parker and Plank (2000). Prior studies have indicated that university students used Facebook for relationship purposes, to nurture their relationships with old friends, and to maintain social integration

(Quan-Haase and Young, 2010; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Reich, Subrahmanyam, and Espinoza (2012) found that teenage social media users utilized social media to connect with their real-life friends, while Chinese Generation Z social media users used it for daily routine alternatives or socialization (Q. Hu, X. Hu, and Hou, 2022). A recent study from Corrada, Flecha, and Lopez (2020) showed that using social media generates significant rewards that impact the search for information and the communication with the company. Their study fortified the central idea of UGT, explaining why individuals use and share information using social media.

Taken together, these studies support the notion that UGT can provide an empirical foundation to understand why people use social media based on their socio-psychological disposition. In the same sense, our study also illustrates the relevance and practicality of UGT in social media research (Whiting and Williams, 2013).

Geographical Differences in Social Media Uses and Gratification

People use media differently and a number of studies have been carried out to address why people vary in their media uses and consumption patterns (Donohew, Palmgreen, and Rayburn, 1987). Several attempts have been made to show that motivations for media use vary across gender and age (Alison, Kiyingi, and Baziraake, 2012; Horzum, 2016; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000). However, there is much less information about geographical differences, such as distance and location, in social media use.

Liu et al. (2018) found that the probability and velocity of information dissemination show heterogeneity and diversity of geographic location. A study by Xu et al. (2018) showed that Western and East Asian social networking site (SNSs) users have different general motivations to use SNS to gratify their needs. That is, SNS users from Western countries used SNS to gratify their self-esteem needs, while their East Asian counterparts (China and Japan) tended to use SNS for social needs. Although their study compared different locations

(i.e. continents) they highlighted cultural differences, rather than literal geographical characteristics. This is also the standpoint of the present study when comparing Generation Y in Thailand's capital city and upcountry.

From early sociological perspectives, the unit of adoption was with urban and rural populations, and the transformation of belonging and citizenship was related to media. From media and communication perspectives, when new media diffuses into different places, it causes some changes in those places because of their different communication access (Srivastava and Moreland, 2012). From marketing perspectives, products and services are offered to attract consumers who live in different parts of the country. Geodemographics, a combination of demographic information and geographic consumption patterns, is also employed to segment consumers (Solomon, 2020).

The uniqueness of each city, such as its economy and culture, has an influence on its residents' behavior, including media consumption patterns. It was found that people living in different cities tended to view, forward, and browse different information and news programs (Liu et al., 2018). On the other hand, people located in the same city or similar geographic locations showed similarities (Fioravanti et al., 2021).

Thailand is a developing country, where urbanization disparity is common (Ariyaarpakamol, 2019). Bangkok, the capital, is known as a dynamic, bustling, culturally diverse setting, while upcountry areas far from provincial capitals tend to be less developed. Moreover, people in different regions have different lifestyles and subcultures. Therefore, it is assumed that social media users from different geographical areas might also have different needs. However, to the best of our knowledge, geographical differences, such as Bangkok and upcountry, among social media users have not yet been closely examined, particularly through a UGT framework. Hence, it is worth investigating whether Bangkok and upcountry people are different in terms of their needs of media use, based upon the aforementioned five typologies of needs by Katz et al. (1973) and Kim et al. (2015).

Generation Y Cohort

Like other generation cohorts, Generation Y, also known as Gen Y or millennials, were born during the years 1977-1994 and share similar experiences of certain events. They were born into an era of globalization, media, and immediate technology (Shragay and Tziner, 2011). Generation Y grew up in the 80s and 90s during an increase in consumerism and materialism (Brosdahl and Carpenter, 2011) and are comfortable spending money on material goods. With these collective experiences, Generation Y have different values, beliefs, and lifestyles than other cohorts (Meredith and Schewe, 1994). They also value freedom more than Generation X and Baby Boomers (Shragay and Tziner, 2011).

Generation Y is currently at the stage of settling into a career and building their success (Levinson, 1986). Thus, they focus on success, careers, and money while family remains in the background (Andrea, Horváth-Csikós, and Tímea, 2016). Generation Y also desire personal freedom and seek a work-life balance (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Sayers, 2007). As digital natives, technology is at the center of their lives, but they are more "tech dependent" than "tech savvy" (Crawford and Jackson, 2019). That is, they usually search for and consume information online. They are better able to select a suitable technology and learn how to use it, compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. According to Bolton et al. (2013), Generation Y's main purpose for social media use was communication.

In relation to their motivation to use social media from a UGT perspective, a study by Jenkins-Guiarneiri, Wright, and Hudiburgh (2012) indicated that Generation Y who were extraverts were more likely to be heavy users of Facebook. Recently, Pongpaew (2020) collected data from 306 Generation Y in Thailand and found that the fulfilment of personal needs, such as enjoyment, relaxation, and socializing with like-minded persons in online communities, strengthened the engagement with a brand in social media. A study from Mude and Undale (2023) suggested that Indian Generation Y utilized

social media for their information search, but used it for education, entertainment, shopping, and socialization less than did Generation Z.

Methodology

This study focused on Generation Y because of their highest internet usage rate and their highest population cohort (Crawford and Jackson, 2019; ETDA, 2020). In this study, Generation Y refers to those who were born between 1977 and 1994 (Solomon, 2020). Empirical data were collected through a field survey, using a self-administered questionnaire.

Generation Y accounts for the majority of the Thai population with approximately 19 million (ETDA, 2020). Based on Yamane (1973), this population size yields a sample size of 384-400, with a 95 percent confidence level. In order to ensure that the sample was representative, a sample size of 450 Generation Y internet users in Bangkok, and 800 users from four regions (with 200 per region) of Thailand were determined. Bangkok was purposively selected because it is the capital and Thailand's most populous city. There are four regions across Thailand and two provinces from each region (North, Central, Northeast, and South) were also purposively chosen on the basis of having the highest proportion of Generation Y cohort (National Statistical Office of Thailand, 2017). These provinces were Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Chonburi, Kanchanaburi, Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, Nakon Si Thammarat, and Songkhla, respectively. The eight provinces were considered as upcountry, encompassing both urban and rural upcountry areas. In addition, the respondents were required to use social media at least three hours per day. A paper-based questionnaire was distributed to Generation Y who live in Bangkok's central business district (i.e., core, outer, new, and north CBD) and the eight upcountry provinces from December 2019 to May 2020. In total, 1,265 responses were eligible for further analysis: 455 from Bangkok and 810 from upcountry. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Chulalongkorn University.

Measures

A total of 35 statements were adopted from the research of Katz et al. (1973) and Kim et al. (2015) to measure the needs for social media use. A slight adjustment was made for suitability, that is, wording, spelling, and typos. Based on prior studies, the UGT framework is still applicable in explaining media consumption, including today's context. It has been widely applied to measure social media, such as Corrada et al. (2020), Hu et al. (2022), and Mude and Undale (2023). Eleven items measured cognitive needs, six items used for measuring affective needs, eight items for personal integrative needs, seven items for social integrative needs, and the other three items for tension release needs. Respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with each item listed on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree). The scale was adjusted from five to four-pointed because an odd number, such as 3 means neutral, showing an unclear behavior (Malhotra, 2020).

For content validity, two communication professors were asked to check the question items. In addition, a pre-test through a think-aloud protocol was applied using a sample of 30 respondents from the target population to ensure ease of understanding and suitability. Although this study adopted previous validated scales, we further tested reliability to ensure the measurement quality and reported in the following section.

Analysis and Results

Respondents Characteristics

Simple statistical analysis was done to describe the respondents' general demographic characteristics and their frequently-used social media. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the respondents (60.9 percent) were female, aged between 25 and 34 (64.7 percent), single status (61.2 percent) with bachelor's degrees (55.0 percent).

A wide range of social media were examined. The top three most frequently used social media among Generation Y were Line (93.3 percent), Facebook (92.0 percent), and YouTube (86.2 percent).

At the same time, the bottom three social media that Generation Y used were Vlog (5.2 percent), LinkedIn (8.5 percent), and Blog (8.6 percent).

Among 1,265 respondents, 38.7 percent spent 3 to 6 hours per day on the internet, 34.4 percent spent more than 6 to 9 hours per day, 14.7 percent spent more than 9 to 12 hours per day, 8.1 percent spent more than 12 to 15 hours per day, 2.8 percent spent more than 15 to 18 hours per day, and the rest 1.3 percent spent more than 18 hours per day.

Table 1 Respondents' characteristics

Demographic profile				Social media			
Gender		**Age**		**Frequently Used***		**Usage per Day**	
Male	39.1%	25-29	41.0%	Pantip	48.6%	3-6 hrs.	38.7%
Female	60.9%	30-34	23.7%	Line	93.3%	> 6-9 hrs.	34.4%
		35-39	19.0%	WhatsApp	20.2%	> 9-12 hrs.	14.7%
		40-42	16.3%	FB Messenger	72.2%	> 12-15 hrs.	8.1%
Education		**Occupation**		Facebook	92.0%	> 15-18 hrs.	2.8%
Not educated	0.6%	Government-related	21.3%	LinkedIn	8.5%	> 18 hrs.	1.3%
Primary school	1.9%	Owned business	22.1%	Instagram	66.6%		
High school	20.3%	Self-employed	16.6%	Twitter	43.2%		
Diploma	12.6%	Company employee	27.8%	Pinterest	14.9%		
Bachelor's	55.0%	Housewives	2.3%	Blog	8.6%		
Master's	8.6%	Students	9.6%	Vlog	5.2%		
Doctorate	1.0%	Unemployed	0.3%	YouTube	86.2%		
Income (in THB)		**Marital status**					
No income	3.2%	Single	61.2%				
20,000 or less	49.1%	Married	34.7%				
20,001-40,000	39.1%	Divorced	2.4%				
40,001-60,000	6.3%	Widowed	1.7%				
60,001-80,000	1.0%						
80,001 or higher	1.3%						

Note: *More than one selection allowed

N = 1,265

Needs Gratification for Social Media Use

From Table 2, the total mean scores for the needs for social media use was 3.05. What stands out in the table is that the mean score of tension release needs was the highest (*M* = 3.24). Cognitive needs and personal integrative needs shared the same mean score at 3.03., while social integrative needs had the lowest mean score at 2.88.

Table 2 Needs gratification for social media use among Thai Generation Y

Types of need gratification	*M*	*S.D.*	Types of need gratification	*M*	*S.D.*
Cognitive needs	**3.05**	**0.46**	To feel that I am influential	2.54	0.92
To know myself	2.85	0.81	To feel that others think as I do	2.76	0.89
To develop good taste	2.98	0.79	To feel proud of Thailand	2.71	0.91
To want to study	3.58	0.57	To have confidence in our leaders	2.37	1.00
To understand what goes on in the world	3.60	0.57	To feel satisfied with the way of life in Thailand as compared with others	2.52	0.96
To know what the world thinks about us	3.21	0.74	**Social integrative needs**	**2.88**	**0.55**
To keep up with the way the government performs its functions	2.96	0.84	To spend time with the family	2.67	0.96
To get to know the true qualities of our leaders	2.96	0.87	To participate in discussions with my friends	3.32	0.71
To obtain useful information for daily life	3.44	0.66	To learn how to behave among others	3.40	0.63
To understand those who have different views on the government	2.92	0.83	To spend time with the friends	3.17	0.74
To feel that I am not always right	3.12	0.79	To feel that I am participating in current events	3.19	0.72
To understand how Thais feel	2.99	0.80	To be in a festive mood	2.92	0.83
Affective needs	**3.02**	**0.50**	To get closer to Thai traditions	2.76	0.93
To raise my morale	2.87	0.88	**Tension release needs**	**3.24**	**0.52**

Table 2 Needs gratification for social media use among Thai Generation Y (cont.)

Types of need gratification	*M*	*S.D.*	Types of need gratification	*M*	*S.D.*
To experience beauty	3.04	0.84	To overcome loneliness when I am alone	3.46	0.68
To release tension	3.57	0.61	To kill time	3.32	0.77
To be entertained	3.64	0.56	To escape from the reality of everyday life	2.58	1.02
To re-experience events which I was in	3.16	0.79			
To participate in the experiences of others	3.12	0.78			
Personal integrative needs	**3.05**	**0.49**			
To feel that I am utilizing my time well	2.75	0.90			
To order my day	2.71	0.91			
To strive for a higher standard of living	2.82	0.90	**Total**	**3.05**	**0.43**

Note: All items were measured on 4-point Likert scale, ranging from *totally disagree* (1) to *totally agree* (4) Reliability coefficients = .93

Considering each item of needs for social media use, the top three reasons the respondents used social media were for entertainment (M = 3.64), for understanding current situations around the world (M = 3.60), and for gaining knowledge (M = 3.58). By way of contrast, the bottom three reasons to use social media were to put more confidence in the prime minister (M = 2.37), to feel proud of Thailand (M = 2.52), and to have more influence on others (M = 2.54). The Cronbach's alpha of .93 indicated excellent reliability of this measurement.

A Comparison of Needs Gratification between Bangkok and Upcountry Social Media Users

To compare the difference in needs gratification between Bangkok and upcountry social media users, an independent sample *t*-test was employed. The analysis presented in Table 3 shows that the difference between the two groups is significant (t[1220] = -2.28, $p < .05$).

Table 3 Needs gratification for social media use between Bangkok and upcountry people

Types of needs gratification	Bangkok		Upcountry		*t*	*p*
	M	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*		
Cognitive needs	3.06	0.44	3.05	0.47	0.54	.60
Affective needs	2.98	0.49	3.05	0.50	-2.45	.02*
Personal integrative needs	2.99	0.51	3.09	0.48	-3.35	.00*
Social integrative needs	2.80	0.53	2.93	0.55	-3.84	.00*
Tension release needs	3.20	0.54	3.27	0.51	-2.13	.03*
Total	2.99	0.43	3.05	0.48	-2.28	.02*

Note: *$p < .05$

Interestingly, the latter group used social media to gratify certain needs more than the first group. To further elaborate, upcountry people used social media to gratify their affective needs (M = 3.05), personal integrative needs (M = 3.09), social integrative needs (M = 2.93), and tension release needs (M = 3.27) more than their Bangkok counterparts (M = 2.98, 2.99, 2.80, and 3.20, respectively). Although Bangkok people used social media to gratify their cognitive needs (M = 3.06) more than upcountry people (M = 3.05), the difference between the two groups was not significant (t[1251] = 0.54, $p > .05$).

Discussion

This study set out with the aim of examining how Generation Y use the available social media resources to gratify their needs. It also attempted to compare the motivations to use social media between Generation Y in Bangkok and upcountry.

Overall, the five most popular social media for Generation Y were Line, Facebook, Google, YouTube, and Facebook Messenger.

They are mostly social media sites, which is consistent with previous statistic reports (ETDA, 2023; Kemp, 2022). The main motivation to use these social media platforms was to gratify their tension release needs. The findings also showed that using social media for entertainment was rated the highest among Thai Generation Y. This result may be explained by the fact that Generation Y have more work-related tension and put more weight on success than their younger and older generations. Generation Y are currently at the stage of settling into a career and building their success (Levinson, 1986). Thus, success, career, and money are their top priorities (Andrea et al., 2016). However, they also desire personal freedom and seek a work-life balance (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Sayers, 2007). Therefore, Generation Y use social media to gratify their tension release needs and to be entertained.

Another possible explanation for this is that Thais are under stress due to Thailand's ongoing political unrest and its economic downturn (Westbrook and Murdoch, 2020). A survey in 2020 revealed that Generation Y were less happy and more stressed relative to the Baby Boomers (Thailand Development Research Institute, 2020). Hence, this might be the reason why they turned to social media, mainly social media sites, for tension release and entertainment. These results coincide with a previous study from Whiting and Williams (2013) indicating that most of the respondents used social media to escape from the real world and to take their mind off things.

These results also imply the relation between tension release and time spent on the internet, supporting the findings of Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) that the need for tension release was positively related to internet usage. Thus, being under tension might be one of the reasons why Thailand had the highest daily time spent on the internet. The results strengthen the cornerstone of the uses and gratification theory, according to which an audience is active and goal-oriented in using media (Katz et al., 1973; Kim et al., 2015). The results also support the idea that the more a content can gratify an audience's need, the more the audience would continue using that media (Ku et al., 2013).

In this study, social integrative needs ranked the lowest, out of the five needs. A possible explanation for this might be the characteristics of this generation. Being success-oriented, Generation Y puts more effort into professional achievement and stability, as mentioned above. In addition, since Generation Y is self-centered, self-important, and independent (Hills et al., 2012); they preferred to use social media to serve their current needs and emotions, to release tension, more than to build relationships with others. However, a note of caution is due here as it does not mean that Generation Y did not want to build relationships with others. In fact, considering the individual item of this dimension of needs, Generation Y tended to used social media to learn how to behave among others and to participate in discussions with their friends. Thus, nurturing relationships with others is still important to Generation Y, especially when their circle of friends is virtual (Andrea et al., 2016).

Looking closely at an item level, it is interesting to note that use of social media to show confidence in, or support for the prime minister ranked the lowest. It is possible that this result was due to the overall discontent aimed at former Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha and his government (Kurzydlowski, 2021). This dissatisfaction stemmed from the belief that the restoration to a full democracy had been impeded by his government since the military coup in 2014, as well as from the country's poor economic performance in recent years (Sasipornkarn, 2020). Thus, the perceived struggle faced by Thailand and its people correlates to low confidence in the prime minister which, in turn, causes them to rate this as their lowest motivation to use social media.

With regard to the differences in needs gratification between Bangkok and upcountry Generation Y social media users, the results suggested differences between the two groups. However, it was somewhat surprising that the latter group used social media to gratify their affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension-release needs more than their Bangkok counterparts. A possible explanation for this might be that upcountry dwellers are constantly threatened by nature and they lack personal security; therefore, they depend more on social media to get by with their lives

(Albritto, Bureekul, and Guo, 2003). They are also restricted to certain behaviors due to their cultural values and norms (Nuttavuthisit, Jindahra, and Prasarnphanich, 2014). According to Deng, Deng, and Hsu (2019), the functionality of social media can provide perceived social support which leads to reduction in tension. Taken together, these could be the reasons be that upcountry people used social media more to escape from boredom or reality, to strengthen their confidence and psychological stability, and to gain positive emotional experience. These results reflect those of Urista, Dong, and Day (2009), according to which social media users can maneuver their own socialization process and self-identity to enhance their self-concept and self-esteem.

Upcountry people are also more communal and interconnected (Somkaun, Chumnanmak, and Narongchai, 2021), and their adhered traditions are influential (Nuttavuthisit et al., 2014). Thus, being collectivistic in nature might make them want to build and maintain relationships with others through social media platforms more than those who live in a city setting, in which they are more individualistic and isolated (Albritto et al., 2003). In a similar vein, this result is supported by Kim, Sohn, and Choi (2011) who found that people from collectivistic, high-context cultures used SNSs to gain social support and maintain social relationships with others. A study by Thomas (2020) also showed that social media were beneficial for enhancing the quality of relationships. Weiser (2001) found that the use of the internet forms social integration, in turn, positively affecting psychological well-being.

Unexpectedly, the difference between the two groups in terms of using social media to gratify cognitive needs was insignificant. This finding suggests that in this digital era, people seek information and knowledge in order to understand something, especially for Generation Y. Owing to their digital nature, Generation Y roam social media to keep themselves updated with current issues and to find solutions to solve their problems (Andrea et al., 2016). Thus, regardless of their geographical differences, Generation Y exploit social media to gratify their cognitive needs. A possible explanation for this could be related to the urbanization of major cities. This is also the case for this study

as many among the eight surveyed provincial capitals are on the list of the top ten biggest cities in Thailand (Srikam, 2006). Urbanization, modernization, educational achievement (McKenzie, 2019), together with globalization and the ubiquity of the internet could serve as catalysts for either momentary curiosity or hunger for information. Therefore, the difference pertaining to cognitive needs between Bangkok and upcountry Generation Y social media users was found to be insignificant.

A similar finding was reported by Lee and Ma (2012), indicating that knowledge gain was the main purposes of social media users. A study from Whiting and Williams (2013) also found that the basic motivation to use social media was for self-education, to learn new things, and to seek information. Such information was how-to-instruction, sales promotion, products, events, and business-related matters.

In a nutshell, upcountry Generation Y used social media to gratify their affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension-release needs more than their Bangkok counterparts. Using social media to obtain cognitive benefits were common among Generation Y. Still, the influence of geographical factors needs to be further tested.

Research Implications

This study adds to the literature in the field of mass media communication by increasing social media uses and gratification in an Asian context. The application of uses and gratifications theory to social media helps explain why people use and like social media. It also appears to be the first study to compare motivations to use social media on the basis of geographical differences, a topic that had not yet been examined in previous literature. The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of how Bangkok and upcountry groups use social media. This study also adds value to the academic arena by bridging the framework of media and communication theory and that of geography. Even with a minimal extent, it is a good start to a call for an interdisciplinary bridge, the scaffolding for building these dual paradigms (Adams and Jansson, 2012).

In terms of practical implications, the overall findings suggest that the main motivation for Generation Y to use social media is for tension release. Thus, in order to serve their needs, media practitioners and content creators that aim to target Generation Y should craft their contents or programs for entertainment purposes. Hence, fun, entertaining, and feel-good contents are recommended for this target group. Edutainment (education-entertainment) contents are also highly recommended because Generation Y also craves knowledge. Education-related games, educational presentations like TED Talks, educational short-form contents, tutorials, and DIY-style contents should be offered to Generation Y. Such contents can gratify their tension release and cognitive needs, and are appropriate for both Bangkok and upcountry dwellers. Furthermore, informative contents such as e-books, or current news, including economic, social, political, art, culture, fashion and lifestyle should be catered to Generation Y audiences. For policy makers, informative, yet easy-to-digest contents, such as infographics, should be presented.

For social media outlets that specially target upcountry Generation Y, motivational or inspirational contents should be tailored to them, in order to boost their spirits and self-confidence. Upcountry Generation Y also cherish integration, so social media platforms that provide authentic and local-related contents will be of interest to them.

As a side note, overall, the most frequently used social media among Thai Generation Y were Line, Facebook, Google, YouTube, and Facebook Messenger. Hence, these should be the main platforms to provide content and communicate with them; not only one, but cross-platforms formats are suggested.

Limitations and Future Research

Perhaps the use of larger sample sizes of upcountry people might explain their higher mean scores. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution and future research should take this issue into account. This study also focused on a limited geographical area, so the results should be viewed as a foundation, or to complement other research. More up-to-date uses and gratifications scales should also be employed in the future. Different types of social content should be further studied to reveal more granular findings. Finally, the findings of this study suggest that geographical factors need to be further tested to see whether they have an influence on other media consumption behavior. Future research is encouraged to incorporate other dimensions in addition to traditional motivations based on UGT.

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