



The uses and gratifications of using Facebook music listening applications



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ABSTRACT

Despite rapid adoption of social media as a means of music listening, little is known about users' motivations. This study applies the uses and gratifications approach to users' motivations for using music listening applications on Facebook. Participants completed an online survey, and 153 out of 576 respondents indicated that they used a Facebook music listening application. A principal axis factor analysis identified three different motivations for this usage, namely entertainment, communication, and habitual diversion gratifications. The entertainment and communication gratifications replicate those found in prior uses and gratifications research concerning other social networking features, illustrating the strong similarity between uses of music and social media. However, the habitual diversion gratification may serve to distinguish listening applications from other features. Identifying and explaining these factors is relevant to social media users, musicians and application designers, as they explain what motivates a means of music listening that is gaining prominence.

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1. Introduction

Rapid technological developments mean that people have the ability to use music in ways that did not exist barely a decade ago (Lonsdale & North, 2011). Music is more accessible and cheaper than before; and the Internet and social media have transformed the opportunities to discover, share, and consume digital music (Leong & Wright, 2011). 2013 statistics indicate an even greater shift towards digital music technology as the primary way people listen to and discover music (British Recorded Music Industry, 2014). In the U.S., music and entertainment app use in 2013 grew 78% in 2013 over 2012 (Khalaf, 2014) and U.S. teens have approximately seven music apps on their smartphones (Nielsen Company, 2014). The Nielsen Company (2014) reported that streaming consumption grew 32% in 2013 over 2012 in the U.S., with 68% of U.S. consumers streaming music in 2013; and in the U.K., listeners streamed 7.4 billion songs in 2013, double the amount in 2012, leading the value of music streaming to surpass 100 million pounds (BPI, 2014). Moreover, musicians are also engaging with fans via social media (Burns, 2009). Indeed, in 2013, nine out of the 10 most-liked people on Facebook and seven of the 10 most followed people on Twitter were musicians (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, 2013).

Thus, there is a cultural shift in music and social media due their reciprocal influence on each other (Burns, 2009). As such, it is impossible to understand the role of music in the modern social world without an understanding of music in the context of social networking (web)sites (SNSs). However, the recency of this development means that it is not well understood.

In 2011, the popular SNS Facebook allowed users to enable third-party applications (apps) to publish activity to Facebook (San Pascual, 2013). In doing so, Facebook and online music services aimed to transform music discovery and sharing (San Pascual, 2013). This change allowed users to listen to music and display their music listening history, share links to particular pieces of music, and even join in on friends' listening sessions. After only a year, 62.6 million songs had been involved in a striking 22 billion plays (Kirn, 2012) via these methods, such that it represents a significant, new means of listening to, discovering, and recommending music, especially among those who are regular SNS users. For instance, as of March 2014, there were over 34 million monthly active users of the Spotify Facebook application (<http://www.statista.com/statistics/241424/dau-and-mau-of-spotifys-facebook-app/>). While the number of active users demonstrates that SNS users are embracing this feature, the uses for and gratifications resulting from such behavior are unknown.

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) is an approach to understanding how and why people seek out specific media. As a communication theory that assumes that audience members are

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not passive, it provides a useful paradigm to analyze media choices and consumption (Ruggiero, 2000). Well established as a framework for explaining audience motives for using mass media (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Ruggiero, 2000), U&G theory can be applied to web 2.0 media, and SNSs in particular. Simultaneously a form of communication and media (Marshall, 2010), SNSs are intriguing subject matter for the study of the motivations, or gratifications underlying their use. The increasing popularity and expanding capabilities of SNSs strongly suggest that people infer functionality and receive gratifications from their use; however, we have very little understanding of why people are motivated to use certain SNS features. U&G theory aptly addresses these questions.

Prior research has highlighted broad social reasons for using SNSs, such as a general sense of motivation to participate or of belonging and influence (Freyne, Jacovi, Guy, & Geyer, 2009), and more specific factors such as staying in touch with friends and family members, meeting with people with common hobbies or interests, and reading comments by public figures (Chen, 2011; Joinson, 2008; Smith, 2011). However, this prior research examining uses and gratifications at the site usage level does not detail how people use specific SNS features (including those related to music). In particular, we must recognize that SNSs support a range of social activities, and that usage, motivations, and gratifications are not uniform across users (Joinson, 2008; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). Moreover, as SNSs add additional features, there is a need for greater consideration of the use of particular SNS features (Baek, Holton, Harp, & Yaschur, 2011; Karnik, Oakley,

Venkatanathan, Spiliotopoulos, & Nisi, 2013; Smock et al., 2011; Wohn, Lampe, Vitak, & Ellison, 2011). By applying U&G theory to specific feature use, research can account for the fact that people choose their level of participation, and choose to engage in some activities or site features and not others (Baek et al., 2011; Smock et al., 2011). In turn, developers interested in improving and enhancing the users' SNS experiences can use this detailed information when designing new features.

There are four studies that, in response, have examined the uses and gratifications for specific SNS features. The features considered include sharing links on Facebook (Baek et al., 2011), engaging in Facebook groups (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009), playing SNS games (Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2012), and participating in a music video sharing Facebook group (Karnik et al., 2013). In particular, the Karnik et al. (2013) study is of particular relevance to the present research, as it provides some data concerning a music activity. Table 1 (and the discussion of the present research) details the uses and gratifications identified by these four studies in detail. Commonalities of the gratifications across the selected features include entertainment and communication/social interaction—which mirror motivations for more general usage of Facebook/SNSs also (e.g., Joinson, 2008; Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Additionally, although framed slightly differently depending on the feature, another gratification was indicative of sharing information or promoting oneself or work. Other gratifications, however, were unique to the specific features in question. For instance, a competition motivation underlies playing SNS games, and a discovery motivation

Table 1
A comparison of the uses and gratifications of specific Facebook features.

Study	Current study – Facebook music listening applications	Karnik et al. (2013) – music video sharing Facebook group	Park et al. (2009) – participating in groups	Baek et al. (2011) – Sharing links	Lee et al. (2012) – SNS games
Factors	Communication, entertainment, habitual diversion	Contribution, discovery, social interaction, entertainment	Socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, information	Information sharing, convenience and entertainment, to pass time, interpersonal utility, control, and promoting work'	Social interaction, self-presentation, fantasy/role playing, passing time/escapism, entertainment, and challenge/competition
Communication – Communicating and discussing and sharing information with others		Social interaction – receiving appreciation (likes) (authors state match to Park et al. socializing)	Socializing – generally interested in meeting and talking with others as well as getting peer support and a sense of community	Information Sharing – respondents as posting links on Facebook to share information with other users	Social interaction – represents a player's motive to get others' support and maintain one's relationship
			Self-status? – seeking and maintaining their personal status/look cool/peer pressure	Promoting Work? – characterized posting links to promote their works Interpersonal utility? – described posting links as a tool for interacting and socializing with others	Self-presentation – a motive to make a good impression on others
Entertainment – Using music applications for enjoyment, entertainment, fun, and to discover new musicians	Discovery of new music (& valued re-discovering music they had not listened to in a long time) Entertainment – appreciated the music genre the group represented (authors state match to Park et al. entertainment)	Entertainment – refers to engagement in Facebook Groups for leisure and amusement needs	Convenience and Entertainment – respondents post links because it is easy and entertaining	Entertainment – a motive to have entertaining gaming experiences	
Habitual diversion – Passing the time, use from boredom or as a distraction, as a habit		Entertainment also?	Pass Time – represented by posting links to pass time Convenience?	Passing time/escapism – a motive to pass time when bored and to escape from their real-life problems	

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