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## Does Media Appeal Matter? Investigating the Motives for Using Social Media and Its Addiction among Malaysian Youth

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### ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNS) have mushroomed in this digital era, which has caused various media psychology issues, such as addiction. Youth is a segment that is significantly impacted by the phenomenon, which is alarming. Thus, it is crucial to understand the motives that motivate youth to use SNS platforms. Coined within the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), this research examines social media motives, namely enjoyment, information seeking, social interaction, and media appeal, on social media addiction among youth. This study applied a quantitative research methodology using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for data analysis. A questionnaire was distributed, and 194 valid responses were gathered via purposive sampling. The findings revealed that enjoyment and media appeal motives were predictors of social media addiction; however, social interaction and information seeking were not predictors. The present research contributes to UGT by expanding the media appeal motive for social media addiction. Implications for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals are discussed to identify targeted interventions to ameliorate emerging social media addiction problems among youth for the betterment of society.

**Keywords:** Uses and Gratification theory (UGT), social media addiction, media appeal, well-being, media psychology and consumption

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### Introduction

The Internet has become the most dominant way to connect people over any medium or platform for communication and interaction (Aichner et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022). With the popularity of social media among young people, there is a significant shift in how humans communicate today (Dumford et al., 2023). Global social media usage has affected modes of communication, interpersonal relationships, and work life (Gazi et al., 2024). Although these networks have some advantages, there is growing concern over their use and whether they would lead youth into addiction (Sun & Zhang, 2021). The use of social media has become problematic among young people, and the exact reasons behind it remain unexplored (Tullett-Prado et al., 2023).

According to Zulkifli and Zainal Abidin (2023), one of the key issues identified in Malaysia is the reason youth are so immersed in social media, which can lead to addiction. A survey of Malaysian youth aged 15-25 revealed that key activities over social networking sites (SNS) were connected with information search, entertainment, and self-expression (Kolhar et al., 2021). The study has shown several reasons why Malaysian youth use social media, indicating the importance of understanding these motives in creating a more comprehensive approach to tackling issues related to social networking addiction in this segment.

According to Kemp (2023), the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) statistics report that various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, are accessible to at least 45 % of Malaysia's youth. According to Che Zainal et al. (2024), the results of the MCMC's 2021 Internet Users Survey, almost 88.7 % of Malaysian youth aged between 15 and 25 who are active on social media can be categorised under this demographic segment. Although the use of social media is high among the young population in Malaysia (Chen et al., 2022; Paiman & Fauzi, 2024), few studies have empirically evaluated the specific types of motives for social media addiction. Furthermore, recent research has investigated the effects of motives for social media use on SNS addiction. The analyses indicated that addiction ranks particularly high but has significant correlations with the main motives such as social interaction, information seeking, and entertainment (Jarrar et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2011). The results indicate that some specific motives for using SNS may prompt addictive behaviours. This information is critical for the design and enforcement of interventions and strategies among young people to engage in healthy digital behaviours (Bottaro & Faraci, 2022; Kolhar et al., 2021).

In addition, previous studies that applied Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) have yielded different results. For instance, Chan et al. (2022a) found that entertainment and social interaction were predictors. However, the escape motive was not a predictor of binge-watching, which is also aligned with Ferris et al. (2021), where interpersonal interaction appears to be a significant predictor of social media addiction. In addition, Chan et al. (2022b) found that UGT motives (passing time, enjoyment, and information seeking) were predictors of YouTube addiction, but Bhatiasavi (2024) found that self-discovery motives were not predictors of psychological well-being, which indicated mixed findings and urged researchers to re-examine it.

Furthermore, little research has been conducted on the media appeal motive (Gan & Li, 2018), which urges researchers to include this motive to expand the UGT. In this respect, media appeal is a technological gratification achieved through various media platforms' technological affordances and functionalities (Gan & Li, 2018). However, whether and how the media appeal motive (Miller et al., 2024) connects to the addictive aspect of young people remains somewhat unexplained. Therefore, the current study aimed to test the impact of the motives for using social media (enjoyment, social interaction, information seeking, media appeal) and social media addiction among Malaysian youth.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Underpinning***

Uses and Gratification theory (UGT), which focuses on the reasons people use particular media and the gratifications they expect from it, was applied in this study. Contrary to other media theories, which emphasise how media affects specific people, UGT emphasises how active audiences choose and use media to satisfy their needs (Sichach, 2023). Based on this theory, people are active users looking for specific media content to meet certain psychological or social requirements rather than passive recipients of media messages (Kircaburun et al., 2020).

According to the UGT, people utilise media for a range of purposes, such as escapism, enjoyment, information, social networking, and self-identification (Hossain, 2019; Menon & Meghana, 2021). These satisfactions are the main motivations underlying media consumption, with people choosing media that best suit their requirements at any particular moment.

## ***Hypothesis Development***

### ***Enjoyment (Hedonic gratification)***

People use social media for pleasure, which is closely related to the hedonic gratification of the UGT (Hossain, 2019). Enjoyment from SNS use elicits positive affect, including pleasure and happiness, through an internal motive called the enhancement motive, which provides intrinsic reinforcement (Kock & Moqbel, 2019). There is numerous interesting content on social media, such as funny stickers or memes, videos, and enjoyable posts (Mpofu, 2021). This aligns with the hedonic aspect of the theory, which claims that people seek pleasure and avoid costs to feel satisfied. Furthermore, social media makes staying socially connected with loved ones, friends, and similar-minded individuals easier, making it naturally enjoyable and satisfying (Winstone et al., 2021). People enjoy using social media when they can interact with others by relating their experiences, passions, and comic materials. This creates a sense of community and solidarity.

In general, enjoyment as part of the hedonic gratification element of the UGT explains why individuals use social media for enjoyment because they use it to connect with others and engage in interesting things to generate fun, relaxation, or networking engagements (Bhatiasevi, 2024). Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The enjoyment motive for using social media positively impacts social media addiction among youth.

### ***Social interaction (Social gratification)***

According to Liu (2025), social interaction refers to socialisation between people to create connections and communication. A social media platform is an online space where users communicate, exchange ideas, and maintain connections with friends, family, and even strangers (Ayyıldız & Şahin, 2022). This aspect is closely related to the social gratification dimension of UGT, which highlights the importance of uses in which people interact socially in their virtual space, such as Facebook or Instagram (Menon, 2022) and leads to addiction (Ferris et al., 2021). Social gratification focuses on the idea that diverse individuals have different reasons for consuming social media and how it enables them to meet these needs. For example, they can chat with friends from around the world, make new friends, or be reminded by Facebook to reconnect through reunion photos. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social interaction motive positively influences social media addiction among youth.

### ***Information seeking (Utilitarian gratification)***

Social media is a platform through which people seek and search for information. In this study, information seeking refers to the motivation to use social media to search for and consume information (Junaidi et al., 2020). Social media fulfills the purpose of retrieving information, providing instantaneous facts across all ages, cultures, or genders (Li et al., 2022). The concept of information seeking corresponds to utilitarian gratification in the UGT (Hoang et al., 2024). Users not only visit the feeds for entertainment but also need data to make up-to-date decisions or solve problems when scrolling on social media. Therefore, breaking news, educational videos, and product reviews on social media are available instantaneously and easily obtained (Kircaburun et al., 2022), which aligns with Chan et al.'s (2022b) study that information seeking is positively related to YouTube addiction behaviour.

In addition, social media provides a crowdsourcing method for information intake. Users can follow accounts, pages, or hashtags to get the content to match their interests and adjust their preferences accordingly. This personalisation feature empowers social media to become an informative use case, thus making it easier for users to use as the basis for sourcing valuable information (Ngo et al., 2024). Based on this discussion, the study postulates the following:

H3: Seeking information motive positively impacts social media addiction among youth.

### ***Media appeal (Technology gratification)***

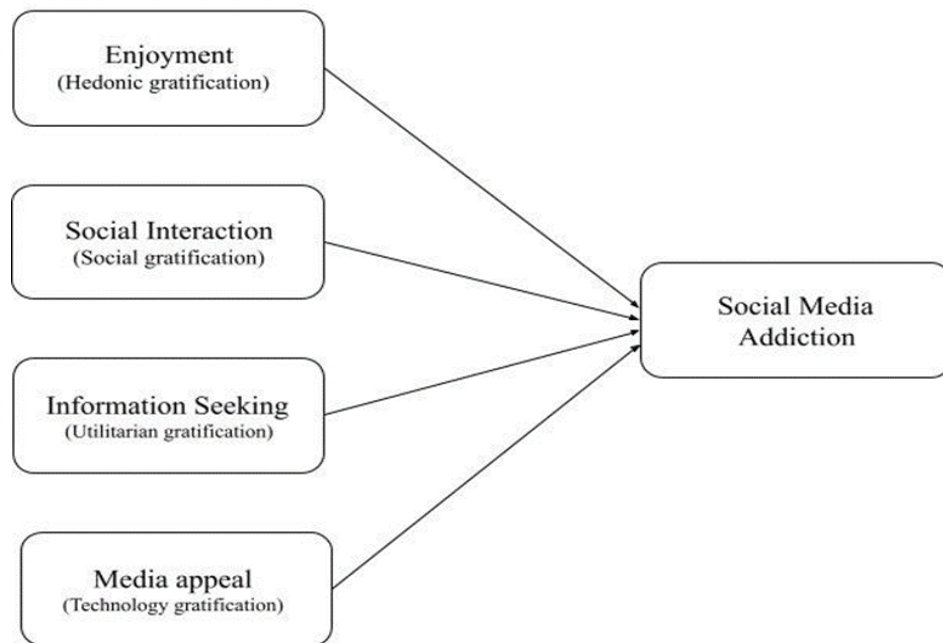
Media appeal is a characteristic of social media expressed through visually pleasing graphics, catchy videos, and memes. Its creative uses include live streaming options and interactive stories (Kircaburun et al., 2020), which are important in triggering curiosity that ultimately influences the audience to interact with content. This function enriches content aesthetics and accuracy for user satisfaction and engagement (Wang et al., 2024). Although not directly satisfying the need for utility, media appeal significantly contributes to user satisfaction and enhances the overall media experience (Boudkouss & Djelassi, 2021). In a nutshell, media appeals help with satisfaction and result in more utility gains from their media usage experience. Media appeal within a UGT frame explicitly influences technology-mediated experiences (Boudkouss & Djelassi, 2021) and lead to addiction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: There is a positive relationship between media appeal motives and social media addiction among youth.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study.

**Figure 1:**

*Proposed conceptual framework*



## **Methods**

### ***Research Design***

This study used a quantitative method to perform statistical tests to analyse the data (Ghanad, 2023). This study used a questionnaire survey design to examine the connection between Malaysian youth and their motives for using social media and their addiction.

### ***Sampling Technique***

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling entails deliberately selecting participants who meet particular criteria relevant to the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). For this purpose, participant selection was carried out according to age, which is between 18 and 40 years old, as this age group was chosen because they are more prone to problems

of social media addiction (Pellegrino et al., 2022). In addition, respondents must be active social media users and have used social media for a certain number of hours.

Researchers used G-power analysis to determine the sample size; based on the analysis, the required sample size was 129 (predictors: 4, power: 0.90, effect size: 0.15) (Kang, 2021). Thus, the 194 sample met the minimum sample size requirements and could further proceed with statistical analysis.

### **Measurement**

The instrument began with demographic questions that comprised the first section of the questionnaire and were designed to acquire information about the participants' age, gender, educational background, race, frequency, and hours spent on social media. The second part of the questionnaire focused on enjoyment motives, and the items were adapted from Jo and Baek (2023) and Park et al. (2009). The following section contained items on social interaction, which were adapted from Zhao et al. (2014). Four items for information seeking were adapted from Junaidi et al. (2020), and three items for media appeal were adapted from Gan and Li (2018). Finally, the social media addition items were adapted from (Gan & Li, 2018).

The measurement used a Likert-type scale with five anchors (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) to measure the participants' responses, enabling more precise assessments of their behaviour and attitude. This survey was distributed among popular social media networks such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and Direct messages to engage a diverse group of participants between 18 and 40. The researchers granted confidentiality and anonymity to the respondents via the cover page of the online survey form before the respondents answered it.

### **Results and Discussion**

According to Appendix A, more than half of the respondents were female (60.3%), whereas the remaining were male (39.7%). Half of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree (50.0%), which indicated that the respondents received tertiary education. Nearly half of the respondents were 21–25 years old (47.9%), and the majority of them were Malay (64.4%). Besides, nearly half of the respondents reported using social media "almost every time" (47.9%) and spent 3–5 hours on social media (36.6%).

### **Reliability Analysis**

According to Dźwigoł (2020), the aim of conducting a pilot test was to verify that the questionnaire was comprehensible and understood by the respondents. Cronbach's alpha was used to conduct a reliability test for the research instrument, a commonly used technique in social science research (Bujang et al., 2018). According to Taber (2018), an alpha score of 0.70 or greater is considered acceptable. Thus, based on Table 1 all alpha values of the constructs were greater than 0.70. Thus, the instrument was reliable.

**Table 1**

#### *Reliability of the Variables*

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha (n=30)
Enjoyment	4	0.847
Social Interaction	4	0.823
Information seeking	4	0.846
Media appeal	3	0.883
Social Media Addiction	4	0.897

### **Normality test**

The assumption of normality is crucial before running the data. This study used Skewness and Kurtosis values to check for normality. Skewness and kurtosis values between -2 and +2 are generally acceptable, while values greater than -2 and +2 indicate substantial non-normality (Hair et al., 2022, p. 66). Therefore, the normality results analysis showed that all variables were normally distributed (Table 2). Hence, parametric analyses, such as regression analysis, can be conducted.

**Table 2**

*Skewness and Kurtosis of Motives for Using Social Media and Addiction*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
Enjoyment	4.00	20.00	-0.889	1.929
Social interaction	4.00	20.00	-0.648	0.320
Information seeking	4.00	20.00	-0.648	0.320
Media appeal	3.00	15.00	-1.199	1.923
<b>Social media addiction</b>	4.00	20.00	-0.360	0.484

A multiple regression analysis was conducted using a stepwise approach to test the predictors of motives (enjoyment, social interaction, information seeking, and media appeal) for social media addiction. Table 4 indicates that enjoyment (Model 1) provides a significant result with  $F = 138.952$ ,  $p < 0.050$ . In addition, the combination of enjoyment and media appeal (Model 2) yielded a significant result ( $F = 91.321$ ,  $p < 0.050$ ). Meanwhile, multiple regression tests showed that enjoyment significantly contributed 42.0 % of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.420$ ) towards social media addiction. This means that enjoyment ( $\beta = 0.577$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was the main factor contributing to social media addiction. However, with the combination of predictors, enjoyment ( $\beta = 0.371$ ,  $p < 0.050$ ) and media appeal ( $\beta = 0.391$ ,  $p < 0.050$ ), the contribution value of variance towards social media addiction increased to 48.9%, with an increment of 6.9% (48.9 - 42.0). Based on multiple regression analysis, H1 and H4 were accepted, while H2 and H3 were rejected.

It showed that the motives predicted by U&G were enjoyment and media appeal. Attributes that did not significantly contribute to this study were social interaction and information seeking. Hence, it can be concluded that some other variables (51.1%) currently not being investigated in this study may contribute to social media addiction.

**Table 3**

*Multiple Regression Analysis – Stepwise Approach*

<b>Model</b>		<b>B</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>(Constant)</b>	2.892		3.631	0.000
	<b>Enjoyment</b>	0.577	0.648	11.789	0.000
$F=138.952$ , $df=1, 192$ , $p=0.000$ , $R=0.648$ , $R^2=0.420$ , $Adj R^2=0.417$					
<b>2</b>	<b>(Constant)</b>	1.299		1.599	0.112
	<b>Enjoyment</b>	0.371	0.416	6.034	0.000
	<b>Media Appeal</b>	0.391	0.350	5.076	0.000
$F=91.321$ , $df=2, 191$ , $p=0.000$ , $R=0.699$ , $R^2=0.489$ , $Adj R^2=0.483$					

Based on research insights into how these motives influence social media addiction among youth, motives such as enjoyment have been found to have a significant link with social media addiction, which aligns with the findings of previous studies (Bhatiasevi, 2024; Jo & Baek, 2023). In addition, the social interaction motive was found to have an insignificant relationship with social media addiction, which contradicts the findings of Ayyıldız and Şahin (2022), Menon (2022) and Ferris et al. (2021), who found that interpersonal interaction is the most important predictor of social media addiction.

Surprisingly, information-seeking emerged as an insignificant motive for youth addiction. These findings indicate that this motive does not directly lead to higher levels of addiction, which is in contrast to numerous previous studies (Chan et al., 2022b; Kircaburun et al., 2022; Wang & Guo, 2023). This can be further understood by the current demographics of many young respondents below 21 and from 21 to 25 years old, who are technology savvy and mainly use SNS platforms for enjoyment and entertainment.

This study's additional and critical contribution is the introduction of media appeal as a motive. This variable exhibits a notable positive and significant impact on social media addiction (Boudkouss & Djelassi, 2021; Gan & Li, 2018; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2024), suggesting that the appeal of innovative and engaging information plays a crucial role in addictive behaviours among youth. This result emphasises the need for platforms to consider content design and engagement strategies that minimise addiction risks while enhancing the user experience.

The application of UGT offers a strong theoretical framework for understanding the motivational process. It emphasised how youth proactively choose and consume media based on the specific gratifications desired, influencing their vulnerability to addictive behaviours. By validating these relationships, this study extends the theoretical understanding of social media addiction in the digital age.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study examined the motives for using social media (predictors) and social media addiction among youth by expanding the UGT. The findings indicated that enjoyment and media appeal motives were predictors of social media addiction; however, social interaction and information seeking were not.

## **Academic Implications**

This study contributes to the UGT by testing use-based motives for using social media and social media addiction among youth. Specifically, enjoyment and media appeal had a positive and significant impact on social media addiction. This implies that the media appeal motive, driven by compelling technological design and engaging features associated with social media platforms, is an addictive and immersive aspect. These findings are critical to advancing UGT by showing that not all social media gratifications contribute equally to the addictive use of SNS, emphasising that extension of the media appeal dimension is a pivotal factor in explaining users' psychological behaviour with social media.

## **Practical Implications**

Based on the results, it is recommended that educational initiatives be developed to enhance digital literacy knowledge among the youth. Educating young users about the potential risks of excessive social media use and fostering critical thinking skills regarding online behaviours can empower and train them to make more informed and rational decisions.

Second, considering the diverse motives identified in this study, such as social interaction, entertainment, and validation, it is imperative to design targeted interventions that cater to these needs. For example, creating alternative offline activities that fulfill these motives can help reduce dependency on social media platforms as the sole source of gratification.

Collaboration between social media platforms and mental health professionals is essential. This is because these platforms can implement features that promote healthy usage patterns, such as sending

reminders to take breaks, limiting notifications during certain hours, and providing resources for users showing signs of addiction.

### ***Limitations and recommendations for future research***

One significant limitation was the sample size employed in this study. While the study included 194 respondents, expanding the sample size would enhance the generalisability of the findings. A larger sample size would allow for a more robust statistical analysis, potentially revealing subtle variations in motives and their association with social media addiction across demographic groups and contexts.

Another limitation is the motives for social media use. While efforts have been made to capture a range of motives, some dimensions of the UGT might not have been fully represented. Future studies should consider refining the questionnaire to encompass a broader spectrum of motives for using social media, such as self-expression, escapism, self-promotion, and altruism (Chan et al., 2022a; Omar & Dequan, 2020), to provide a more in-depth understanding of the factors that influence social media addiction. Additionally, qualitative methods could complement quantitative data collection to explore the nuanced ways these motives manifest in youth behaviour.

Lastly, incorporating additional demographic factors such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and contextual variables such as peer influence and parental involvement (Leijse et al., 2023) would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to social media addiction among youth. Such approaches align with the principles of the UGT, which posits that individuals actively choose and use media to gratify their needs, and would enrich media and communication scholarship.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

### **Author Contribution Statement**

TJC - Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing - original draft, Writing - Review & editing. WSAMH - Data curation, Project administration, Writing - original draft. YT - Data curation, Writing - Review & editing. MHC - Validation, Writing - Review & editing

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### **Ethics Statement**

This research did not require IRB approval because it involved an anonymous survey with no collection of personal or sensitive data.



### **Data Access Statement:**

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### **Author Biography**

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## Appendix A

### *Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=194)*

Variable(s)	Category	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Male	77	39.7
	Female	117	60.3
<b>Education</b>	High school	21	10.8
	STPM/ foundation/ Diploma	55	28.4
	Bachelor's degree	97	50.0
	Master's degree	8	4.1
	Ph.D.	4	2.1
	Professional certificate	9	4.6
<b>Age (years old)</b>	<21	50	25.8
	21-25	93	47.9
	26-30	21	10.8
	31-35	5	2.6
	36-40	25	12.9
<b>Race</b>	Malay	125	64.4
	Chinese	28	14.4
	Indian	29	14.9
	Others	12	6.2
<b>Frequency of using social media</b>	Sometimes/occasionally	16	8.2
	Almost every time	93	47.9
	Every time	85	43.8
<b>Hours spent on social media</b>	1 hour or less	11	5.7
	2-3 hours	64	33.0
	3-5 hours	71	36.6
	6 hours and above	48	24.7