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Uses and Gratifications of YouTube: A Comparative Analysis of Users and Content Creators

Abstract

Drawing on the classic media theory of uses and gratifications, this paper comparatively analyzes the uses of YouTube and the rewards obtained by consumers and content of this video sharing platform. The aim of this research is two-fold: 1. to identify the main uses and gratifications that determine consumers and content creators to use YouTube, and 2) to examine the reasons behind the decision to become a content creator on YouTube. Based on a qualitative research method, the paper highlights how YouTube is used from the perspective of consumers and content creators and the types of needs it gratifies. The research consists of 20 in-depth interviews with YouTube consumers and content creators from Romania. While for content consumers YouTube is mainly a means of relaxation and information, for content creators this platform becomes a source of recognition and social validation. The study also indicates that vlogging can provide job-specific gratifications. Moreover, the research reveals essential aspects behind the decision to become a content creator.

Keywords: uses and gratifications, YouTube, user-generated content, content creators.

Introduction

For several years now, YouTube has been the most used video content platform in the world, which is accessed monthly by over 1.9 billion users (YouTube for Press, 2019). YouTube is also the second most popular website worldwide, surpassed only by Google (The top 500 sites on the web, 2019). In Romania, YouTube is ranked second in the list of the most popular websites (Top Sites in Romania, 2019). Given the increased public interest in using this platform, the purpose of the paper is to examine the uses and gratifications of YouTube, drawing on classical media theory. YouTube is considered a website that encourages the development of content creation and its transformation into a business, thus supporting content creators to improve the quality of published videos and to enhance interaction with their fans (Hou,

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2018). This paper aims to highlight the differences in terms of gratifications obtained by consumers and content creators.

Building on previous work by Shao (2009) and Khan (2017), we investigate the uses and gratifications obtained by YouTube users following their degree of involvement. From this point of view, YouTube is proving to be a platform that manages to satisfy a wide range of needs. Shao (2009) shows that users can be consumers, participants but also content creators. While consumers obtain information and entertainment gratifications, participants receive rewards related to social interaction and community development. Content creators, however, reach another level of involvement since they produce new elements and pieces of information that help them receive rewards in the area of self-actualization and self-expression.

In this context, this paper aims to facilitate the understanding of the content creators' perspective compared with the needs of the users. Our approach brings together the views of the two categories of users, which are usually studied separately. Furthermore, our article provides a detailed description of the transition from YouTube user to content creator, within the Romanian context. This is an exploratory research that aims to identify essential trends regarding the use of YouTube by Romanians. We hope that our findings can be further explored and expanded by future research.

Uses and Gratifications of YouTube

The "uses and gratifications" (U&G) perspective is considered a modern approach for understanding mass communication as it produces a significant restructuring on how the media-individual relationship is perceived (Siraj, 2007). This model indicates that the audience is active and that it consciously selects channels that can meet its needs (Katz et al., 1973). At the core of individuals' decision to use specific media are their needs, which are strongly influenced by "psychological dispositions, sociological factors, and environmental conditions" (Katz et al., 1973, p. 516). At the same time, the reward comes when individuals feel the selected media have been able to meet their needs to a high degree (Palmgreen, 1984).

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) launched the uses and gratifications theory, proposing a definition in the form of a logical media path: "(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 in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (p. 510). In the early stages of the U&G theory, the focus was on suggesting types of motives and gratifications underlying the use of media. Rubin (1985) has made a significant contribution to the development of the theory by developing the functionalist approach to U&G and, later, by highlighting how this theory contributes to the research on media effects (2009). However, social media have produced a fundamental change in the communication process by offering users the opportunity to become content creators (Leug, 2009). Recently, as expected, much research focused on the application of the U&G model to social media. The ever-increasing diversity of social networks (such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter) resulted in a detailed analysis of how users adopt new social platforms and integrate them into their daily habits. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) were able to show that individuals are not limited to the use of a single type of network and create a personalized range of plat-

forms, each having its role and function (McQuail & Windahl, 2010). Moreover, the adoption of a new platform is closely related to its popularity (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

Gao and Feng (2016) propose a classification of rewards that is specific to social media use. The two authors claim that the rewards obtained from using social media may derive from five primary needs, namely information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, and impression management. Leisure is one of the main reasons that drive users to access social media platforms. By consuming this type of content, the public satisfies its need for relaxation and escapes the sphere of daily life problems (Katz et al., 1973).

With the development of YouTube, the phenomenon of video blogging has become popular, vlogs being widely consumed. The vlog is described in the literature as a user-generated short video that is distributed in the online environment where other users can view it, write a comment about it, or subscribe to the creator's channel. Vlogs can take the form of an online diary or web-TV shows and may have different themes (Gao et al., 2010). Through the options of share, comment, repost, social media allow for interaction and attract rewards in this regard not only by maintaining the connection with the close ones but also by creating a favorable environment for meeting new people (Gao & Feng, 2016). The new social platforms create a pleasant climate for self-presentation, allowing users to update their accounts with information about their activities and preferences. Shao (2009) emphasizes that self-presentation in the online environment helps the individual to obtain social acceptance or shared social support. Presenting oneself most positively is the concern of many social media users (Dunne et al., 2010). People use social media to embellish their identity in the online environment so that this helps them achieve social validation (Dunne et al., 2010). The main benefit offered by personalizing their accounts is the increased level of self-esteem (Pai & Arnott, 2013).

As for the tools made available by YouTube, Balakrishnan and Griffiths (2017) have identified two main functions of this platform: a. creating content and b. searching for content. YouTube is a website that delineates content creators explicitly. The platform has also developed its recommendation options so that it can provide users with the content they might be interested in, based on their general preferences. Algorithms used by platforms such as Google or YouTube are intended to feed the users what they are most likely to access and consume. This type of selection causes the user to enter an echo chamber and be exposed to points of view similar to his/ her own and to content from the same sphere of interest (Pariser, 2011). Haridakis and Hanson (2009) indicate that the reasons that determine the users to watch newly posted content are related to the need for entertainment, the need to search for information, the desire for social interaction but also the desire to view different materials with close friends.

Admittedly, the reasons that cause the users to distribute the video material found on this platform relate to the need for interaction with other users, the desire to be involved in a fun activity but also to the need to spend time with close friends and family. For example, YouTube can be used as a complementary tool in the study process, students using this platform in their exam preparation process throughout their academic career (Moghavvemi et al., 2018). YouTube has also been identified as a useful tool in the process of intercultural exchange between users, being an informal method to learn a foreign language (Combe & Codreanu, 2016). Bakar et al. (2014, p.11) rank the gratifications generated by using YouTube as follows: content-generated gratifications, process-generated gratifications, social gratifications and technology gratifications.

Snelson (2015) identifies several reasons that justify the desire of young people to produce vlogs in which they present aspects of their school activity. In this case, vlogging is described as a fun activity that helps young people meet their entertainment needs. Another motivation of the vlogging activity would be young people's desire to align with a tendency identified within the group of friends; young people are inspired by friends who carry out this type of activity in the online environment and want to imitate their behavior (Snelson, 2015). The influence exerted by a person's entourage is considered a determinant factor of its desire to use certain social media (Zhou et al., 2019). By vlogging, young people also satisfy a range of emotional needs, including increased self-confidence. In this sense, Snelson (2015) points the positive feedback and encouragement their followers send to the vlogger as sources of emotional gratifications.

However, Moor et al. (2010) explain that, within the YouTube platform, forms of expression of hostility and use of insults are prevalent, the phenomenon being known in the literature as "flaming". The prevalence of the flaming phenomenon is a factor that results in certain users not participating actively in the platform, suppressing at the same time their desire to publish a material created by them (Moor et al., 2010). In their thorough analysis of a series of vlogs with a strong denominational character, in which the users expressed a series of negative emotions (fear, anxiety, frustration), Berryman and Kavka (2017) conclude that the activity of vlogging may have a cathartic effect over the content creator. Thus, in certain situations, vlogging can be considered a form of therapy (Berryman & Kavka, 2017). For example, the vlog has been categorized as a therapeutic tool in the case of the content creators who are part of the transgender community (Raun, 2012).

Khan (2017) points out that by watching funny videos, users can experience a form of escapism. Escapism is a behavior adopted by an individual to help oneself to distance from daily problems and concerns, an effective method to avoid negative life aspects (Young et al., 2017). YouTube helps individuals satisfy their need for escapism as they can perform various roles when using this platform, distancing themselves from the dissatisfying status they have in their daily lives (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2017). In this context, content consumption has a regulatory function of the emotional state (Shao, 2009). This mechanism is known in the literature as the disposition management theory (Zillmann, 1988).

YouTube is a suitable environment to research how the same platform generates different gratifications, depending on how it is used. If by content consumption users mainly obtain cognitive, social, and emotional rewards, the creation of content can generate remunerative and emotional gratifications. Previous studies (see Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017; Khan, 2017) focused on analyzing the uses and rewards offered by YouTube using a quantitative approach; these studies either confirmed or denied the presence of certain gratifications identified over time in literature. At this point, we believe that a comparison of the gratifications obtained by consumers with those obtained by content creators, from a qualitative perspective, would contribute to a better understanding of why people use YouTube. Hence the first research question of this study: (RQ1) *What are the main uses and gratifications that drive consumers and content creators to use YouTube?*

As shown earlier, via consumption of content, users of YouTube obtain mainly cognitive, social, and emotional gratifications. The creation of content can generate emotional gratifications or it can lead to celebrity status. However, it is necessary to explore the behavior of YouTube users and detail the motivations behind content creation.

Uses and Gratifications of User-Generated Content

The user-generated content completely reorganized the trends in the study of mass communication, removing the boundary between producer and content consumer. In general terms, the concept of user-generated content is defined as the specific type of media content produced and distributed on the Internet by individuals belonging to the general public, not by professionals who generate a particular content in exchange for remuneration (Daugherty et al., 2008). In this sense, the production theory states that with the new tools offered by the Internet, the importance of the user has increased since one can effortlessly become a creator of content in the online environment (Bruns, 2016).

The motivations underlining users' decision to create content in the online environment have been a quite intensely debated topic in the field (Bughin, 2007; Leung, 2009; Snelson, 2015). One candidate for supporting content creation for the online was identified as user's financial reward. Stoeckl et al. (2007) argue that profit is not part of the reasons that drive people to become content creators because generating online content does not provide an immediate material reward. The reasons that encourage users to engage in content production are rather intrinsic. In a recent research, García-Rapp (2016) argues that by organizing giveaways through which different products are offered as prizes, content creators increase their visibility and motivate their followers to participate actively in the community. Thus, the desire to obtain a financial reward could be considered as part of the factors that encourage content consumption on YouTube. In addition to the profit gained by YouTube as a Partner Program, content creators can monetize their online activity by collaborating with different brands that want them to promote their products or services online.

Video blogging has also led to the emergence of an "autopreneur" career. This means that the person who carries out this type of activity (called vlogger or YouTuber) can be considered as an entrepreneur who develops a business based on publishing self-biographical content (Ashman et al., 2018). The publication of such materials on the platform can attract the attention of a significant number of users and the generated popularity can be exploited for developing a personal brand (Ashman et al., 2018). An excellent example in this regard is Zoella, a British vlogger who has launched a cosmetics brand, several books and has built her own company by using the image she created on YouTube. Bughin (2007) remarked that the desire to gain fame motivates the content creators present on the websites specialized in the distribution of video content in Germany. Amateur content creators consider YouTube as a tool to get recognition in the online environment and to acquire celebrity status (Chen, 2013).

As mentioned above, studies that reveal content creators' gratifications (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017; Shao 2009) do not focus on the path that individuals take from the moment they become interested in publishing original content until they get to do this with a certain regularity. Therefore, the present paper aims to identify a pattern in the process of transition from the user status to the status of content creator. In this regard, the second research question of our study is: (RQ2) *What motivates the decision to become a content creator on YouTube?*

Previous research (see Stoeckl et al., 2007; Bughin, 2007) identifies mainly intrinsic motivations for this activity (i.e. becoming a content creator), such as the desire for expression and self-actualization, the need for entertainment and the desire to gain recognition. Considering the possible extrinsic motivations, it becomes necessary to reassess the factors that determine indi-

viduals to create content in the online environment. It is, therefore, important to explore the motivations that guide users in the transition process as they become content creators.

Research Methodology

Exploring the behavior of YouTube users from the Uses and Gratifications theoretical perspective requires the investigation of rationales that determine the use of YouTube, the modalities of use, as well as the afferent gratifications. We have chosen a qualitative approach to address these issues. The research consisted of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in May and June 2019. The sample comprised 20 individuals (convenience and snow-ball sampling) aged between 21 and 27 years. Because the present study aims to carry out a comparative analysis between the uses and rewards obtained by content creators and consumers, 11 YouTube consumers and 9 content creators were included in the sample. Taking into account that the average age of content creators in Romania varies according to the field of activity (beauty/fashion, gaming, entertainment, daily), ranging from 18 to 25 years (Starea vlogosferei românești, 2016), we have selected the participants in the content consumers group from the same age range. In this way, we have sought to ensure a relevant comparison without differences specific to the age gap affecting the process.

The content consumers group comprised 8 women and 3 men, all students enrolled in four colleges from Bucharest, Romania. The interviewees in this group were selected using the following criteria: to have used YouTube for at least 12 months and to access this platform at least once a week. The second group consisted of 9 content creators – 7 women and 2 men, YouTubers who focus on different areas, such as beauty, fashion, sports, and entertainment. We have chosen to select vloggers that produce similar content (such as daily vlogs, product reviews, confessional vlogs). Gaming vloggers were not included in the research because these content creators produce distinct content (such as gameplay or tutorials) and have a different kind of interaction with their subscribers. Nevertheless, gaming vloggers could be the focus of a future research on U&G of YouTube. The selection criteria for inclusion in the content creators' group were to have an active YouTube channel for six months prior to the interview and to have used the platform during the previous 12 months. Furthermore, an important aspect that we have taken into consideration when selected the content creators was that they had to personally deal with the content creation activity because if the vlogger uses a professional team of production, the video material created in this way no longer falls into the category of user-generated content. Most of the respondents in this group (i.e. content creators) came from the College of Communication and Public Relations (Bucharest, Romania) where the proportion of female students is substantially larger compared to the percentage of male students and, therefore, there was an unbalanced number of female and male participants. However, addressing gender differences was not an objective of this research, and therefore this limitation can be tackled in future endeavors.

The main objective of conducting the interviews was to identify the motivations that led consumers and content creators to use YouTube and the various gratifications for each category. The interviews with content consumers aimed to identify a series of needs that determine the use of YouTube, such as the need for information, relaxation, preparation for academic work, entertainment or the need to spend time with family and friends. In the case of content creators, the emphasis was on the motivation that determined them to start a career on YouTube.

We analyzed the desire of content creators to obtain a profit or social recognition from vlogging. Also, we approached additional reasons in the discussion, such as the need for entertainment, relaxation or the development of various skills through vlogging activity. Moreover, another gratification investigated in the research was the therapeutic effect of vlogging.

Results and Discussion

Uses and Gratifications of YouTube Consumers and Content Creators

The first section of the interviews aimed to identify users' preferences regarding social media platforms and the gratifications associated with YouTube consumption. Participants in the research stated that they used multiple social media platforms, notably Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. The interviewees combine these platforms during daily work as well as during leisure. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) argue that the integration of a multitude of social networks is a general trend identified among users, an aspect observed within the investigated group of this research as well.

The primary gratification obtained by users is relaxation. We identified that the state of relaxation described by them includes escapism: *"When I am very stressed, and I get on YouTube, I try to focus on the video, and I am not interested in anything at the moment"* (M., 21, female). Thus, YouTube becomes a generator of gratifications associated with escapism and avoidance acting as a diversion from the stressful situations that users experience in their daily lives.

The need for relaxation and implicitly the escapism-specific manifestations are highly connected with the need for entertainment. Users pointed out that YouTube is one of their favorite platforms for meeting entertainment needs. In this regard, we encountered a typical response: users access YouTube to avoid states of monotony or boredom. YouTube satisfies the need for entertainment by providing a vast range of content types. Participants indicated that thanks to the algorithm that YouTube uses, they receive video suggestions following their expectations, interests, and desires.

As for the need for information, interviewees indicated that YouTube is an application that keeps them informed about events in the social and political spheres. Besides, through tutorial videos, they feel informed and learn to perform a multitude of actions. YouTube is identified as a useful tool when users need to be informed about how to solve a problem encountered in their daily work.

Another type of gratification mentioned by most of the interviewees is that YouTube is a useful tool in academic work. YouTube is described by students as a complementary tool in the study process and is appreciated because it provides a wealth of information in an accessible and condensed manner. In this sense, the students consider the videos posted on this platform as a substitute for the classes, because they appreciate the interactive way in which different topics are explained. Furthermore, the use of YouTube during lessons has become a prevalent practice in the Romanian academic environment.

One of the interviewees exposed a particular case of integrating YouTube into the academic preparation process: *"At one point, a teacher recommended us a series of videos from YouTube, made by him, on how to cite academic sources properly and they have been extremely helpful"* (C., 22, female). When a professor becomes a content creator, several ben-

efits of using YouTube for education are at play: the platform facilitates the quick dissemination of information, it maintains students' attention and determines them to use YouTube as a learning resource outside the class. This finding is in line with previous research (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2017; Moghavvemi et al., 2018) showing that students consider YouTube a complementary tool in the educational preparation process. Additionally, this finding shows the benefits of integrating this platform in the process of communication and interaction between students and professors.

Most of the interviewees said that young people watch vlogs to understand other cultures: *"I watch vloggers from Germany, London, France (especially Paris) and I find it very interesting to see how they live, their cultures, their habits, and how they spend their day"* (M., 21, female). Previous studies (see Combe & Codreanu 2016) indicate that YouTube is a useful tool in the process of intercultural exchange between users; the platform is an informal method of learning a foreign language.

The social gratifications that YouTube offers revolve around video sharing and the habit of watching content with close friends. Furthermore, watching videos with friends and family is a way for users to spend time together. Moreover, this activity is considered a way to strengthen the relationships among neighbors and to address and discuss various topics. The respondents mentioned that they use YouTube to watch videos recommended by their close ones: *"Sometimes, I follow the recommendation of my friends, to be cool and in line with the trends"* (C., 22, female). This is in line with work done by Zhou et al. (2019) who showed that the group of friends had a significant influence on the individual's decision to use certain social media.

With respect to the way in which content creators expose their personal experiences and negative emotions, we identified a minority view concerning the gratifications obtained by a consumer after exposure to this type of material. These personal videos can have a therapeutic effect on the followers, because the latter identify themselves with the exposed problem and experience the feeling of belonging, while eliminating the loneliness felt in those difficult situations (see Raun, 2012).

The respondents asserted that they understand how YouTube generates video recommendations and how the platform uses the specific options (Like or Subscribe) in trying to influence the algorithm. We observed the desire of the interviewees to shorten the search time and how these tools (i.e. Like and Subscribe) help the users get the content they want when they access the platform.

From the interviews conducted with content creators, we identified distinct gratifications than those identified in the case of content consumers. The first source of gratification for content creators that we identified was the exposure that YouTube facilitates in the context of social media platforms. This public exposure satisfies the need for recognition and validation, this being the primary motivation that determines individuals to publish their content. YouTube provides content creators with emotional rewards, as suggested by Snelson (2015). The primary source of emotional rewards is the positive feedback received from followers, which seems to be a general tendency: *"The positive reactions, the fact that different girls began to recognize me on the street and so on, made me feel the fact that my work really matters and is appreciated and that made me continue"* (D., 25, female).

Most of the participants to the study indicated that vlogging helped because it encouraged them to have more confidence in themselves and in what they do. Therefore, vlogging can influence the level of self-esteem of content creators. At the same time, content creators revealed

that vlogging negatively influenced their level of self-worth at the beginning of their careers, when they received negative comments and reactions from the audience. However, the positive feedback received from followers compensates for the negative input and encourages content creators to continue their activity. This aspect is in line with the study carried out by Choi et al. (2017), which shows that through the action of content creation, individuals gain credibility in the social environment for what they do and, thus, they increase their self-esteem. The main reasons behind the desire to become a content creator are the need to gain recognition in the social environment and the need to increase the level of self-esteem.

The respondents did not delineate the desire to gain fame as one of the main motivations behind their decision to become content creators (see Bughin, 2007). However, social desirability might interfere with recognition of the fact that this is a personal goal. Even when the creators emphasize the popularity they have acquired as a result of their activity, they explain that they appreciate the recognition of their merits. They mainly reiterate the idea that the driver of their activity is the desire for social validation and not the acquisition of fame, which is an effect or an adjacent gratification.

Following the analysis of the content creators' claims, it was possible to identify a general trend regarding the financial and material gratifications they obtain. They said that YouTube meets their financial needs, but this aspect is viewed by them as a secondary reward. Content creators claim that the desire to make a profit was not the basis for their decision to start their careers on YouTube. Most of the interviewees believe that the desire to get useful materials should not be a motivation at the beginning of the vlogger career: *"Yes, you can end up making good money from YouTube, but after years and years of work for free"* (L., 27, female). The interviewees' statements are in line with the assumption developed by Stoeckl et al. (2007), according to which the gratifications of a remunerative nature are not the defining factors in the decision of the individual to become a content creator. To be able to access the monetization modalities, content creators must meet several standards. When they start their vlogging activity they do not actually have any guarantee that their effort will be reimbursed. Our findings do not support the results identified by Ashman et al. (2018), according to which the activity of vlogging is regarded as a simple mechanism to obtain brand deals and fame in a short time. Our group of content creators emphasized that once accessed, the monetization mechanisms may increase the level of motivation of vloggers and accentuate their desire to continue carrying out their business.

The study identified examples of content creators who turned their activity on YouTube into a real workplace. Some content creators explained that they have a well-established program, they post with a certain regularity, work daily on the content they publish and get a remuneration that satisfies their needs and recognition for the work they carry out. Thus, they fall into the category of "autopreneurs" described by Ashman et al. (2018). The trend shown above is an exception, since most of the participants stated that they are carrying out other income-generating activities in addition to their YouTube activity.

Starting from the assumption of Snelson (2015), according to which vlogging can help young people develop some skills, our study analyzes the types of skills that content creators consider they have developed. The respondents stated that the vlogging activity helped them improve their ability to speak in front of an audience, their filming and video editing skills, but also the skills and knowledge required by creating and maintaining a personal business.

There was no general agreement regarding the possible therapeutic effect of content creation. The cathartic effect (Berryman & Kavka, 2017) that is generated by exposing negative

aspects and experiences of the content creator's personal life was mentioned only by few interviewees: *"I started to wipe my makeup while talking in front of the camera and talk about the things that dissatisfied me and made me not esteem myself. In the end, when I closed the camera, I had a sense of relief, as I had taken something from me that hurt me a lot"* (S., 25, female). The therapeutic effect generated by the activity of vloggers is achieved by employing two mechanisms. First, the vlogger exposes his/her problem in front of the camera, which makes him/her more aware of it, analyzes the problem, and finally gets to feel liberated. Second, the exposure attracts social support, the feeling of being understood and, ultimately, the followers may organize themselves in a sort of support group. We would appreciate that, among our interviewees, the therapeutic effect sustained by the vlogging activity identified by Raun (2012) is present but on a small scale.

The interviewees consider content creation as fun and helpful in avoiding the monotony state. Furthermore, the tendency to involve close people in this activity was identified as a way to enhance social gratifications. The desire to create content to avoid the monotony is in line with the study conducted by Snelson (2015). We observed a weak connection between the activity of creating content and escapism. Content creation is perceived only by few of the respondents as an activity that causes individuals to divert their attention from the negative aspects of daily routine.

The comparative analysis of the two groups of participants shows considerable differences regarding the gratifications obtained by individuals who use the same platform (see Table 1 below). A first observation is that participants in the first category (i.e. consumers) use YouTube to satisfy mainly the needs of relaxation, information, or entertainment. Content creators, on the other hand, have as a primary purpose the satisfaction of higher-level needs, such as the need to obtain social recognition or the need to increase their self-esteem. If the need for entertainment is paramount for content consumers, it becomes secondary for content creators.

Table 1. A comparative view of gratifications obtained by YouTube users and content creators.

Content creators' gratifications	Content consumers' gratifications
Social recognition and validation	Relaxation & Entertainment
Self-esteem enhancement	Escapism
Skills development	Information
Entertainment	YouTube as a complementary tool in the study process
Opportunity to get remuneration	Social gratifications
YouTube as a full-time job	Therapeutic effect

Although this was not aimed by this research, we observed some gender differences with respect to the use of YouTube. On the one hand, male content creators have stated that they do not feel affected by the flaming phenomenon. On the other hand, female content creators have indicated that this phenomenon has sometimes led them to stop posting on YouTube. Male content consumers said that they access YouTube to search for videos on a specific topic. However, females mentioned that they spend more time scrolling and tracking the activity of content creators. We believe that these are interesting ideas and that such specific gender differences could be further explored by future research.

Motivations for Becoming a Content Creator

As mentioned earlier, our interview sample included content creators from different fields except gaming. We identified a pattern regarding the decision to become a content creator, which can be analyzed based on the U&G theory. The shift from a content consumer status to the involved consumer and then to the content creator is a gradual process that involves the increase of engagement with the platform (Shao, 2009). In our study, we aimed to identify the motivations for this change of roles, as well as several factors that influence the decision to become a creator and, thus, increase one's engagement with YouTube.

One of the factors that influence the user's desire to change roles is the type of content that he or she pursues from the consumer's perspective. Before becoming content creators, users were mainly watching vloggers active in the field in which the uses wish to set up their own channel. Users consider, thus, that the content creation activity satisfies a need or a desire that they have and that is common to the vloggers whom they are following. Our findings support Ashman et al.'s (2018) idea, according to which examples of successful vloggers function as a stimulus for people who want to build a career on YouTube. Furthermore, users perform an analysis on vlogging channels in the field in which they would like to activate before deciding to become content creators. Most of the interviewees said that they had chosen this path: *"The decisive fact was that I consumed a lot of content that made me say: Alright, I'm starting now"* (A., 25, male).

Following the identification of the platform as an environment conducive to meeting a particular need, individuals must remove the barriers that prevent them from continuing their careers on YouTube. This aspect is an essential step in the content creator's decision to keep posting videos. One of the respondents (A., 25, male) explained that he wanted to become a content creator for about 4-5 years before making the final decision. The main barrier he encountered during this period was related to the fear of being judged or to the fear of being the victim of the flaming phenomenon. The main barriers the participants mentioned were related to the fear of the flaming phenomenon and the fear of exposure, which is supportive of the results of previous studies (see Moor et al., 2010; Stoeckl et al., 2007). The fear of not facing the competition on the platform and the lack of the necessary technical tools were other barriers to becoming a content creator mentioned by the interviewees.

Uploading the first video does not represent a guarantee that the individual has decided to start a career on YouTube. The creator's debut is described by an intense vulnerability to negative comments and remarks. The beginning phase is characterized by successive interruptions of the activity as many interviewees said: *"I said three times that I start posting on YouTube, but the first two attempts were not successful because I stopped after I posted the first video"* (S., 25, female). As suggested by the literature in the field, the occurrence of offensive remarks functions as an inhibitor of the individual's desire to publish content within the platform (see Moor et al., 2010; Stoeckl et al., 2007). After the content creator makes his debut on YouTube, there is an accommodation period. During this period, the content creator decides to continue his activity without interruptions and begins to appreciate the positive feedback received from the followers. After this stage, emotional gratifications start to appear, these being generally related to the increase of self-esteem, as detailed in the previous section of our paper. The next step is called the ascension stage because once the content creators are accommodated and stabilized, they grow in terms of visibility. The main gratifications are related to social recognition, but material bonuses can also occur.

Finally, taking into account the stages presented above, the final decision to embark on a YouTube content creation career comes when the individual has the guarantee that the platform will meet the expected gratifications, namely self-esteem enhancement, social recognition and material rewards.

Conclusions

YouTube has grown significantly in recent years, becoming one of the most used and appreciated video platforms today. This study aimed to investigate two different categories of users in order to reveal what kind of gratifications YouTube offers to each of them. For content consumers YouTube satisfies the need for relaxation and the need for information. Through the diversity of content and content creators, YouTube successfully satisfies these needs each consumer finding a material that suits their wishes and requirements. For content creators YouTube manages to fulfill a series of higher needs such as those related to social recognition and validation, the activity of vlogging becoming, in some cases, their primary professional activity and providing job-specific gratifications. From this point of view, a noteworthy association has been observed between users' level of involvement and the type of obtained satisfaction.

As for the process of becoming a YouTube content creator, we have found that the flaming phenomenon has a strong influence on interviewees' decision to expose themselves online. The decision to become a creator is a gradual one and it is related to receiving positive feedback from the followers. This step is further supported by the level of fulfillment of expected YouTube gratifications.

Our findings are in line with previous research on uses and gratifications of YouTube (see Khan, 2017; Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2016; Shao, 2009). We have found that, depending on the degree of commitment shown by the user, YouTube can generate different types of gratifications. Our study has identified an essential trend in the behavior of new media content consumers, namely that the user is active and interested in customizing his/her account based on appropriate YouTube recommendations. The respondents were willing to engage more as YouTube met their needs.

Our present paper, unavoidably, has some limitations. While the qualitative method used in our research has led to a better understanding of the behavior of YouTube users, the number of conducted interviews could be completed with more participants in both categories, i.e. users and content creators, respectively. Furthermore, the content creators' group could be expanded to include YouTubers with various popularity tags. Another limitation is related to the higher share of female participants. Developing a new study on a sample consisting of an equal number of female and male participants could indicate different results. To seize gender differences, a quantitative approach could be used to complete the results. A random sample will allow for a better estimation of group differences in terms of various demographic characteristics.

Finally, our study is an exploratory one, a starting point for new research on the use of YouTube and on the flaming phenomenon that is present on Romanian YouTube channels, too. The therapeutic effect that YouTube can generate among both content consumers and content creators is an interesting direction for future research. This aspect of YouTube effects is currently understudied, but it is a very important aspect of research in the field as it involves

a different type of media use than traditional media. Cultural differences between YouTube users and content creators could be another interesting topic worth further investigating.

Acknowledgment

This paper was financially supported by the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POCU/380/6/13/124708 no. 37141/23.05.2019, with the title “Researcher-Entrepreneur on Labor Market in the Fields of Intelligent Specialization (CERT-ANTREP)”, coordinated by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration.

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