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Uses and Gratifications in the Networked Academic Library: A Theoretical Framework for Social Media Engagement Among University Library Users

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Abstract

Academic libraries now run much of their outreach, service, and community-building through social media, yet the research documenting this shift remains heavily descriptive. Studies count platforms, record how often libraries post, and report adoption rates, but they rarely ask why users attend to a library's social media presence or what satisfactions bring them back. This paper argues that the uses and gratifications (U&G) tradition, adapted to the conditions of the academic library, is the most suitable audience-centred lens for that explanatory work. Drawing on the classical U&G literature, its renewal for interactive and social media, and library and information science scholarship on social media adoption, the paper develops an integrated framework built around seven gratification domains: informational-cognitive, academic-instrumental, social-integrative and networking, affective-entertainment, self-presentational and esteem, affordance-based, and privacy as a moderating condition. It couples the classical needs typology of Katz and colleagues with the affordance logic of Sundar and Limperos, and it adds two structural moderators that personal-use models tend to ignore: institutional supply and academic role. Eight propositions specify relationships among gratifications sought, gratifications obtained, continued engagement, and scholarly content creation, among them the expectation that a gap between what users seek and what they obtain predicts disengagement. The paper closes by treating information overload, distraction, misinformation, and privacy concern as limits internal to any honest gratification account, and by drawing out implications for theory, for measurement in mixed-method research, and for practice.

Keywords: uses and gratifications; social media; academic libraries; university library users; gratifications sought and obtained; information behaviour; user engagement

1. Introduction

For a growing share of university students and scholars, the first encounter with the library no longer happens at a service desk or an online catalogue. It happens in a feed: a new-arrivals post on Instagram, a WhatsApp message announcing extended hours during examinations, a

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ResearchGate notification that a requested article has been shared. Such moments are now ordinary in the relationship between an academic library and the people it serves. Manuel Castells described contemporary society as one whose networks are embedded in information and communication technology (Misra, 2021), and the academic library belongs inside that description. Its notices, its collections, and its reference work increasingly travel through the same platforms that carry students' personal conversation and entertainment (Saini & Mir, 2023; Schmälzle & Huskey, 2023).

The empirical record of this change is substantial but uneven in its ambitions. A recognisable genre of library and information science (LIS) research surveys a group of users, asks which platforms they use and how often, records satisfaction on a short scale, and reports the totals. Work in this genre has established, for example, that academic libraries in northern India have adopted social media only partially and inconsistently (Shah & Khan, 2019); that awareness of library social media among college users can be high while satisfaction stays moderate, with connectivity a persistent barrier (Chandran & Natarajan, 2015); and that research scholars routinely share scholarly material through social media while reporting weak security and limited technical skill as obstacles (Sevukan & Sudarsan, 2015). This work is valuable, and it tells us what users do. It tells us much less about why they do it, about the satisfactions they pursue, and about what makes a library's social media presence hold their attention or lose it.

This explanatory gap will not close by adding a few attitude items to the next survey. It reflects the absence of a theoretical framework specific enough to the academic library to organise its distinctive purposes and constraints. The uses and gratifications tradition is the obvious candidate. Since the 1970s it has treated audiences as active agents who select media to satisfy identifiable needs, and it has supplied a vocabulary of cognitive, affective, integrative, and tension-release gratifications that has adapted across six decades of media change (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). U&G has already been applied to social media in general settings (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Whiting & Williams, 2013) and, within LIS, to scholarly communication and knowledge sharing (Al-Aufi & Fulton, 2014; Lin & Giang, 2021). The field still lacks a consolidated account that adapts U&G to the academic library rather than to personal social media use, absorbs the affordance-based gratifications that newer media generate, and recognises that in a library a user's satisfaction depends partly on what the institution chooses to supply.

This paper builds that account. It is conceptual work, not an empirical study: its aim is to synthesise the U&G tradition, its renewal for interactive media, and the LIS evidence on library social media into a single framework that can guide both theory and the design of empirical studies, including the doctoral project from which the paper grows. The argument moves in stages. It begins by recovering the foundations of U&G and the assumptions that give it explanatory force, among them the often-neglected distinction between gratifications sought and gratifications

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obtained. It then traces how interactive and social media revived U&G while straining its original premises, above all by turning audiences into content producers and by making platform affordances a source of gratification in their own right. From there it asks what is distinctive about social media use in the academic library, drawing on the LIS evidence base, before presenting the framework itself: seven gratification domains, two structural moderators, and eight propositions linking gratifications sought to engagement, satisfaction, and scholarly content creation. A later section treats the dysfunctions of social media, overload, distraction, misinformation, and privacy exposure, as limits internal to any candid gratification account. The paper ends with implications for theory, method, and practice, and with the boundary conditions a single framework cannot escape.

The argument is motivated by one setting in particular: the university library in Haryana, in northern India, where a large and disciplinarily varied population of undergraduates, postgraduates, doctoral scholars, and faculty uses social media for everything from examination preparation to research collaboration. The shift to online education during the COVID-19 period, and the policy emphasis on digital learning under the National Education Policy 2020, have left that setting more dependent on networked platforms than before. The framework is written with this context in mind, though its constructs should travel to comparable higher-education settings.

2. The Uses and Gratifications Tradition: Foundations and Assumptions

The uses and gratifications approach began as a reaction against the question that dominated early communication research. Where the effects tradition asked what media do to people, U&G reversed the inquiry and asked what people do with media (Katz, 1959). That reversal mattered, because it relocated agency from the message to the audience and made the audience's needs, rather than the communicator's intentions, the starting point for analysis.

The empirical work came before the label. Herta Herzog's studies of radio audiences in the 1940s asked why listeners were drawn to daytime serials and quiz programmes, and she identified emotional release, wishful thinking, and advice for daily living among the satisfactions they reported (Herzog, 1944). Comparable functional studies accumulated through the 1950s without a unifying theory to hold them together. That consolidation arrived in the 1970s. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) set out the assumptions that still define the approach: the audience is active and its media use is goal-directed; the initiative in linking a need to a media choice lies with the audience member; media compete with other sources of satisfaction; people are self-aware enough to report their interests and motives; and judgements about the cultural value of media content should be suspended while those motives are studied on their own terms. In the same years, Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) mapped thirty-five needs that media serve and grouped them into five classes: cognitive needs for information and understanding, affective needs for emotion and pleasure, personal integrative needs for credibility and status, social integrative needs for contact with family and others, and tension-release needs for escape and diversion. This five-part typology

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is the most durable inheritance of the tradition, reappearing, renamed and recombined, in most later studies of media gratification.

Two features of the classical formulation carry the later argument. One is the functional logic beneath the typology. Needs arise from a person's social situation and psychological disposition; media are one resource among many for meeting them; and the choice of a particular medium reflects an expectation that it will deliver the wanted satisfaction better than the alternatives. Media use, on this account, is reasoned behaviour, even when the reasoning is habitual and barely conscious. To call the audience active is not to claim that people weigh every choice deliberately; it is the weaker and more defensible claim that media selection is patterned by need rather than imposed at random by the communicator.

The other feature, developed most fully by Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979), is that what an audience seeks from a medium and what it actually obtains are separate quantities, and they need not coincide. Their discrepancy approach, extended in a study of television news by Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn (1980), modelled gratifications sought and gratifications obtained as distinct constructs and showed that the relationship between them predicts satisfaction and continued exposure. An expectancy-value reading followed: an audience member holds beliefs about what a medium can provide and attaches value to those outcomes, and the product of belief and value drives both the gratification sought and the choice to attend. Later social media research has made little use of this sought-obtained distinction, measuring instead a single undifferentiated set of gratifications. For an institution like a library, whose users arrive with specific expectations it may or may not meet, the gap between sought and obtained gratification is exactly what should predict whether engagement lasts.

The approach has never wanted for critics, and its weaknesses bound what the present framework can claim. The most persistent objection is that U&G risks tautology: a gratification is inferred from the very use it is meant to explain, so the account turns circular unless gratifications are measured independently of the behaviour they predict (Ruggiero, 2000). Method is a second weakness: U&G has leaned heavily on self-report, which is vulnerable to rationalisation, to limited introspective access, and to the distance between what people say they seek and what actually moves them (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). The third criticism is conceptual: by starting from the individual and the individual's needs, classical U&G neglected the social structures that shape both the needs and the supply of media, and it had little to say about content, power, or the institutions that produce what audiences consume (McQuail, 2010). These are real limitations. The field's response has not been to deny them but to manage them: specifying constructs with care, separating sought from obtained gratifications, triangulating self-report with behavioural and structural data, and setting the individual-level account within a recognition of social and institutional context. The framework below takes up each response.

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The approach has lasted, despite the critiques, because of its audience-centred orientation, which has tracked the long drift of media toward greater audience control. As media multiplied and choice expanded, a theory premised on active selection grew more plausible, not less. By the end of the twentieth century the internet had made the condition U&G assumed, an audience choosing actively among competing sources, the ordinary condition of media life (Rubin, 2009). The argument now turns to that transition.

Table 1

The development of the uses and gratifications approach across media generations

Period	Representative work	View of the audience	Characteristic gratifications	Principal addition to the theory
Functional origins (1940s–1950s)	Herzog (1944); Katz (1959)	Listeners and readers with identifiable motives	Emotional release, advice for living, companionship	Moved the question from media effects to audience motives
Classical consolidation (1970s)	Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973); Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973); Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979)	Active audience selecting among media to meet needs	Cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, tension release	A formal needs typology and the sought-obtained distinction
Internet gratifications (2000s)	Ruggiero (2000); Papacharissi and Rubin (2000); Stafford et al. (2004); LaRose and Eastin (2004)	Interactive user choosing across abundant content	Information, interpersonal utility, convenience, process and content satisfactions	Interactivity and process gratifications; expectation and habit
Social media gratifications (2010s onward)	Quan-Haase and Young (2010); Whiting and Williams (2013); Sundar and Limperos (2013)	Networked producer and consumer at once	Social interaction, self-presentation, sharing, surveillance, affordance satisfactions	Prosumption and affordance-generated gratifications

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3. From Audiences to Users: Uses and Gratifications in the Age of Interactive and Social Media

The internet did not leave U&G untouched; it changed the object the theory had to explain. Ruggiero (2000) argued that three attributes of computer-mediated communication, interactivity, demassification, and asynchroneity, both revived U&G and forced its extension. Interactivity allowed the audience to respond to and alter the message, collapsing the old separation between sender and receiver. With demassification, individuals could select from an enormous range of content tuned to narrow interests, which sharpened the active-selection premise. Asynchroneity detached media use from fixed schedules and bent it to the user's own rhythm. Each attribute strengthened the audience's hand, and each brought gratifications the mass-media typology had not anticipated.

A first wave of internet U&G research set out to identify those gratifications. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found internet use organised around interpersonal utility, information seeking, convenience, entertainment, and passing time, and they showed that interpersonal utility was bound up with the perceived qualities of the medium itself. Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade (2004) distinguished three families of internet gratification: content gratifications tied to the information the medium carries, process gratifications tied to the experience of using and browsing it, and social gratifications tied to the relationships it sustains. The process category mattered, because it recognised that people take satisfaction from the act of navigation itself, apart from any content goal. LaRose and Eastin (2004) pushed the theory the other way, grafting social-cognitive concepts onto it: they recast gratifications as expected outcomes, added self-efficacy and self-regulation as predictors, and modelled habitual, sometimes deficient, media use as the product of weakened self-control. Their model matters because it supplies a mechanism, expectation and reinforcement, for the heavy, habitual use that later became characteristic of social media.

When social network sites arrived, researchers applied the U&G lens to them directly. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) compared the gratifications of Facebook with those of instant messaging and found Facebook serving a distinctive cluster of needs around social information, sociability, and the management of self-presentation. Whiting and Williams (2013) interviewed users and distilled ten gratifications of social media, among them social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, expressing opinion, sharing information, and watching other people. Chen (2011) showed that active use of Twitter, posting and replying rather than reading passively, gratified a need to connect with others, and that the gratification grew with the volume of interaction. Dunne, Lawlor, and Rowley (2010) examined young people's use of social network sites and stressed identity construction and peer belonging among adolescents. The studies converge on one point: social media gratifications are at once informational, social, and self-presentational, and the social and self-presentational components loom larger than they did in the broadcast era.

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Two developments in this literature carry particular weight for the framework that follows. One is the argument, made most clearly by Sundar and Limperos (2013), that new media generate genuinely new gratifications which do not reduce to pre-existing needs. On their account the affordances of a technology, grouped under modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability, cue gratifications that the user did not bring to the medium but that the medium itself makes available. A platform that lets a user act on content, customise a feed, or move fluidly through linked material offers satisfactions of agency and navigation with no clean equivalent in the typology of broadcast needs. Classical U&G is a needs-pull account, in which pre-existing needs draw the user toward media; the affordance argument adds a technology-push account, in which the features of the medium create demand. A complete contemporary U&G has to hold both, treating real media use as the product of their interaction rather than of either alone.

The other development is the dissolution of the boundary between audience and producer. On social media the user does not only select content but makes it. The same person who reads a post writes one, and the writing brings its own gratifications: self-disclosure, recognition, the cultivation of an online identity, and closer relationships through reciprocal sharing. Lin and Giang (2021), in a study grounded explicitly in U&G, showed that self-disclosure on Facebook is shaped by the emotional support a user receives and that it builds intimacy with other users over time. Pang (2018), studying microblog users in China, found recognition-seeking to be a distinct and powerful motive alongside information and socialising, and reported that the need for information was the single strongest driver of use. Gratification on social media, then, is partly produced by the user's own activity and partly relational, accruing not to an isolated consumer but to a node in a network.

The networked quality matters in its own right. Phua, Jin, and Kim (2017) made it concrete, showing that platforms serve bridging and bonding social capital to different degrees, with Twitter stronger for bridging across loose ties and Snapchat stronger for bonding within close ones. Read alongside Castells's account of the network society (Misra, 2021), this work suggests that a social media U&G cannot stay purely individual: the gratifications it describes are earned inside a structure of connections, and that structure is part of the explanation. Affordance-generated gratification and networked prosumption are what most clearly separate a social media U&G from its mass-media ancestor, and they are what a library-specific framework has to absorb, because a library's users act on its channels, produce scholarly content of their own, and sit inside academic networks whose value is part of what they seek.

4. Social Media in the Academic Library: Functions, Users, and Evidence

The academic library entered social media through outreach and stayed for service. Its platforms do three overlapping kinds of work. They market the library and keep it visible, announcing new arrivals, publicising events, and holding a presence where users already spend their attention. They deliver service, pushing notices about hours and access, fielding reference

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questions, flagging e-resources, and routing users to databases and full text. And they build community, cultivating scholarly belonging, supporting informal exchange among researchers, and inviting participation rather than passive receipt. These functions map only loosely onto the gratifications users seek, and part of the analytical task is to connect what libraries supply with what users actually want.

The Indian setting sharpens several of these features. COVID-19 moved higher education in India abruptly onto digital platforms, and policy has kept it there: the National Education Policy 2020 promotes blended learning and stronger digital infrastructure, and it pushes universities to combine classroom teaching with online delivery through national platforms. During the pandemic social media became a practical way to reach students who were dispersed and often beyond the range of a formal learning-management system, and many libraries that had treated their accounts as occasional noticeboards began to use them in earnest. Connectivity across rural and urban Haryana is uneven, though, so access cannot be assumed, and the connectivity barrier Chandran and Natarajan (2015) recorded still shapes what users can draw from a library's channels. A framework for this setting has to treat access as a condition that varies across the population and limits the gratification available to parts of it, not as a constant.

The LIS evidence on these functions is largely descriptive, but read with care it yields more than counts. Shah and Khan (2019), analysing the websites of University Grants Commission–recognised universities in northern India, found that just over half used Facebook while far fewer of their libraries did, that library adoption of Twitter was negligible, and that YouTube use was rare. Their study documents a supply-side weakness: these universities held a social media presence that their libraries had not yet converted into service. Chandran and Natarajan (2015), studying college library users affiliated to Anna University, found near-universal awareness of social media and a substantial group using it for educational purposes, but only moderate satisfaction with the library services delivered through these channels and a clear barrier in poor connectivity. Hussain (2018) turned the lens on the professionals rather than the users, reporting that a large majority of LIS staff used social media several times a day, many keeping contact with hundreds of people, while also feeling measurable stress and anxiety from that use.

Other studies fill out the picture. Sevukan and Sudarsan (2015) found that almost all research scholars at Pondicherry University used social media tools to exchange research-related information, with insufficient security and limited technical expertise as the main constraints. Al-Aufi and Fulton (2014) showed that a majority of academics used social networking tools for informal scholarly communication, chiefly to stay current with research and to learn of conference announcements. Sudhier and Divya (2019) found that doctoral scholars at the University of Kerala still preferred email and the web over newer tools and named information overload and distraction as their leading difficulties. Park (2010) demonstrated that usage patterns differ sharply by academic role, with undergraduates favouring profile-oriented services, postgraduates favouring

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community-oriented ones, and faculty largely inactive. Bharati and Singh (2018), surveying students at a north Indian university, reported that entertainment was the most common reason for using social network sites even as research scholars drew study-related information from the same platforms, a reminder that motives coexist within a single user.

Set side by side, these studies point to four features of the library context that a generic social media U&G handles poorly. One is the dual identity of the platforms. The same Instagram account a student follows for entertainment may carry the library's new-arrivals post; the same WhatsApp that hosts family conversation delivers the examination-hours notice. Gratifications spill across the boundary between leisure and study, and a library channel competes for attention inside a feed built around other purposes. A framework for this setting has to allow that affective and entertainment gratifications, though not the library's main business, help decide whether its messages are seen at all.

A second is role heterogeneity. Park's (2010) finding that undergraduates, postgraduates, and faculty use social media differently is no minor demographic detail; it means that the relative weight of the gratification domains shifts with academic role. A first-year undergraduate after examination notices and peer contact is not chasing the same satisfactions as a doctoral scholar after collaborators and current research. Any framework meant to describe the whole population of library users has to treat academic role as a moderator, not as a variable to be controlled away.

A third is the presence of scholarly gratifications that entertainment-centred models of social network sites miss. Research collaboration, reference and citation management, and the building of a scholarly identity are satisfactions specific to the academic setting. The platforms that serve them, ResearchGate, Mendeley, and Zotero, are social media in the technical sense but are built for scholarly production, not leisure (Al-Aufi & Fulton, 2014; Williams & Woodacre, 2016). What they offer, keeping current with a field, sharing and receiving research, organising sources, being recognised as a contributor, needs its own place in the typology.

The fourth, and the one that most clearly sets the library apart, is institutional mediation. In personal social media use the supply of content is effectively unlimited, and a user's gratification depends mainly on that user's own choices. In the library case the institution is both actor and object: it posts, and it is also the thing users judge. What a user gets from a library's social media therefore depends on what the library actually supplies: how often it posts, how useful and reliable its content is, how quickly it answers. Shah and Khan's (2019) account of thin library provision and Chandran and Natarajan's (2015) finding of moderate satisfaction point to the same coupling: obtained gratification is bounded by institutional supply. This coupling of supply and demand has no real counterpart in models built for personal use, and it is the feature most in need of theoretical attention.

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5. Toward an Integrated Framework: Seven Gratification Domains in the Academic Library

The framework proposed here brings together three bodies of thought that have been used separately: the classical needs typology of the U&G tradition, the affordance logic of contemporary new-media research, and the LIS evidence on what academic library users do with social media. Its organising claim is that gratification in this setting is multidimensional, that the dimensions are separable and weighted differently across users, and that what a user finally obtains is shaped by four things at once: the institution's supply, the platform's affordances, the user's academic role, and the user's privacy concern. The seven domains are set out below and summarised, with their theoretical lineage and library-specific expression, in Table 2.

The first domain, informational-cognitive gratification, is the satisfaction of needs for knowledge and orientation. In the library it covers awareness of new arrivals, notices of hours and access, alerts about e-resources, and updates tied to coursework and research. It descends directly from the cognitive category of Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) and from the information-seeking motive that recurs across internet U&G research (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Libraries design for it most consciously, and it is the easiest to measure.

Academic-instrumental gratification, the second domain, is the satisfaction of completing scholarly tasks. It differs from general information seeking because it attaches to academic production, not just awareness: locating a database, retrieving a paper, managing references, preparing for an assignment or examination. It draws on the content and process gratifications of Stafford and colleagues (2004) and on the utilitarian motives found in studies of student social media use (Bharati & Singh, 2018). Keeping it separate from informational-cognitive gratification matters, because a library may satisfy a user's wish to know that a resource exists while failing to satisfy the wish to use it, and the two failures call for different remedies.

The third domain, social-integrative and networking gratification, is the satisfaction of connection and belonging in a scholarly community. It covers peer contact, the building of academic relationships, and the bridging and bonding social capital that different platforms afford (Phua et al., 2017). Its lineage runs from the social integrative needs of the classical typology through the networked account of the social media era (Misra, 2021). In a library it shows up as connection with fellow learners, participation in subject groups and forums, and the wider networking that platforms such as LinkedIn and ResearchGate support.

Affective-entertainment gratification, the fourth domain, is the satisfaction of enjoyment, diversion, and emotional release. It corresponds to the affective and tension-release categories of the classical typology and to the entertainment and relaxation motives that dominate general social media use (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Its place in a library framework is easy to underrate. The library's own content is rarely entertainment, but the affective pull of the surrounding platform is part of what brings users to the feed where library content appears, and enjoyment of a library's lighter posts can carry attention toward its substantive messages.

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The fifth domain, self-presentational and esteem gratification, is the satisfaction of being seen, recognised, and known as a particular kind of scholar. It draws on the personal integrative needs of the classical typology and on the prosumption research that puts content creation and self-disclosure at the centre of social media experience (Lin & Giang, 2021; Pang, 2018). In the academic library it appears as the cultivation of a scholarly identity, the sharing of one's own work, and the recognition that follows visible contribution. It is the domain tied most closely to active rather than passive use, and so to the production of content that benefits other users in turn.

Affordance-based gratification, the sixth domain, is the satisfaction that comes from the qualities of the platform itself rather than from any prior need. Following Sundar and Limperos (2013), it covers the agency of acting on content, the interactivity of exchange, the navigability of moving through linked material, and the modality in which information is presented. In a library it explains why a user might prefer a WhatsApp broadcast to an email or an institutional portal: the content is the same, but the channel feels immediate, responsive, and easy to move through. This is the clearest point at which the framework departs from a pure needs account, since it lets the medium create demand the user did not arrive with.

The seventh element is not a gratification at all but a condition that governs the others: privacy and perceived control. Concern about surveillance, data exposure, and professional reputation satisfies no need; it suppresses the satisfaction of other needs, above all the self-presentational and networking gratifications that depend on disclosure. The privacy calculus is well attested in scholarly contexts, where exposure carries professional risk (Vukušić Rukavina et al., 2021), and the security worries that research scholars report (Sevukan & Sudarsan, 2015) are its concrete form. Treating privacy as a moderator, rather than as one more gratification, corrects a common confusion in survey instruments that list it alongside entertainment and information as though it were a parallel motive.

Two structural moderators complete the model. One is institutional supply: the volume, quality, reliability, and responsiveness of what the library posts. Because the library is both actor and object, the gratification a user can obtain is bounded by what the institution provides, and thin provision widens the gap between what users seek and what they get (Chandran & Natarajan, 2015; Shah & Khan, 2019). The other is academic role, since the salience of the domains shifts as one moves from undergraduate to postgraduate to doctoral scholar to faculty member (Park, 2010). Supply and role are what most clearly mark this as a library framework rather than a generic one.

At the framework's core is the relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, recovered from Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979). A user approaches a library's channels with a profile of sought gratifications shaped by role and disposition. The channel, conditioned by institutional supply, platform affordances, and the user's privacy concern, returns some profile of obtained gratifications. When what users obtain meets or exceeds what they sought, engagement continues and may deepen into content creation; when a gap opens, especially in the informational

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and instrumental domains the library exists to serve, engagement decays. The model is a loop, not a list: obtained gratification feeds back into the gratifications a user will seek next, and into whether the user returns at all.

An example makes the loop legible. Take two users of the same library account. A first-year undergraduate arrives seeking informational and affective gratification: notices about examination hours, and a feed pleasant enough to keep checking. If the library posts those notices reliably and in an accessible form, what the student obtains meets what was sought, and the habit holds. A doctoral scholar comes to the same account seeking academic-instrumental and networking gratification: alerts about databases and new research, and contact with others in the field. If the account offers only general notices, the scholar's sought gratifications go unmet however active it is; the gap opens in the domains that matter to that user, and the scholar drifts toward ResearchGate or a disciplinary group where the gratification is available. The same supply produces engagement in one user and disengagement in the other. What differs is not how active each user is but how well the account matches what each one seeks. The framework's claim is that this matching, conditioned by supply and moderated by role, governs whether engagement endures, not the sheer quantity of posting.

The propositions below state the framework's central claims in a form open to empirical test. They are summarised in Table 3.

P1. The gratifications sought from academic library social media are multidimensional and separable into informational-cognitive, academic-instrumental, social-integrative and networking, affective-entertainment, and self-presentational and esteem domains.

P2. Informational-cognitive and academic-instrumental gratifications are the principal drivers of a user's selection of library channels, whereas affective-entertainment gratifications principally sustain habitual attention to the surrounding platform.

P3. The discrepancy between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained negatively predicts continued engagement with library social media, with the effect strongest in the informational and instrumental domains.

P4. Institutional supply, namely posting frequency, content quality and reliability, and responsiveness, moderates the sought-obtained relationship, so that weak supply widens the discrepancy and accelerates disengagement.

P5. Academic role moderates the relative salience of the gratification domains, with research-oriented users such as doctoral scholars and faculty weighting academic-instrumental and networking gratifications more heavily than undergraduates, who weight informational and affective gratifications more heavily.

P6. Platform affordances of modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability generate gratifications independent of pre-existing needs and can create demand for library services that users did not initially hold.

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P7. Privacy concern moderates self-presentational and networking gratification, dampening self-disclosure and the gratification obtained from it when the salience of surveillance or professional risk is high.

P8. Self-presentational and networking gratifications increase the likelihood of prosumption, that is, the creation and scholarly sharing of original content, which in turn amplifies the social-integrative gratification available to the wider user community, forming a reinforcing loop.

The framework is bounded in scope. It addresses gratifications and their consequences for engagement and content creation, and it does not try to model learning outcomes or academic performance directly, though it treats them as downstream of sustained, well-matched engagement. It assumes a population with reliable platform access, an assumption that the connectivity barriers reported in parts of the LIS literature qualify in practice (Chandran & Natarajan, 2015). Written for the academic library, its supply and role moderators may not transfer cleanly to public or special libraries, whose user structures differ.

Table 2: *Seven gratification domains for academic library social media*

Domain	Working definition	Theoretical lineage	Expression in the academic library
1. Informational-cognitive	Meeting needs for knowledge and orientation	Cognitive needs (Katz et al., 1973); information seeking (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000)	New arrivals, notices, e-resource alerts, research updates
2. Academic-instrumental	Completing scholarly tasks and workflows	Content and process gratifications (Stafford et al., 2004)	Reaching databases, retrieving papers, managing references, exam and assignment preparation
3. Social-integrative and networking	Connection and belonging in a scholarly community	Social integrative needs (Katz et al., 1973); social capital (Phua et al., 2017)	Peer contact, subject groups, scholarly networking on LinkedIn and ResearchGate
4. Affective-entertainment	Enjoyment, diversion, and emotional release	Affective and tension-release needs (Katz et al., 1973); entertainment motive	The pull of the surrounding feed that carries attention to library content

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Domain	Working definition	Theoretical lineage	Expression in the academic library
		(Whiting & Williams, 2013)	
5. Self-presentational and esteem	Recognition and the cultivation of scholarly identity	Personal integrative needs (Katz et al., 1973); self-disclosure and prosumption (Lin & Giang, 2021)	Sharing one's work, building an academic profile, gaining recognition
6. Affordance-based	Satisfaction arising from platform features	Modality, agency, interactivity, navigability (Sundar & Limperos, 2013)	Preference for an immediate, responsive channel such as a WhatsApp broadcast
Condition: privacy and perceived control	A concern that suppresses other gratifications	Privacy calculus; e-professionalism (Vukušić Rukavina et al., 2021)	Reluctance to disclose or network under perceived surveillance or professional risk

Table 3

Propositions of the framework

	Proposition
P1.	The gratifications sought from academic library social media are multidimensional and separable into informational-cognitive, academic-instrumental, social-integrative and networking, affective-entertainment, and self-presentational and esteem domains.
P2.	Informational-cognitive and academic-instrumental gratifications are the principal drivers of a user's selection of library channels, whereas affective-entertainment gratifications principally sustain habitual attention to the surrounding platform.
P3.	The discrepancy between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained negatively predicts continued engagement with library social media, with the effect strongest in the informational and instrumental domains.
P4.	Institutional supply, namely posting frequency, content quality and reliability, and responsiveness, moderates the sought-obtained relationship, so that weak supply widens the discrepancy and accelerates disengagement.

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	Proposition
P5.	Academic role moderates the relative salience of the gratification domains, with research-oriented users such as doctoral scholars and faculty weighting academic-instrumental and networking gratifications more heavily than undergraduates, who weight informational and affective gratifications more heavily.
P6.	Platform affordances of modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability generate gratifications independent of pre-existing needs and can create demand for library services that users did not initially hold.
P7.	Privacy concern moderates self-presentational and networking gratification, dampening self-disclosure and the gratification obtained from it when the salience of surveillance or professional risk is high.
P8.	Self-presentational and networking gratifications increase the likelihood of prosumption, that is, the creation and scholarly sharing of original content, which in turn amplifies the social-integrative gratification available to the wider user community, forming a reinforcing loop.

6. The Limits of Gratification: Overload, Distraction, Misinformation, and Privacy

A framework that described only the satisfactions of social media would misrepresent the experience of using it, and would be of little use to a library trying to serve its users well. The same platforms that gratify also frustrate, and the frustrations are not external accidents but conditions internal to how gratification works. Four bear directly on the academic library.

Information overload is the first. The volume of content that makes social media attractive can exceed what a user can process, and past a point more supply reduces satisfaction instead of adding to it. Doctoral scholars in Sudhier and Divya's (2019) study named overload and distraction as their leading difficulties, even as they relied on networked tools for their work. The relation between supply and obtained gratification is therefore not linear but closer to an inverted U: too little provision starves the informational domain, too much buries the useful signal in noise. A library that meets weak engagement by posting more may push its users down the far slope of that curve rather than up the near one.

Distraction and compulsive use come second. Turkle's (2011) account of the tethered self describes a generation kept in continuous contact with its devices, and the academic cost of that contact recurs across studies of student social media use. The gratifications of connection and diversion compete directly with the sustained attention scholarly work demands. This is no reason for libraries to retreat from social media. It is a reason to see that the channels through which they reach users are the same channels that pull those users away from study, and that designing for engagement is not the same as designing for learning.

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Misinformation, and the question of trust, is the third. Credibility is a precondition for informational gratification: a user cannot be satisfied by information they do not believe. Apuke and Omar (2020) showed how readily false information spreads through social media, driven by motives that include altruism and the wish to be first to share, and the COVID-19 period made the academic stakes plain. Here the library has the advantage. Its authority as a curator of reliable information is exactly what the surrounding platform environment lacks, and a library that foregrounds the reliability of what it shares turns its institutional credibility into an informational gratification users cannot easily find elsewhere.

Privacy and professional exposure, raised earlier as a moderator, returns here as a limit. For students the concern is data exposure and unwanted visibility; for scholars and faculty it reaches professional reputation, since a visible online identity that supports networking also creates risk (Vukušić Rukavina et al., 2021). The security worries that research scholars report (Sevukan & Sudarsan, 2015) are the everyday form of this calculus. The self-presentational and networking gratifications depend on disclosure, and privacy concern restrains disclosure, so privacy acts as a brake on the very gratifications that most benefit the scholarly community when they are realised.

These four limits carry a theoretical point the framework is built to accommodate. Gratification on social media is not uniformly positive, and a user may seek gratifications that work against their own academic purposes, as when the pursuit of diversion erodes the attention study requires. An adequate U&G account for the academic library has to model dysfunction alongside satisfaction, and to treat the conditions that limit gratification, overload, distraction, low credibility, and privacy risk, as part of the explanation rather than caveats appended to it.

7. Implications for Theory, Method, and Practice

The contribution to theory is integrative more than wholly new. The framework joins two accounts of gratification that have largely developed apart: the needs-pull logic of the classical tradition, in which pre-existing needs draw users to media, and the technology-push logic of affordance research, in which a platform's features generate gratifications of their own (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Treating real library social media use as the product of both, instead of choosing between them, brings the theory closer to how users behave. The framework also adds a structural moderator that individual-level U&G has tended to omit, institutional supply. Because the academic library is both an actor that posts and an object that users evaluate, the gratification a user can obtain is bounded by what the institution provides, and modelling that boundary answers the individualism for which classical U&G was criticised (McQuail, 2010). Finally, it corrects a common conceptual error, positioning privacy as a moderator that suppresses gratification rather than a gratification in its own right, and it makes academic role an explicit moderator instead of a background variable.

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For empirical method, and for the doctoral study from which this paper grows, the framework offers concrete guidance. It identifies measurable constructs in the seven domains, and it argues for measuring gratifications sought and gratifications obtained as separate sets, not a single battery, so that the discrepancy between them can be computed and used to predict engagement (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979). It fits the mixed-method design the underlying study proposes: standardised scales can capture the strength of each domain and the size of the sought-obtained gap, while interviews and focus groups recover the meanings, especially the privacy and credibility judgements, that fixed-response items flatten. Because the central claims concern how supply and role condition the link between gratifications and engagement, it calls for analyses that test moderation, through regression with interaction terms or structural equation modelling. And it recommends treating role as a grouping variable for comparison rather than collapsing it, given the evidence that gratification profiles differ across undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral, and faculty users (Park, 2010).

For practice, the framework reframes what a library does when it manages a social media presence. The aim is not presence as such but a match between supply and the gratification profile of the users a given account serves. A library whose followers are mainly undergraduates should weight its provision toward informational and instrumental content with some affective appeal, while one serving a research-heavy population should weight it toward current-research alerts, resource access, and support for scholarly networking. Segmenting communication by role, rather than addressing one undifferentiated audience, follows directly from the role-moderation claim. The affordance domain shows that how content is delivered matters apart from what it contains, so interactivity, responsiveness, and well-chosen modality are themselves sources of gratification, not decoration. The supply moderator shows that consistency and reliability protect obtained gratification, while erratic posting widens the sought-obtained gap and drives disengagement; this gives empirical teeth to the otherwise vague advice to post regularly. And the credibility and privacy limits show that a library's particular advantages, its authority over reliable information and its standing as a trusted institution, are worth foregrounding, because the surrounding platform supplies neither.

8. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The limitations follow from the paper's character. It is conceptual work, and its propositions are arguments, not findings; they await the empirical test the framework is designed to support. The U&G tradition's reliance on self-report persists here, and the framework inherits gratification research's vulnerability to the gap between what users can articulate and what actually moves them (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). The constructs are pitched at a level of generality that real instruments will have to sharpen, and the boundary between adjacent domains, particularly between informational-cognitive and academic-instrumental gratification, will need empirical confirmation rather than assertion.

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The framework is also bounded by setting. It is written for the academic library, and for a higher-education context in Haryana whose connectivity, disciplinary mix, and platform preferences shape what its users seek and obtain. Whether the supply and role moderators behave the same way in other countries, or in public and special libraries, is an open question. Platform change is a further limit: the specific platforms named here will shift, and a framework pinned to particular services would date quickly, which is one reason it is built on gratification domains and affordances rather than a catalogue of platforms.

Several lines of research follow. The most direct is a study that operationalises the seven domains, measures gratifications sought and obtained separately, and tests the eight propositions in a library population, with role as a comparison variable and institutional supply measured rather than assumed. A longitudinal design would do more, since the sought-obtained loop is dynamic and its effects on engagement unfold over time. The framework also invites integration with adjacent theory: with social capital accounts of networked gratification (Phua et al., 2017), with the technology acceptance and unified adoption models that explain platform uptake, and with the social-cognitive extension of U&G that explains habit and its excesses (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Finally, the dysfunctions treated here as limits deserve study in their own right, since the conditions under which sought gratifications turn academically counterproductive are themselves a question the framework raises but does not resolve.

9. Conclusion

Academic libraries now meet many of their users on social media, through the same platforms that carry those users' personal and intellectual lives. The research recording this change has told us a great deal about what users do and very little about why, and the gap is theoretical before it is empirical. This paper has argued that the uses and gratifications tradition, adapted with care, is the right instrument for closing it, and it has offered that adaptation as a framework of seven gratification domains, two structural moderators, and a loop between the gratifications users seek and those they obtain.

The framework's distinguishing claims are that gratification in the academic library is multidimensional and role-dependent, that it arises from the interaction of users' needs with platform affordances, that what users obtain is bounded by what the institution supplies, and that privacy and overload are limits internal to the account rather than caveats outside it. None of these claims is proven here; each is stated as a proposition open to test. The contribution is to gather the scattered insights of six decades of gratification research and a generation of LIS scholarship into one structure specific enough to guide the empirical study of social media in the university library and general enough to travel beyond the setting that prompted it. The next task is to put the propositions to work against data, and to let the evidence revise the framework it was designed to test.

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