

The Desire for Fame: An Extension of Uses and Gratifications Theory

(Rui & Stefanone, 2016).

In 2009, an ordinary Chinese woman became famous overnight.

Yufeng Luo shared an extensive collection of personal photos on her blog, where she exaggerated her physical attractiveness and intelligence (Gao, 2011).

While her self-promotion behaviour made her controversial, she soon found herself at the centre of intense attention across China and was awarded with fame.

Yufeng Luo



- The Internet makes it relatively easy for individuals like Yufeng to pursue fame. Social network sites (SNSs) are particularly useful for this purpose, creating new opportunities for ordinary people to compete for others' attention.
- Traditionally, individuals were limited to passive media consumption and rarely able to contribute to mass media production. Now, SNSs have fundamentally transformed our role from media consumers to media producers.
- Anyone with Internet access can easily create and share text, photos, and videos with other users worldwide.
- By creating and sharing media content, ordinary people actively compete for public attention.
- In contrast to self-disclosure at dyadic levels, SNS users can share volumes of personal information with massive and anonymous audiences resulting in heightened exposure across social networks that yields increased attention to the individual.
- Research highlights how SNSs and personal blogs are employed for this purpose (Hollenbaugh, 2010; Stefanone & Lackaff, 2009).
- The uses and gratifications (U&G) approach provides a theoretical framework to study motivation for media use (Blumler, Katz, & Gurevitch, 1974) as it conceptualizes media use as a means to satisfy human needs.

- Social cognitive can theory explain the social origins of desire for fame. SCT argues that human behaviour is a function of environmental stimuli and personal factors (Bandura, 2001).
- Although mediated characters are models for behaviour, the context of media consumption can moderate media effects (Roberts, 2004; Southwell & Yzer, 2007).
- While motives for media use largely depend on users' needs/desires, a users' expectations of the gratifications they will obtain from media consumption also play an important role in shaping their motives (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973).
- U&G provides a functional approach to media use. A core assumption of U&G is that audiences are aware of their needs and these motivate media choices for gratification.
- This process of media use works as follows on the next slide:

- (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 resulting in -
- (6) need gratifications and -
- (7) other consequences, (mostly unintended: Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

- This theoretical framework suggests that need is core to predicting media use. Later work shows that desire also predicts media consumption because individuals use media to satisfy their desires (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004).
- There are slight differences between these two concepts. While need is fundamental to human survival, desire refers to excessive satisfaction of human needs (Evans & Yamaguchi, 2009).
- Since the nineteenth century, anyone attracting wide public attention is recognized as a celebrity (Marshall, 1997).
- Although this makes the pursuit of fame less meaningful (Celedonia & Williams, 2006) the pursuit of fame still drives individuals to invest in it, often at the cost of their careers and relationships.
- In addition, although fame can boost self-esteem, this confirmation is contingent on evaluations of mass audiences and so is unstable (Estes, 1998). Heavy reliance on public interest results in fluctuations of self-worth and psychological vulnerability (Crocker, 2002).
- Despite these risks, recent evidence shows a trend of increased desire for fame among younger individuals. A survey conducted in the United Kingdom shows that 16% of children between 16 and 19 years old believed they would be famous, and 11% planned to stop formal education in pursuit of fame (UK's Learning and Skills Council, 2006).

- **Media-Cultivated Desire for Fame**
- The majority of learning is through vicarious experiences (Bandura, 2001).
- SCT explains human functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal determinism in which behavioural, environmental, and personal factors all affect and are affected by each other (Bandura, 2001).
- Environmental stimuli include the social context that influences perceptions and actions. Personal factors encompass cognitive, biological, affective, and other internal conditions that affect perceptions and behaviour.
- Bandura (2001) argued that human behaviour creates and is created by internal factors and stimuli in the external environment.
- **RTV** programming portrays a culture that equates fame to personal success (Stefanone & Lackaff, 2009).
- RTV programming generally consists of ordinary individuals exposing their private thoughts and feelings to large, anonymous audiences. In return, participants are rewarded with fame.
- Consistent with SCT, heavy RTV viewers should be more likely to internalize the value system that equates with fame and success.

- **The Motive of SNS Use: Fame Seeking**
- Motives for SNS use include relationship initiation (Tosun, 2012), relationship maintenance and development (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Tosun, 2012), social interactions (Barker, 2009; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011), information seeking (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009), entertainment (Park et al., 2009; Smock et al., 2011), escapism (Smock et al., 2011), self-status seeking (Park et al., 2009), and professional development (Smock et al., 2011).
- - These motives are similar across most media platforms.
- However, individuals vary their media use based on what gratifications they expect media to provide (Katz et al., 1973). Media gratifications are related to media characteristics, including content, context and technological attributes (Katz et al., 1973).
- These characteristics enable media to provide different gratifications. Therefore, the different technological attributes between traditional mass media and new media suggest that new media users likely exhibit unique motives.
- So... **Exhibitionism** as a New Motive of SNS Use?

- SNS users can cultivate large audiences from which wide public attention can be gained.
- Second, it has never been easier to share text, photos and videos. This technological affordance reduces the cost of self-promotion to large audiences.
- By engaging in Non Directed Self Disclosure (NDSD), individuals publicly share personal information that should have been kept secret.
- This behaviour involves risks of privacy violation (Petronio, 2002). Therefore, fame-seeking behaviour is conceptualized as behaviour that sacrifices personal privacy in exchange for the opportunity to gain attention from others, measured as the number of photos and videos posted and the frequency of updating text-based statuses.
- **Reality TV viewing -**
- Findings from the research by Rui & Stefanone, (2016) demonstrate that the RTV effect depends on the social context where RTV viewing occurs.
- The primary audience of RTV is young people who exhibit stronger identification with a culture of celebrity. Therefore, when groups of friends view RTV together, their interpersonal conversations about the television content likely reinforce the value system and behaviours those television programs endorse.

- Furthermore, their research extends the findings by showing that these effects are not limited to behaviour but ultimately stimulate individual viewers' desire.
- They also found that co-viewing with audiences that endorse the culture of celebrity could strengthen the RTV effect. This is because the primary audience of RTV is already strongly identified with the value that RTV programming endorses.
- The researchers also proposed that SNSs encourage a new motive of SNS use: **exhibitionism**. Results showed that exhibitionism mediated the relationship between a desire for fame and NDSD in the form of posting photos and updating Facebook statuses.
- These behaviours are not targeted at specific individuals but broadcast across the entire network. Thus, those who desire fame and use SNSs to pursue fame can receive more attention by engaging in these behaviours.
- This argument is consistent with the functional approach of U&G to media use, which describes media use as a means to satisfy human need/desire.
- In other words, media consumption is one of many possible approaches to need/desire satisfaction.
- Therefore – in psychological terms... what do individuals gain from this need/desire for fame?