Title: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS STUDY OF NICHE SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

This study used the uses and gratifications theory to compare the motivations audience members have for using two different social network sites. Study participants (N=554) were asked about both their motivations for using the popular social network site Facebook and for using the niche social network site Ravelry to gather data for the comparison. The results show that there is a significant amount of overlap between the motives for Ravelry use and for Facebook use. The motives of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, habitual pass time, social interaction, cool new technology and professional advancement emerged during data analysis as motives for using both sites. New friendship emerged only as a motive for Ravelry use. The results also showed the most prominent motive for Facebook use was social interaction and the most prominent motives for using Ravelry were relaxing entertainment and new friendships. The strongest motive for using Facebook related to relationships maintenance, which supports findings of past research. In contrast, the one of the strongest motives for using Ravelry show members are seeking new relationships through their niche social site use. The most significant finding of the study was the discovery of personal utility and information seeking motives for using niche social network sites which were not seen in the popular social network site. The significant differences between motives for using the niche social network site and the popular social network suggest additional research may be needed refine the current definition of social network site and to explore the need to further classify sites that meet the definition of social network site.