'My social network, my choice': User gratification factors influencing choice of online social network sites among teenagers

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Abstract- Teenagers are considered the most prolific users of social network sites (SNSs), where they spend a considerable amount of time. The growth of these online communities has skyrocketed with familiar examples being Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Although research on young people's use of SNSs is emerging, questions remain regarding exactly what motivates them to choose specific sites. This review outlines the theoretical framework and gratifications that researchers have used to understand teenagers' interactions with SNSs. It brings together work that examines gratifications sought, such as diversion, personal identity, surveillance, and social capital. These gratifications point to a growing demand for more user-generated media and offers insights into potential areas for further research.

Index Terms- new media, social network sites, teenagers, uses and gratifications

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of social media, from blogging, to online social networking, to creation of all kinds of digital material, is central to many teenagers' lives (Ahn, 2011a; Lenhart, Madden, Macgill & Smith, 2007). Greenhow and Robelia (2009) posit that popular media accounts tend to portray young people's media practices as "deficient or deleterious to academic learning" (p. 1130). This is manifested by the choice of SNSs as a major communication medium among teenagers. Teenagers are considered among the most prolific users of SNSs as illustrated by Ahn:

> Teenage youth are a unique population of SNSs users. They are among the first to have grown up entirely surrounded by communication technologies. Teenagers are also in a period of rapid development, growth, and maturation. Research about social media effects on youth promises to contribute significantly to the concerns of adults who mediate access to these online communities (Ahn, 2011a, p. 1435).

Although research on young people's use of SNSs is emerging, questions remain regarding exactly what young people do on these sites, whom they interact with, and how their SNSs use relates to their other online and off-line activities (Baker & White, 2010; Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008; Ahn, 2011a). According to Boyd and Ellison (2008) SNSs are the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a public or semi-public profile, create and view their own as well as other users' online social networks. That teenagers are connected to these global online communities is both a frightening prospect for parents and educators and an intriguing area for social science research (Ahn, 2011a).

Several studies have been carried out concerning the use of SNSs among the youth. In a study conducted among Michigan State University undergraduate students, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) examined the relationship between the use of Facebook and maintenance of social capital. Their findings suggested the existence of an association between use of Facebook and social capital, with the strongest relationship being the bridging of social capital. In another study, Wyche, Schoenbeck and Forte (2013) examined Facebook use in rural Kenya. Their findings suggest a high level of awareness among the respondents concerning the use of Facebook where they argued that the high costs associated with Facebook access in rural Kenya, limited Bandwidth and power outages impede the growth of SNSs. Although these two studies exemplify the attempts made at furthering research on SNSs, there are glaring gaps in their approach. There lacks a theoretical underpinning in the studies thus making it difficult to explain the studied phenomenon. The studies also tend to focus on selected SNSs, which leave us in doubt as to the user gratification factors influencing choice of specific SNSs.

Statement of the problem

The popularity of social network sites (SNSs) among teenagers has grown exponentially, with little accompanying research to understand the influences on adolescent engagement with this technology (Ahn, 2011b; Baker & White, 2010). Ahn (2011b) further argued that there have been few studies that consider systematic differences in user characteristics of SNSs. Dunne and Lawlor (2010) contend that the growth of the online phenomenon of SNSs and its growing popularity among teenagers has not captured the attention of academia. Today's adolescents are depicted as 'digital natives' and 'millennial learners' who are constantly online, perceive themselves as Internet-savvy, and prefer technology-enhanced communication channels (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

The proliferation of SNSs presents a major challenge to both parents and policy makers in as far as adopting effective communication strategies targeting teenagers are concerned. The adoption of effective communication strategies (Kiragu, Sienché,

Obwaka & Odallo, 1998) will inevitably stem the social, cultural and economic repercussions of uninformed behavior by teenagers. However, despite the growth of social media, and more specifically the adoption of SNSs by teenagers, little has been done to investigate the user gratification factors influencing the choice of specific SNSs among this group. Interestingly, Internet usage among the youth is perceived negatively considering elements such as pornography and indecent exposure. This is despite the fact that Internet represents a fantastic world of opportunity for children and youth, filled with both good and bad consequences (Chan & Fang, 2007). Among the negative consequences of the Internet include; cyber bullying, sexting, online harassment, and Facebook depression. The positive consequences include socialization and communication, enhanced learning opportunities, and access to health information (O'Keefe et al., 2011). It is therefore worth noting that with new forms of media emerging and the convergence of media technology, the patterns of media usage will inevitably undergo rapid changes thus presenting a major challenge to policy communication strategies targeting teenagers. The danger here is that ineffective communication strategies may be adopted thus excluding teenagers, whose Internet use is considered undeveloped. The purpose of this review is to address this gap by investigating the user gratification factors influencing teenagers' choice of SNSs.

Objective(s)

The general objective of this review is to investigate user gratification factors influencing teenagers' choice of SNSs. Specifically, the review investigates how 'gratifications sought' influence teenagers' choice of social network sites.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The teenage youth segment

The UNFPA (2011) defined the youth as people within the age bracket of 15 to 24 years. The UNFPA (2011) report states that "although people 24 years old or younger make up almost half of the world's 7 billion population (with 1.2 billion between the ages of 10 and 19), their percentage of the population in some major developing countries is already at its peak" (p. 10). The Global Roundtable Working Group on the Youth (2011) affirmed these statistics by stating that the number of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is 1.1 billion; youth constitute 18 percent of the global population. Youth and children together, including those aged 24 and younger, account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population. Geographically, the largest population of youth is concentrated in Asia; 15 percent, in Africa; 10 percent, in Latin America and the Caribbean; and the remaining 15 percent, in developed countries and regions. Such statistics demonstrate that:

> In middle income and some rapidly developing lower income countries, the number of years in which a large, young working population can be counted on to fuel development may be fleeting, and governments and the private sector need to act expeditiously to prepare the young for productive roles (UNFPA, 2011, p. 11).

This review focused on teenagers aged between 13 and 19 years.

Many of the youth have been excluded from designing, planning and implementing programs and policies that affect them. Many, who are productive and energetic remain unemployed, continue to suffer from poor health, and lack sufficient support. Some of them have special needs that require attention. These include those living off the streets and those with HIV/AIDS. The responsibility of ensuring that the aspirations and hopes of the youth are met lies with a multiplicity of stakeholders. Among the other issues affecting the youth include: (1) unemployment and underemployment where only about 25 percent of the youth are absorbed leaving 75 percent unemployed, (2) the youth face a myriad of health related problems including STI's, drug and substance abuse as well as poor access to health services. The Global Roundtable Working Group on Youth (2011) attested that millions of adolescents face the prospect of early marriage, early childbearing, incomplete education and the threat of HIV and AIDS. Increasing youth's knowledge, improving services for young people, and encouraging youth's participation in program decisions will help all young people to lead healthier and more productive lives, (3) increasing school and college dropout rates, crime and deviant behavior, limited sports and recreation facilities, abuse and exploitation, limited participation and lack of opportunities, limited and poor housing, and (4) limited access to ICT. These limitations imply that "the youth cannot exploit career, business and education opportunities available because they lack access to ICT due to unavailability especially in rural areas, and high costs" (Global Roundtable Working Group on Youth, 2011, p. 4).

An overview of the new media

The new media is defined broadly and generally refers to a range of applications that merge traditional media such as print, television, film, newspapers and images with digital technology to create interactive and dynamic publications, tools and uses (Conway, 2011). The new media is characterized by elements such as open access, user driven and collaborative content generation, feedback, and digital delivery. Among the common examples of new media include "virtual worlds, collaborative workspaces, social media, and open access journals, applications for smart phones, tablets, and e-readers" (p. 247). The youth form a considerable segment of new media users due to the high levels of interactivity involved. With new forms of media emerging and the convergence of media technology, the patterns of media usage will inevitably undergo rapid changes.

A characteristic of the new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) is the multifunction capacity. Although research about the Internet has grown exponentially along with the development and spread of ICTs, it still remains a comparatively small body of literature (Kim & Weaver, 2002; as cited in Chan & Fang, 2007). Worldwide, a growing number of individuals are connected through the Internet and related Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as mobile phones, personal computers, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), tablets and other networked gadgets and electronic devices, which are themselves converging (Dutta, Dutton, & Law, 2011). The beginning of the 21st century is marked by the rise of ubiquitous technology in everyday life. As more and more people are connected to the Internet, today's networked society

makes it increasingly difficult to remain offline. "As new products, such as the Apple iPad, Samsung Galaxy Tab, and Cisco Cius, entered the market this same year, sales for the reinvented media tablet were forecasted to reach 19.5 million." (Dutta et al., 2011, p. 5). Consequently, individual citizens are becoming more focused on the opportunities and risks electronic devices pose. Among these include the risk of indecent exposure, enculturation, pornography, and anti-social behaviors among others.

Littlejohn and Foss (2008) highlighted the idea of the "Second Media Age", as propounded by Mark Poster in his book "The Second Media Age", which signal important changes in media theory. Three key assumptions of the second media age include: firstly, that the concept of "media" is loosened from primarily "mass" communication to a variety of media ranging from broad to personal in scope. Secondly, the concept evaluates new forms of media use ranging from individualized information and knowledge acquisition to interaction. Thirdly, the power of media comes back into focus including a renewed interest in characteristics of dissemination and broadcast media. The first media age was said to be characterized by "(a) centralized production (one to many); (b) one-way communication; (c) state control for the most part; (d) the reproduction of social stratification and inequality through media; (e) fragmented mass audiences; and (f) the shaping of social consciousness" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 292). The second media age, in contrast, and which is the focus of this study is described as being "(a) decentralized; (b) two-way; (c) beyond state control; (d) democratizing; (e) promoting individual consciousness; and (f) individually oriented" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 292).

Severin and Tankard, 1998, and Littlejohn and Foss (2008) further argued that the World Wide Web (WWW) is seen as an open, flexible, and dynamic information environment, which allows humans to develop a new orientation to knowledge and thus engage in a more interactive, community-based, democratic world of mutual sharing and empowerment. SNSs constitute this new platform through which teenagers interact. Littlejohn and Foss therefore add that "the Internet provides virtual meeting places that expand social worlds, creates new possibilities for knowledge, and provide for a sharing of perspectives worldwide" (p.292). The new media contain powers as well as limits. Examples include: provision of openness and flexibility of use, can lead to confusion and chaos. New media greatly widen choice. Diversity is one of the great values of new media, but can lead to division and separation. New media may also allow flexibility in how we use time but also create new time demands.

Online Social Network Sites (SNSs)

Closely related to the Internet and most popular among the youth are SNSs. The online phenomenon of SNSs has been consistently growing in popularity over the past five years. SNSs constitute a form of virtual community, with sites such as bebo, Facebook and MySpace commanding a vast global following (Dunne & Lawlor, 2010; Boyd & Ellison, 2008). For example, Facebook and MySpace report in excess of 70 and 50 million visitors, respectively on a monthly basis to their sites (Dunne & Lawlor, 2010). Consequently, a new aspect of new media referred to as 'user-generated media' has emerged. Boyd and Ellison defined a SNS as "a web-based service that allows individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). Boyd and Ellison further argued that SNSs "are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and industry researchers intrigued by their affordances and reach" (p. 210). They posited that since their introduction, SNSs such as Myspace, Facebook, Cyworld and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily lives. Boyd and Ellison argued that "SNS researchers' ability to make causal claims is limited by a lack of experimental or longitudinal studies. Although the situation is rapidly changing, scholars still have a limited understanding of who is and who is not using these sites, why, and for what purposes, especially outside the U.S." (p. 224).

Although their influence on the world at large is still unclear, user-generated media (UGM) are fundamentally changing the world of entertainment, communication, and information. This is attributed to their self-sustaining nature and ever growing audience size (Shao, 2009). Historically, UGM can be traced back to the bulletin boards on such portal sites as Yahoo and AOL in the 1990s. Over time, "they have evolved to encompass blogs, wikis, picture-sharing, video-sharing, social networking, and other user-generated web sites" (p. 8). UGM thus refers to "the new media whose content is made publicly available over the Internet, reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and is created outside professional routines and practices" (Shao, 2009, p. 8). The challenge here is in relating the gratifications sought and those obtained through the choice of these new forms of media.

Examples of online Social Network Sites (SNSs)

Ellison and Boyd (2013) argued that the proliferation and evolution of SNSs makes it challenging to give a standard definition. They further defined a social network site as;

> A networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content provided by other users, and/ or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/ or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site
> (Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 7).

Examples of popular SNSs among the youth include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+. Willems (2011) described Facebook as "a social utility which connects people with friends and others" (p. 1322). There are more SNSs, which are ranked based on their popularity as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Top ten online social network sites (SNSs)

Rank	Site	Estimated unique monthly visitors
1	Facebook	800,000,000
2	Twitter	250,000,000
3	LinkedIn	200,000,000
4	Google+	150,000,000
5	Pinterest	140,500,000
6	Tumbir	110,000,000
7	Flickr	67,000,000
8	VK	65,400,000
9	Instagram	50,000,000
10	MySpace	26,500.000

Source: Top 15 most, 2014

Theoretical framework

This review is premised on the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory as propounded by Blumler and Katz in 1974. The uses and gratifications (U&G) theory is based on the notion that media cannot influence an individual unless that person has some use for that media or its messages (Rubin, 2002). This marks a shift from the traditional viewpoint of 'powerful-media-effects' theories in which an audience is depicted as passive and easily manipulated by media influences. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) argued that in U&G theory a key distinction is made between gratifications obtained and gratifications sought. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) draw this distinction by arguing that "gratifications obtained (GO) refer to those gratifications that audience members actually experience through the use of a particular medium" (p.352). By contrast, gratifications sought (GS), which are often referred to as "needs' or "motives" refer to "those gratifications that audience members expect to obtain from a medium before they have actually come into contact with it" (p. 352).

This review focuses on the gratifications sought by teenagers in their choice of SNSs. Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley (2010) reinforce this by classifying GS as "communication, friending, identity creation and management, entertainment, escapism and alleviation of boredom, information search, and interaction' against GO, which include 'portrayal of one's ideal image, peer acceptance, relationship maintenance, safety from embarrassment and rejection, and engagement in playground politics" (p. 51). Song, Larose, Eastin and Lin (2004) found seven gratification factors specific to the Internet. These are; virtual community, information seeking, aesthetic experience, monetary compensation, diversion, personal status, and relationship maintenance. From the foregoing arguments, it is quite clear that teenagers indeed seek a variety of gratifications from SNSs and in turn gain different satisfactions from the same. A further exploration of the U&G approach in the next section will give insight into the user gratification factors influencing teenagers' choice of SNSs.

The uses and gratifications (U&G) theory

According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008) one of the most popular theories of mass communication is the U&G approach. This approach focuses on the consumer-the audience member rather than the message. The theory imagines the audience member to be a discriminating user of media. The audience is assumed to be active and goal directed. The audiences are largely responsible for choosing media to meet their own needs. The media are considered to be only one factor contributing to how needs get met, and the audience members are assumed to have considerable agency or in essence know their need and how to gratify those needs.

The U&G approach was propounded by Blumler and Katz in 1974. The underlying assumption is that audiences are active and they seek out that content which provides the most gratification (Fawkes & Gregory, 2001). Fawkes and Gregory further added that "the level of gratification depends on the level of need or interest of the individual" (p. 120). According to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973-1974), the last few years have witnessed a revival of direct empirical investigation of audience uses and gratifications. Each of these studies attempts to press towards a greater systemization of what is involved in conducting research in this field. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch added that the U&G approach is concerned with: "(a) the social and psychological origins of, (b) needs, which generate, (c) expectations of, (d) the mass media or other sources, which lead to, (e) different patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in, (f) need gratifications and, (g) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (p. 510). This model informs the present review in the sense that, (a) teenagers have social and psychological needs, which (b) determine the Gratifications Sought (GS) through specific SNSs, and (c) have expectations of the different SNSs available, which (d) enables them to access social media, (e) and engage in different online activities, resulting in (f) gratifications obtained (GO) and, (g) other consequences (both positive and negative), mostly unintended.

User gratification factors

Gratification factors influencing teenagers' choice of SNSs have been summarized into the following variables; (a) diversion, which is escape from routine and problems; emotional release, (b) personal identity/ individual psychology, which relates to value reinforcement, (c) surveillance, which is information about things which might affect one or will help one do or accomplish something (Severin & Tankard, 1998), and (d) social capital, which captures the benefits accrued from personal relationships, for example, family, friends, classmates, and acquaintances (Vitak, Ellison & Steinfield, 2011, Severin & Tankard, 1998).

Personal identity

Personal identity is a critical variable in this review considering that the importance of presenting a positive self-identity among teenagers cannot be overemphasized. Harrison and Thomas (2009) defined identity as "the way in which users develop their online profiles and lists of friends to carry out important community processes" (p. 114). They further outlined aspects of identity as follows.

(a) Impression management, which is concerned with personal identity formation, (b) friendship management, which is linked to impression management in that users use publicly displayed profiles of others to choose who

they would like to include as friends on their list, (c) network structure, relates to the roles that users play in the social community in which they participate, and (d) bridging of online and offline social networks, which is concerned with the degree to which the SNS becomes an integral part of the users' actual life while offline (Harrison & Thomas, 2009, p. 114).

This is evidenced by Dunne and Lawlors' (2010) study on young people's use of online SNSs. Their study was carried out among girls aged 12 to 14 years and focused on one SNS 'Bebo'. Findings revealed an active use of Bebo for personal motives and gratifications in terms of presenting and managing a certain identity and persona in a social context. One respondent in their findings stated, "sometimes you look at people's profile pictures and go "oh my god", what are they at"? Some of the stuff they say about themselves is exaggerated as well, they are trying to make themselves look cool" (Dunne & Lawlor, 2010, p. 52). Chigona, Kamkwenda and Manjoo (2008) echo this by arguing that among the process gratifications sought by the youth include the need for image, fashion and status.

Social capital

The concept of social capital draws a variety of definitions in multiple fields (Ellison, Steinield & Lampe, 2007). Broadly though, (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009) defined social capital as the resources accumulated through the relationships among people. This definition is reinforced by Williams (2006) assertion that:

> It is loosely understood to operate like financial capital in that it creates more of it. However, instead of goods and services, the things being used and created are personal relationships and the benefits that come with them: Some social actors interact and form a network of individuals – a "social network"- resulting in positive affective bonds. These in turn yield positive outcomes such as emotional support or the ability to mobilize others (Williams, 2006, p. 594).

Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) argued that unsafe disclosure of information, cyberbullies, addiction, risky behavior, and contact with dangerous communities are among the popular concerns raised about the use of SNSs. They further posit that "other research shows that young people are motivated to join these sites to keep strong ties with friends and to strengthen ties with new acquaintants" (p. 876). This validates Williams (2006) argument that bridging and bonding social capital could be motivating factors influencing choice of SNSs.

Putnam as cited in Williams (2006) splits social capital into 'bonding' and 'bridging'. He argues that bridging and bonding allow for different types of social capital to result when different norms and networks are in place. According to Putnam, these two types of social capital are related but not equivalent. Bridging social capital is inclusive and occurs when individuals from different backgrounds make connections between social networks. By contrast, bonding can be exclusive. It occurs when strongly tied individuals, such as family and close friends, provide emotional or substantive support for one another (Williams, 2006). Papacharissi and Mendelson (n.d) argued that media audiences also seek to maintain social capital. They add that maintained social capital focuses on staying connected to

groups from previous moments in one's life. The question though at this point is whether teenagers' choice of SNSs is motivated by the desire to 'bridge', 'bond' and 'maintain' social capital.

Diversion and surveillance

Severin and Tankard (1998) categorize the variables of diversion and surveillance as gratification factors. They define diversion as escape from routine and problems, and surveillance as seeking information about things, which might affect one or will help in accomplishing given tasks. This is echoed by Johnson (2008) as cited in Quan-Haase and Young (2010) who suggested that 'keeping in touch' dimension of Facebook comprises of surveillance and social searching. Surveillance is further defined as the desire to see what old contacts and friends are upto, how they look, and how they behave. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) further outline the main reasons to use Facebook as (a) to learn about social events, (b) to keep in touch with friends, and (c) as a diversion from school work. These fit in well with the objective of the review, which seeks to investigate user gratification factors influencing teenagers' choice of social network sites. McQuail as cited in Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) argued that there are four main motivations for media use; (a) information, (b) entertainment, (c) social interaction, and (d) personal identity. Leung (2007) echoes this by listing entertainment, surveillance, passing time, and escape as motivations for internet use. Although these motivations are observed from a broad perspective, it is clear that diversion and surveillance act as motivations for internet use. This information could be related to bridging and bonding social capital among teenagers.

Demographic characteristics of gender, age and socioeconomic status

Ahn (2011b) conceded that there have been few studies that consider systematic differences in user characteristics of SNSs. Studies in the United States point to a relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and Internet access. This could by extension be applied to SNSs. Ahn (2011b) argued that "parents' education beyond a high school diploma, a common indicator of SES, did not have a significant relationship to teens' use of SNSs" (p. 3). Additionally, teenagers who primarily accessed the Internet away from home or school were most likely to be SNSs members (Ahn, 2011b). According to Boyd (2008) gender and age also appear to influence participation on Social Network Sites (SNSs). Boyd (2008) further stated that younger boys are more likely to participate in SNSs than younger girls but older girls are far more likely to participate than older boys. Boyd argued that the motivations for using SNSs are that inherently, "older boys are twice as likely to use the sites to flirt and slightly more likely to use the sites to meet new people than girls of their age" (p. 121). Although Boyd (2008) does not classify specific age categories to these motivations, it is apparent that age and gender are indeed predictive of teenagers' Social Network Sites choices.

Empirical review of literature

Several studies have been carried out relating the U&G theory to SNSs. In one such study, Urista, Doug and Day (n.d) sought to explain why young adults used MySpace and Facebook

through the U&G theory. The exploratory study applied the focus group method to investigate how members of Facebook and MySpace used the sites to fulfill their wants and needs. This qualitative approach was used in order to provide insights into thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and attitudes of individual SNS members who used online sources to fulfill their needs and wants. Findings revealed five themes from the focus group discussions. These included: (a) efficient communication, (b) convenient communication, (c) curiosity about others, (d) popularity, and (e) relationship formation and reinforcement. The findings also suggested that an immediacy driven tendency motivated young people to use SNSs. Members used SNSs to satisfy a specific gratification that they sought. These gratifications fall into the four factors adopted in this review.

In another study, Wyche, Schoenebeck and Forte (2013) examined Facebook use in Kenya, where social media participation is growing but less developed technological infrastructures and uneven access to technology limit use. This study emphasized how the potential for ICT to support economic prosperity, education, and civic engagement had been widely discussed, but lament the scarcity of research on SNSs in such contexts. This was a qualitative study where the researchers conducted observations and interviews at Internet cafés in rural Kenya. Among the key findings of the study included the fact that participants were familiar with Facebook but there were high costs associated with Facebook access in rural Kenya. Cases of limited Bandwidth and power outages were also cited as impediments to Facebook access. Whereas Wyche, Schoenebeck and Forte's (2013) study sets the stage for future research on SNSs, there is a clear gap in the relationship between theory and SNSs use. The study also fails to address a specific segment of the population thus making it difficult to direct communication strategies aimed at segments of the population. This review presents a different perspective to the study of urban populations' choices of SNSs by specifically targeting teenagers.

Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) examined the relationships between use of Facebook, a popular SNS and the formation and maintenance of social capital. This study employed a survey method where the findings point to an association between use of Facebook and the three types of social capital, with the strongest relationship being to bridge social capital. This compares favorably with Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley's (2010) research, which explored the U&G that young people, specifically girls aged 12 – 14 years, derived from online SNS (Bebo). The study sought to explore the girls' usage of the Internet and more specifically SNSs, and examine the reasons for this behavior. A qualitative methodology was employed in the study involving a total of seven focus groups which were conducted in the setting of an Irish secondary school. Their findings identified gratifications sought (GS) as communication, Friending, identity creation and management, entertainment, escapism and alleviation of boredom, information search, and interaction with boys. The gratifications obtained (GO) included, portraying ones ideal image, peer acceptance, relationship maintenance, safety from embarrassment and rejection, and engaging in playground politics. This study demonstrated how the U&G approach is both appropriate and relevant in the context of the online environment and specifically SNSs.

Rack and Bonds-Raacke (2008) conducted a study to evaluate why people use friend-networking sites, what the characteristics are of the typical college user, and what U&G are met by using these sites. This was an exploratory study, which applied the quantitative method. The questionnaire was employed as the main tool of data collection. In a study examining whether off-line inequalities predict teenagers online social networks, (Ahn, 2011b) analyzed a dataset of 701 U.S. teenagers aged between twelve and eighteen years. This study employed a survey methodology where online questionnaire was the main tool for data collection. Findings suggested that the characteristics of teenagers that use Facebook, Myspace, or both SNSs showed distinct differences. Although Ahn's (2011b) study is closely related to the present review in the sense that teenagers' SNSs choices are under focus, Facebook and Myspace SNSs are used thus locking out those teenagers who might belong to other SNSs. All these studies ideally examine the motivations for using specific SNSs but are deficient in explaining the gratifications that inform the choice of these SNSs. The studies are also methodologically deficient in that the use of one research design may not present accurate findings, which can be generalized to large populations.

III. METHODOLOGY

This article adopted a review methodology based on literature related to social network sites (SNSs) and teenagers. The Uses and Gratifications approach informed the theoretical framework of the review. Empirical studies were reviewed for gratifications sought, which were then grouped into the four variables discussed.

IV. DISCUSSION

This review set out to reveal user gratification factors influencing teenagers' choice of social network sites (SNSs). The results based on existing literature revealed four main classifications of gratification factors that teenagers sought in their interactions with SNSs. The review extends prior scholarship by investigating gratification factors influencing SNSs choice. This coupled with the Uses and Gratifications approach presents a rich foundation for future empirical research into teenagers and SNSs. Previous studies reviewed point to a broad and unstructured classification of gratifications sought by SNSs users. These pose as many questions as they resolve but provide pointers to future directions for research. It is envisaged that this review is a first step in developing a framework through which user gratifications influencing SNSs use can be examined.

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