



Review Article

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## Gratifications of Instagram Use – A Systematic Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid growth and popularity of Instagram garnered scholarly attention. With the help of the uses and gratifications theory, the research community started scrutinising why users use Instagram. The present systematic literature review used the PSALSAR framework and examined the peer-reviewed published literature exploring the gratifications of Instagram (GOI).

Findings revealed the universe of emerging literature exploring the gratifications of Instagram with different methods, samples, and geographical contexts. As a theoretical contribution, the study unravelled GOI literature's patterns, trends, and knowledge gaps. The SLR identified inconsistencies in GOI definitions and highlighted the need for more uniform gratification constructs. It revealed that GOI research is predominantly centred on the USA and other Western countries, underscoring the necessity for wider exploration among non-Western Instagram users. The review also emphasised the limited investigation of the GOI's sociological origins. Further, it organised prior research into five thematic areas: (1) identification of GOI, (2) comparison of gratifications across sample groups, (3) comparison across social networking platforms, (4) use of gratifications to predict other variables, and (5) examination of gratification antecedents. Finally, the study outlined key limitations and proposed directions for future research.

## INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of Instagram attracted scholarly attention and led to inquiries on why Instagram audiences engage with Instagram (Menon, 2022; Sheldon & Newman, 2019). Uses and gratification theory has been an important theoretical framework for studying social media audiences (Markarian & Toradze, 2023; Schrøder, 2013), as it posits that audiences consciously access media to satisfy their social and psychological needs (Katz, Haas, *et al.*, 1973). The assumption here is that users actively use Instagram to obtain certain gratifications. These scholarly inquiries generated a pool of literature on the gratifications of Instagram (GOI). There is a need to synthesise these past research findings to leverage the existing body of information to progress in the field of study. In such instances, systematic literature reviews are valuable tools for making sense of the body of literature and advancing the research domain.

The current study presents a systematic literature review on GOI published during the 12 years following the release of Instagram. The study conducted a content analysis of this literature and made recommendations and discusses the agenda for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly work on GOI has sought to unveil the fundamental motivators driving users to engage with Instagram (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Various studies have identified distinct GOI. For instance, Sheldon *et al.* (2021) identified motivational drivers encompassing "Relationship surveillance," "Documentation," "Inspiration," "Diversion/companionship," and "self-promotion." Scholars have argued that, as a new medium, Instagram may provide new gratifications, which might not have been revealed in past studies on conventional media (Ruggiero, 2000).

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Even Instagram's affordances may give rise to new gratifications (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Given the differences in the literature findings and the possibility of new GOI, a compelling need arises for a systematic review of these studies to foster a comprehensive understanding of GOI.

Scholars have employed diverse methodological approaches in their investigations of GOI. For instance, using the gratification scale from prior literature (Geary *et al.*, 2021), ethnographic inquiry (Vila *et al.*, 2020), and adopting a grounded theory approach (Ilich & Hardey, 2020). The present systematic literature review endeavors to scrutinize these varying methods, further advancing the comprehension of this body of knowledge.

Scholarly investigations extended beyond GOI and delved into the underlying factors driving users' pursuit of specific gratifications. For instance, Kocak *et al.* (2020) contended that individuals' personality traits significantly influence their motivations for seeking specific GOI. Additionally, researchers explored the consequences of GOI. For example – the intensity of Instagram use (Alhabash & Ma, 2017), problematic Instagram use (Chen *et al.*, 2022), Instagram stickiness (Y.-H. Lin, 2022), and Instagram addiction (Nikbin *et al.*, 2022). The present review attempts to comprehensively examine the antecedents and outcomes associated with GOI to enhance our understanding of this multifaceted landscape. Furthermore, scholarly investigations into GOI do exhibit certain limitations. For instance, as noted, using nonprobability sampling techniques in respondent recruitment imposes constraints on the generalizability of study findings. Furthermore, concerns have been raised regarding the reliability and validity of self-reported measures, highlighting potential discrepancies between self-reported data and actual usage patterns. The present study aims to critically examine such limitations within existing literature.

A consolidated review of GOI literature has yet to be available. The present review addresses this knowledge gap and contributes to the more extensive knowledge body of the audience's social media use behaviour. More precisely, the present study responds to the following research questions

- What are the predominant research objectives that have been explored in the studies on GOI?
- What are the gratifications of Instagram identified in the literature? What methodological approaches have been employed to investigate them?
- How did researchers operationalise and measure GOI?
- What are the antecedents and outcomes of the gratifications of Instagram?
- How do different cultures and geographies influence GOI?
- What are the limitations of the existing research?

## METHOD

### Systematic Literature Review

The present study followed the PSALSAR (Protocol, Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, Analysis, and Reporting) framework (Mengist *et al.*, 2020) to structure the systematic literature review. Recent studies have also established the utility of the PSALSAR framework for literature review. Each of the six steps of the framework is described below within the context of the present study.

#### Step One - Protocol

The protocol's first step involves defining the research scope (Mengist *et al.*, 2020). The present author described the study's scope as examining the research on the users' GOI. It included the literature published in scholarly journals and conference proceedings, identifying GOI.

#### Step Two - Search

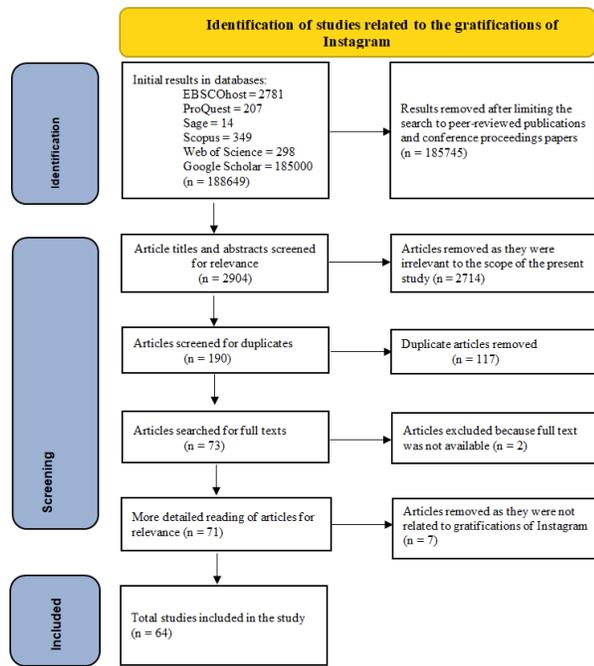
This step included a searching strategy and delivery (Mengist *et al.*, 2020). A rigorous strategy for the literature search was designed by adapting the protocols described in the literature (Fernández-Planells *et al.*, 2021; Melchior & Oliveira, 2022; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). The author identified the terms used to recognise gratifications study, for example, "uses and gratifications," "gratifications," "motivation," "motives," and "U&G." The term "Instagram" was used to locate the Instagram-specific studies. These keywords formed the base of the literature search in six research databases - EBSCOHost, Sage, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar (Fernández-Planells *et al.*, 2021). The literature has validated the appropriateness and utility of these databases for systematic literature reviews (Fernández-Planells *et al.*, 2021; Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020; Melchior & Oliveira, 2022). Though Google Scholar includes more sources than Web of Science and Scopus, it can complement the literature search (Fernández-Planells *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the researcher decided to use Google Scholar. Google Scholar does not provide advanced search and export facilities; therefore, the author followed a manual search strategy. The irrelevant results appeared around the 45<sup>th</sup> search result page; the author stopped screening after the 50<sup>th</sup> page. Figure 1 demonstrates the updated PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page *et al.*, 2021) describing the literature search process and article selection.

#### Step Three - Appraisal

Step three includes appraising and evaluating the selected articles based on the review's objectives. This involves formulating the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Mengist *et al.*, 2020).

#### Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

All peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers exploring the GOI were included. Studies examining



**Figure 1:** The PRISMA (2020) flow diagram demonstrating literature search and article selection.

the gratifications of social media were not part of this study. However, articles exploring the gratifications of social media and comparing different social networking platforms, including Instagram, were included in the study. Studies exploring feature-specific gratifications (for example, Instagram stories) or gratifications of specific user actions on Instagram (for example, photo sharing) were included. Articles written in languages other than English were excluded. Articles for which the full text was unavailable were excluded.

The author reviewed the articles' titles and abstracts, and 190 articles passed the screening for inclusion and exclusion criteria (Figure 1). All duplicate records ( $n=117$ ) were removed. After a rigorous search, full texts of 71 articles were found. Then, the author conducted an in-depth reading of these articles. Seven articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. Finally, 64 articles were included in the systematic literature review.

#### Step Four - Synthesis

Synthesis involves the extraction and coding of the relevant data from the selected articles (Mengist *et al.*, 2020). The present author prepared a classification scheme of 23 variables and 115 content categories to synthesise the selected articles (Please see Appendix 1). This classification scheme was developed based on the key research questions addressed in the study. It incorporates variables such as the objectives of the research, antecedents of GOI, and outcomes of GOI. The categories within these variables were created after a careful review of the literature, with deliberate efforts

to ensure they were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Next, the author coded all the articles according to the classification scheme. Doing this helped them develop proximity to the content and also helped make qualitative interpretations. Then, the author qualitatively reviewed the research patterns, trends, and limitations.

#### Step Five - Analyses

The analysis phase involved assessing the synthesised data, extracting significant information, and drawing conclusions (Mengist *et al.*, 2020). The analysis and results section presents a detailed qualitative and quantitative explanation and narration of the results.

#### Step Six - Report

Step six involved presenting the results as a journal article (Mengist *et al.*, 2020). The author partially used the updated PRISMA (2020) protocols to report the results (Page *et al.*, 2021).

## RESULTS

A total of 181 authors from 26 countries wrote articles on the GOI. As Figure 2 demonstrates, authors from the USA (57) lead research on the GOI. As shown in Figure 3, the USA is the favourite location for researchers to conduct studies.

After removing an outlier ( $n=2247$ ), the average sample size for the study was 431.78 respondents. Though the age group ranged from 13 to 91 years, studies mainly focused on the young age group (Mean = 25.62 years). The sample is skewed toward female users. On average, the study included 150.92 male respondents (39.95 per cent) and 225.38 female respondents (61.33 per cent). Some studies focused on specific sample groups, for example, student Instagram users (24), mothers (1), and fans of a sports club (1). Most scholars chose to work with samples collected through non-probability sampling methods (45).

### RQ1 - What are the predominant research objectives that have been explored in the studies on GOI?

#### Objectives of the Study

The author reviewed the research questions and hypotheses addressed in the studies and classified them into five broader categories: (1) identification of the GOI, (2) comparison of gratifications among different sample groups, (3) comparison of gratifications of different social networking platforms, (4) use of gratifications to predict other variables, and (5) examining the antecedents of gratifications. A study can be classified into more than one category, as some address multiple objectives.

All studies, primarily or as a secondary objective, explored the GOI. These studies were able to identify gratifications that were unique to Instagram, for example, "Cool" and "Creativity" (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The details of the identified gratifications are described in separate sections. The second classification

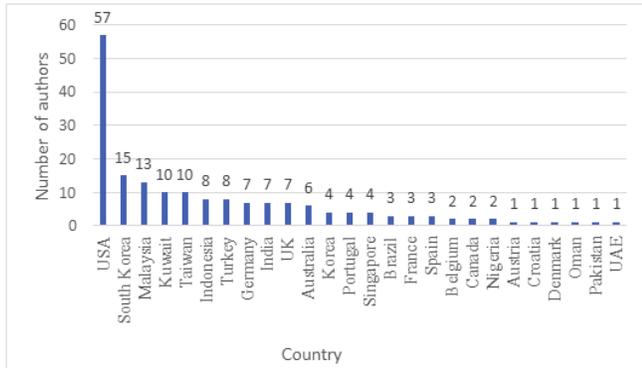


Figure 2: Author affiliation countries

of objectives revolved around systematically examining different sample groups (10) - such as gender, age, and the geographical localisation of users spanning diverse nations. The studies found that these distinct groups exhibit differential patterns in seeking GOI. The third classification of objectives pertains to the comparative analysis of diverse social networking platforms centred on gratifications (12). These studies successfully demonstrated that different social media platforms stimulated different gratification-seeking tendencies and established that distinct digital social landscapes offer varied avenues for fulfilling user needs and desires. For example, Alhabash & Ma (2017) demonstrated that for the motivation of “Self-expression,” Instagram is the most preferred platform, followed by Snapchat, Twitter, and then Facebook.

Within the fourth category, 30 distinct studies examined the predictive capacity of gratifications. These studies aimed to check if gratifications can explain variations in the patterns of Instagram usage and characteristics of user behaviour. More details on these outcome variables are described in a separate section. The fifth category of objectives was dedicated to uncovering the antecedents prompting users to seek particular gratifications. It is pertinent to note that specific psychographic antecedents, including factors such as the Big Five personality traits, played a significant role in

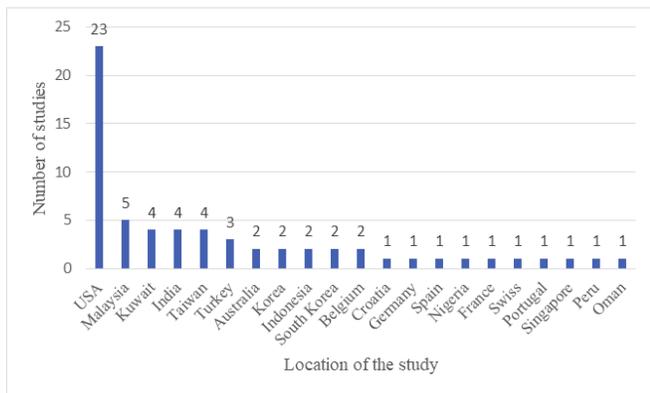


Figure 3: Location of the study

this context. Further elaboration and discussion on these aspects are provided in a separate section.

**RQ2 - What are the gratifications of Instagram identified in the literature? What methodological approaches have been employed to investigate them?**

*Gratifications of Instagram*

Together, all 64 studies identified 154 gratifications. The author clubbed similar gratifications into common categories at face validity, for example, “Sharing” and “Sharing problems” (Phua *et al.*, 2017b). Attempts were made to retain the original gratification labels except for three new labels borrowed from the past literature on the gratifications of Facebook (Gadekar & Ang, 2020; Gadekar & Krishnatray, 2017): improving knowledge, social recognition, and relationship maintenance. This exercise generated a total of 63 GOI. Table 1 lists the most identified gratifications with a minimum frequency of five. The gratification of “Entertainment” is the most identified gratification of Instagram use (25), followed by “Social interaction” (22). Among others, “Archiving” (18), “Information” (16), “Socialisation” (15), and “Self-expression” (15) are the prevailing gratifications.

*Unique Gratifications*

A total of 15 studies agreed that Instagram has unique gratifications over other platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. These unique gratifications are “Creativity,” “Coolness,” (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016) “Following Fashion,” “Inspiration” (Nelson *et al.*, 2019), and “Discussion” (Kang *et al.*, 2020, 2022). Instagram provides opportunities for users to show their creative talent (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), and being on it gives users a feeling of being “cool” (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). People follow celebrities and seek fashion-related information and advice on Instagram (Nelson *et al.*, 2019). (Nelson *et al.*, 2019; Sheldon *et al.*, 2021). Engaging in discussions on various topics is another motivation for using Instagram (Kang *et al.*, 2020, 2022).

Instagram offers opportunities to its users to extend their bridging capital more than their bonding capital. Instagram users tend to connect with people they do not know in real life (Phua *et al.*, 2017b), including celebrities and public figures. Consequently, the formation of weak ties among Instagram users is prevalent, resulting in a lower level of bonding social capital. This finding highlights the unique nature of social interactions on Instagram, where the ease of connecting with diverse individuals may lead to a different pattern of social capital development compared to traditional offline interactions (Phua *et al.*, 2017b, 2017a).

*Type of Methods Used*

Quantitative methodologies dominate Instagram’s uses and gratifications research. The studies largely limited their scope in verifying the established gratification structures. However, a few studies also explored qualitative inquiries



**Table 1:** Gratifications of Instagram identified in the literature (minimum frequency of five)

Gratifications identified	Number of studies
Entertainment	25
Social interaction	22
Archiving	18
Information	16
Socialization	15
Self-expression	15
Escape	10
Social recognition	9
Pass time	9
Connection	8
Self-presentation	8
Creativity	7
Improve Knowledge	7
Relationship maintenance	7
Exploration	6
Surveillance	6
Self-promotion	5

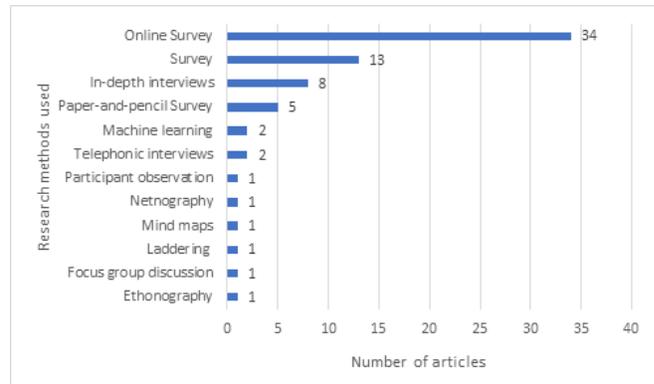
(9) or a mix of quantitative and qualitative inquiries (8). Details mentioned in Figure 4 show that 52 studies used survey methodology. The qualitative methods included in-depth interviews (8), telephonic interviews (2), phenomenology (1), participant observation (1), ethnography (2), and focus group discussion (1). Unconventional to the communication research trend, some scholars also used innovative methods such as mind maps (1) and laddering (1). Laddering is often used in consumer behaviour research to explore values guiding the consumers’ choices of products. Indicating another upcoming research trend, rather than relying on self-reported measures, two studies (Kang *et al.*, 2020, 2022) used machine learning algorithms to mine users’ actual data from Instagram to find out why they use Instagram.

**RQ3 - How did researchers operationalise and measure the GOI?**

*Operationalisation of the GOI*

A review of gratification scales presented in the articles revealed a blend of similarities and discrepancies in the operationalisation of GOI. In some instances, different scholars similarly operationalised gratifications but employed different labels to describe them. The following examples elaborate on this further.

A consensus emerged about the operationalisation of the gratification of “Entertainment.” Users consistently



**Figure 4:** Research methods used in the studies

perceive Instagram as an entertaining and enjoyable platform (Al-Kandari *et al.*, 2016). The gratification of “Archiving” is defined as users’ motivation to save their memories on Instagram so they can access them later (E. Lee *et al.*, 2015). Users document daily life events through posts and photos uploaded on Instagram – for example, birthday pictures and photos clicked at a special event or a place they visited. Nevertheless, scholars have employed different labels to describe this phenomenon, such as “Documentation,” (Sheldon *et al.*, 2021) “Self-documentation” (Alhabash & Ma, 2017), “Archiving” (E. Lee *et al.*, 2015), or “Recording” (Kocak *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, the gratification of “Escape” shares a similar definition but is denoted by various terms. Users use Instagram to avoid stressful life situations and temporarily divert their minds. They seek to forget troubles, avoid loneliness, and escape from reality. Researchers label it as “Escapism” or “Diversion.”

There are some overlaps in defining the gratification factors in some cases. For example, the gratification of “Passing time” involves users using Instagram to pass the time when they have nothing better to do. This makes them feel relaxed. However, these connotations are a part of the gratification of “Entertainment” in some studies. Similarly, the gratification of “Peeking” is defined when users browse Instagram for photos of their interest and check about the daily lives of celebrities and other people of their interest (Kocak *et al.*, 2020). However, the gratification of “Surveillance” shares similar connotations. It is defined as individuals seeing visual status updates of their friends, seeing what other people are sharing, and creeping through other people’s posts (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). There are differences in the operational definitions of the gratification of “Surveillance” itself. With the same operationalisation as above, a study labels it as “Relationship surveillance.” Another study defines surveillance as users keeping in touch with their family and friends and receiving updates from them. Inconsistency in labelling gratifications also led to the merger of multiple gratifications under one label. For example, “Self-expression” and “self-expression/ impression management.”

Table 2: GOI in different regions

GOI	Asia	West	USA
	f(%) n=28	f(%) n=28	f(%) n=23
Entertainment	12 (42.85%)	12 (42.85%)	8 (34.78%)
Social interaction	9 (32.14%)	8 (28.57%)	7 (30.43%)
Self-expression	9 (32.14%)	8 (28.57%)	7 (30.43%)
Information	9 (32.14%)	7 (25%)	5 (21.73%)
Pass time	7 (25%)	3 (10.71%)	3 (13.04%)
Archiving	6 (21.42%)	8 (28.57%)	6 (26.08%)
Socialization	5 (17.85%)	6 (21.42%)	5 (21.73%)
Social recognition	5 (17.85%)	3 (10.71%)	2 (8.69%)
Escape	4 (14.28%)	6 (21.42%)	5 (21.73%)
Self-presentation	4 (14.28%)	3 (10.71%)	2 (8.69%)
Creativity	3 (10.71%)	4 (14.28%)	3 (13.04%)
Information Sharing	3 (10.71%)	1 (3.57%)	1 (4.34%)
Conformity	3 (10.71%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Connection	2 (7.14%)	4 (14.28%)	3 (13.04%)
Relationship maintenance	2 (7.14%)	3 (10.71%)	2 (8.69%)
Convenience	2 (7.14%)	3 (10.71%)	3 (13.04%)
Self-promotion	2 (7.14%)	3 (10.71%)	2 (8.69%)
Peer influence	2 (7.14%)	1 (3.57%)	0 (0%)
Self-enhancement	2 (7.14%)	1 (3.57%)	1 (4.34%)
Surveillance	1 (3.57%)	4 (14.28%)	4 (17.39%)
Coolness	1 (3.57%)	3 (10.71%)	3 (13.04%)

\*Studies conducted in the USA are also included in the West category.

### Measurement of Gratifications and Scale Development

Scholars primarily relied on literature to measure gratification (43). The scale developed by Sheldon and Bryant (2016) was primarily used in studies to measure GOI (10). Most studies borrowed instruments initially meant for other social networking sites or the Internet (E. Lee *et al.*, 2015). Interestingly, a study adapted a scale that initially measured motives of alcohol drinking to measure GOI (Nikbin *et al.*, 2022).

Some (7) scholars chose to develop their instruments. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the instruments. Overall, a total of ten, including only one of the seven scale development studies, chose to report the validity statistics of the scale.

### RQ4 - What are the antecedents and outcomes of the gratifications of Instagram?

#### Antecedents of Gratifications

A set of socio-demographic, psychographic, and Instagram use-related variables were explored as antecedents of the GOI. Appendix 2 provides the list of 42 such variables.

Gender and different social media platforms are the most explored variables as predictors of GOI, followed by age.

#### • Gender

Studies found mixed results about the influence of Gender on GOI. While both genders share common motivations, variations emerge in prioritising specific motives (Menon, 2022). Overall, the literature indicates that female users have a higher inclination towards Information Seeking, self-presentation (Al-Kandari *et al.*, 2017), escaping awkward situations (Huang & Su, 2018), maintaining relationships, managing tasks, and educational gratifications (Kircaburun *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, male Instagram users are more inclined towards social connections (Al-Kandari *et al.*, 2017), self-promotion (Huang & Su, 2018), social utility purposes (Parmelee & Roman, 2019), meeting new people, and socializing (Kircaburun *et al.*, 2020). However, contrary to these findings, some studies found no differences between both genders regarding the gratifications they obtain from Instagram (C. S. Lee *et al.*, 2015).

#### • Age

Age is the next significant antecedent of GOI. According to Sheldon *et al.* (2021) older individuals utilise Instagram as compensation, possibly seeking social connections or fulfilling specific psychological needs. Conversely, younger users demonstrate a more extensive involvement with social media platforms, as highlighted by Kircaburun *et al.* (2020), who found that Generation Z individuals exhibit higher social media engagement levels than older generations. Another study found that information-seeking gratification increases while status-seeking decreases as individuals grow older (E. Lee *et al.*, 2015). Younger users tend to go on Instagram seeking diversion or escape from unwanted situations (Menon, 2022). These findings collectively emphasize the importance of considering age-related differences in social media use motives while understanding the dynamics of Instagram user behavior.

#### • Psychographic antecedents

Big Five personality traits are crucial in influencing the pursuit of specific gratifications from Instagram (Kircaburun *et al.*, 2020; Kocak *et al.*, 2020). For instance, extraversion is positively associated with gratifications related to maintaining relationships and managing tasks, while introverts are more inclined to engage in problematic social media use. Users with lesser life satisfaction tend to seek gratifications of companionship and diversion on Instagram (Sheldon *et al.*, 2021). In another instance, interpersonal interaction was found to predict the gratification of "Coolness," "Creativity," and "Surveillance." Users who participate in social activities such as traveling, sports events, and visiting friends tend to document those memories on Instagram (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

### *Outcomes of gratifications*

As the literature indicates, GOI leads to different outcomes, broadly classified into three categories: psychological outcomes, Instagram use-related behavioral outcomes, and problematic use of Instagram.

- *Psychological outcomes*

GOI is instrumental in forming users' intention to use Instagram. Various GOI, such as social interaction and entertainment (Hwang & Cho, 2018) form users' intention to continue using Instagram. Gratifications also contribute to fostering positive attitudes toward Instagram (E. Lee *et al.*, 2015) and specific features of the platform, such as Instagram stories (Ko & Yu, 2019). Gratifications also increase user satisfaction (Mazzarolo *et al.*, 2021) and provide a sense of community (Blight *et al.*, 2017). These findings collectively highlight the importance of gratification in shaping user behavior and attitudes within the Instagram environment.

- *Instagram use-related behavioral outcomes.*

Another significant outcome of the GOI is Instagram user behavior. Various aspects of Instagram use were studied in this sense, including overall use, specific activities on Instagram, frequency of use, intensity of use, and intention to use it in the future. For example, the "Desire to belong" gratification is associated with the user's activities on Instagram, such as the frequency of viewing posts, liking posts and images, and Instagram use. Gratifications of "Self-documentation" and "Passing Time" were found to influence the intensity of Instagram use (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

However, culture was found to be moderating the relationship between gratifications and Instagram use. In individualist cultures, the users who seek the gratification of "Self-promotion" spend more time on Instagram and are likely to have more followers. On the other hand, in collectivistic cultures, the users who seek the gratification of "Social interaction" tend to spend more time on Instagram and are likely to have more followers (Sheldon *et al.*, 2017).

- *Problematic use of Instagram*

Gratifications have been associated with problematic use of new media. Instagram is no exception. A set of studies has identified the adverse outcomes of the GOI, too, such as problematic Instagram use (Chen *et al.*, 2022), Instagram stickiness (Y.-H. Lin, 2022), and Instagram addiction (Nikbin *et al.*, 2022).

Individuals using Instagram to show their creative and innovative abilities are more likely to show problematic use of Instagram. Additionally, the gratifications of "Passing the time" and "Presenting a popular self" were associated with problematic Instagram use. This means users who use Instagram to pass the time and try to express or present a more popular self are more likely to indulge in problematic use of Instagram (Kircaburun *et al.*, 2020).

### **RQ5 - How do different cultures and geographies influence GOI?**

#### *Gratifications by Users from Different Geographical Regions*

The literature was reviewed to see potential variations in gratifications sought by users from Asian and Western demographics. As detailed in Table 2, the literature underscores divergent motivations among Instagram users across different geographic areas. Although the desire for entertainment emerged as the primary motivation among both Asian and Western users, distinctions were evident about other gratifications.

Instagram served as a platform for Asian users to voice their perspectives, views, and feelings. They engage in interpersonal interactions and curate their online identities on Instagram. A pronounced aspiration for social recognition was observed, accompanied by a stronger inclination to conform to social norms within their respective circles. Their peers often influence their decisions to use Instagram. Asian users demonstrated a propensity for information consumption and self-enhancement through Instagram utilisation.

Conversely, the platform was utilised by Western users to document personal experiences and escapism from life stressors. Establishing and nurturing connections prevailed as a significant motivation, aligned with using Instagram for expressing creativity and staying informed about others' activities. Self-promotion featured prominently within their motivations. Western users perceive being on Instagram as a 'cool' thing. Similarly, distinct from Asian user patterns, American users' motivations aligned more closely with the broader Western demographic. This was obvious as most of the studies under Western categories were conducted in the USA.

### **RQ6 - What are the limitations of the existing research?**

#### *Limitations of research*

The author reviewed the studies for their limitations. These limitations can be broadly classified into five categories: limitations with the generalizability of the findings, limitations of a sample, limitations with measurements, limitations of the self-reported measures, and limitations with inferring causality. As a first limitation, selecting samples through non-probability sampling techniques restricted scholars from making generalizable interpretations (Sheldon *et al.*, 2021). Studies conducted in one country (Chen *et al.*, 2022), at one educational institution (Huang & Su, 2018), or in one cultural setting (Al-Kandari *et al.*, 2017) may not be representative of the entire population of Instagram users. As the second limitation, the insufficient and skewed sample restricted scholars from using more complex and

powerful analytical tools, such as structural equation modelling. Insufficient samples can affect the model fit indices (Machado *et al.*, 2020). Further, skewed samples gave significantly more weightage to one group over the other. Relying on only student respondents and recruiting more female respondents raises potential threats to the findings' internal and external validity. The third limitation pertains to the measurement of gratifications, as most studies borrowed the gratification measurement instrument from other studies from unfamiliar cultural contexts. Many studies used only selected motivational factors, consequently overlooking other motives. Therefore, the findings may not reflect the (Hwang & Cho, 2018). Additionally, the measured time spent on Instagram did not account for multitasking or the simultaneous use of platforms, creating another potential threat to the measurement validity (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

The fourth limitation pertains to the self-reported data in the studies. Except for two studies that used actual Instagram posts and comments (Kang *et al.*, 2020, 2022), all studies relied on self-reports, which is another potential threat to the validity of the findings (Chen *et al.*, 2022). Self-reported data may not provide an accurate picture of the actual behaviour and might create a test-retest effect on participants' responses to such questions (Rozgonjuk *et al.*, 2021), limiting the unravelling of the unique GOI. As the fifth limitation, the cross-sectional nature of studies restricted the causal interpretations (Chen *et al.*, 2022).

## DISCUSSION

This study presents the first systematic review of the corpus of the literature on GOI published during the 12 years after the release of Instagram (2010 to 2022). Findings revealed that the research on GOI is limited to a small research community. Scholars used multiple methodological approaches and qualitative and quantitative inquiries to identify GOI. As a promising trend, scholars also used unconventional methodologies such as laddering, mind maps, and machine learning algorithms.

The present study shed light on GOI research's evolving trends and identified the knowledge gaps. The theoretical contribution of the present study lies in underscoring the growing significance of the uses and gratifications theory in studying new media audiences and strengthening its core assumption of active audiences. It provided recommendations for advancing theoretical development regarding the operationalisation of gratifications and the possibility of other theoretical constructs to explain GOI. Ruggiero (2000) has argued that new media technologies have revived the uses and gratifications theory. In alignment with this argument, the present study shows that the uses and gratifications theory has demonstrated its ability to be relevant in the changing times after many decades.

## Operationalisation of GOI

The present literature review has highlighted the disparities in the GOI's operational definitions and labelling. However, it's worth noting that such variations are common. Katz *et al.* (1973) have argued that scholars may develop their classification schemes of gratifications based on the specific focus of their study. Scholars examining different social media platforms or different attributes within a single platform, such as Instagram, may naturally yield different gratification models. However, one of the other possible reasons for such disparities in defining and labelling would be that scholars relied on past literature to borrow gratification measurement scales that were initially not explicitly designed for GOI. Similar anomalies were found in the context of Facebook as well (Gadekar & Krishnatray, 2017). Nonetheless, these discrepancies can pose challenges to the reliability and validity of interpretations regarding these gratifications, independently and concerning their relationships with other constructs.

In light of the advancement of uses and gratifications research, it is now imperative to strive to develop standardised typologies for common gratifications observed across multiple studies. Such typologies for gratifications derived from similar media or media attributes in similar contexts should be attainable. Therefore, uses and gratifications scholars concentrating on Instagram and specific features of the platform should collaborate to reconcile the operational definitions of the most conventionally identified gratifications.

## Different Geographies, Cultures, and GOI

The GOI research is concentrated on Western countries, specifically the USA. American authors dominate the research on Instagram with the most studies, whereas American Instagram users are the most studied population. Consequently, even though not all Instagram users are from the USA, what we see in research on GOI now is a skewed reflection of Western and specifically American Instagram users (Al-Kandari *et al.*, 2017).

India hosts the highest number of Instagram users (230.25 million), with a considerable margin from the second highest, which is the USA (159.75 million) (Statista, 2022). However, only four studies have been conducted with Indian Instagram users. Asian countries contribute to a significant portion of Instagram usage, with around 2738 million Instagram users, almost double that of Western countries. However, they are far behind their Western counterparts in research on GOI. This is noteworthy because the present study's findings shed light on how users from different geographical regions differ in seeking gratification from Instagram. The finding highlights the potential influence of cultural divergence on gratification sought from Instagram.



The literature has also demonstrated the mediating role of culture in the relationship between GOI and Instagram use (Sheldon *et al.*, 2017). This aligns with other studies that suggest that individuals with different cultural backgrounds seek gratification from social media differently (Lewis *et al.*, 2017). Besides suggesting that cultural differences can influence users' motivations to use Instagram, the insight from the current study deepens our understanding of how cultural and regional factors influence users' interactions and preferences on Instagram.

### Origins and Outcomes of Gratifications

Literature has long recognised the question of why people seek certain gratifications (Katz, *et al.*, 1973; Ruggiero, 2000) and emphasised the need for careful attention to antecedent and outcome conditions of gratifications (Rubin, 1994; Ruggiero, 2000). The present review revealed that the origins of Instagram gratifications pertain to Instagram use, demographic contexts, and psychological characteristics. Scholars examined various characteristics of Instagram use, for example, time spent on Instagram, activities (Al-Kandari *et al.*, 2017), and profile characteristics such as the number of followers and number of followings on Instagram (C. S. Lee *et al.*, 2015). Scholars investigated the demographic roots of gratifications and found contrary findings, indicating the need for further investigations. The psychological origin of gratifications is traced to various psychological characteristics such as dark personality traits, life satisfaction, narcissism, type of mindset, and personality type. However, GOI's contribution to the outcome of parasocial relationships of the users is yet to be explored. The sociological origins of GOI remain relatively under-explored to date. Only a few studies tried to explore the social dimensions of the audience experiences of Instagram through social activity (Sheldon *et al.*, 2021), political interests (Parmelee & Roman, 2019), and professional training (Huang & Su, 2018).

Further, the present review has identified three types of outcomes of the GOI: psychological outcomes, Instagram use-related behavioural outcomes, and adverse outcomes such as problematic use of Instagram. GOI does impact users psychologically, influencing users' intentions and attitudes toward the medium. It also affects their use intensity and activities on Instagram. The argument that culture mediates the relationship between GOI and its outcome of Instagram use creates a promising space for future investigations into culture's role in GOI's antecedents and outcomes.

### Overcoming the Limitation of Self-report Based Studies

One of the old criticisms of uses and gratification is its reliance on self-reports (Ruggiero, 2000). However, studies have shown a promising trend to overcome this criticism by employing the latest methodologies, such as algorithms and machine learning techniques.

Two studies used machine learning algorithms to analyse Instagram's content and identified the GOI as information, relationship, and discussion. GOI related to "Information" and "Relationship" are also evident in other self-reported studies. However, the gratification of "Discussion" has emerged as another new GOI. This demonstrates the potential of working with real data to identify new gratifications. It is recommended that such investigations continue. However, the reliability and validity of the findings emerging from these studies need to be established. These findings need to be compared with those that emerged from self-report-based studies, and their similarities and differences must be reflected upon.

### Alternative approaches to studying gratifications

Literature has demonstrated that, in addition to the conventional typologies of gratifications, such as "Information" and "Entertainment," alternative theoretical concepts could explain why individuals engage with Instagram. For example, a study used concepts of bridging and bonding capital to explain the motivation for user engagement with Instagram. Other concepts could be the social compensation and enhancement hypotheses (Gaddekar & Ang, 2020). In the present GOI literature, a study found that older adult Instagram users seek gratification to compensate for their real-life needs of social activity and face-to-face interaction. This supports the social compensation hypothesis. Another study argued that unconscientious students may be less successful in life and unpopular among their peers. Therefore, they may use social media to present a more successful, superior, and better version of themselves to compensate for this. They might indulge in self-promotional activities. This again supports the compensation hypothesis.

Moreover, the uses and gratifications theory could be combined with other theoretical models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), to explain the gratifications. The affordances-based uses and gratification model (uses and grats 2.0) (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) is another alternative approach to understanding GOI. This approach focuses on Instagram's technological affordances and explains how individuals use Instagram for these affordances.

### Limitations of the study

There are some limitations of this study. This study considered only peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers. Other scholarly works, such as books and chapters, were not part of this review. Another shortcoming is that this study considered articles published only in English and might have omitted other relevant material from other languages. Furthermore, this study did not analyse the statistics of the GOI. For example, reliability statistics, factor loadings, and effect sizes. Analysing such quantitative findings may provide more insights into GOI.

## Future Research Agenda

Based on these suggestions and the review of 64 articles, this section makes recommendations for future research on GOI. There might be some overlap with the earlier sections in some places because the author considered mentioning it in those sections appropriate.

Transforming global and social contexts and new features of Instagram may attract new motivations because the phenomenon of gratification constantly evolves with time (Katz, *et al.*, 1973). More inquiries are needed to detect such emergent gratifications. However, conventional gratifications that are still relevant to Instagram should continue to be included in future investigations. The present study revealed the scarcity of inquiries addressing the social origins of gratifications. How an individual uses media is influenced by their position in the social structure (Rosengren & Windahl, 1989). Therefore, there is a need for more theoretically oriented studies that can go beyond the standard demographic contexts and explore some overarching perspectives of the social circumstances that can explain why users seek certain gratifications from Instagram. Literature has shown differences in the GOI sought by different socio-demographic groups; however, some studies also have contrary findings. Future studies should examine the “why” behind both types of findings to have deeper insights. The present literature review has identified culture as the critical antecedent of GOI. Culture also mediates the relationship between GOI and Instagram use. Future researchers should explore the culture-centric GOI, extend the current uses and gratifications models, and interpret gratification results considering the region and culture of the media users. More studies from non-American contexts might provide newer insights.

The GOI scholars should integrate qualitative methods into their survey-based uses and gratifications studies (Schröder, 2013). Efforts should be made to reach a consensus regarding operationalising some established gratifications. It is recommended that future studies come up with new gratification models using inductive inquiries. Borrowing methods from other domains, such as laddering (C. F. Lin *et al.*, 2020), would also be helpful. Feature-specific inquiries should continue as new features are continuously being added to Instagram. These should examine which features of Instagram satisfy which user needs. Instagram’s newly identified unique gratifications, such as “Creativity,” should be investigated further. More pertinent questions would be: What drives users to express creativity on Instagram? Why and how is “Creativity” related to the problematic use of Instagram? Studies based on probability-based sampling would provide a representative picture of GOI. Self-report measurement limits the study to audiences’ perceptions of their behaviour and attitudes, and may underrepresent the actual behaviour (Rozgonjuk *et al.*, 2021). Thus, there is a need to examine the actual content on users’ Instagram

accounts, as it would contribute to the internal validity of the findings.

There is a need for more gender-balanced samples to extrapolate the findings to the larger population. Future researchers should also differentiate between light and heavy Instagram users, as they might seek gratification differently (Huang & Su, 2018). Similarly, active versus passive user comparison might reveal additional insights. Current research on GOI is limited to the positive use of Instagram. Future researchers should examine the negative GOI and explore why non-users avoid using Instagram. There is a deficiency in the literature regarding measurement instruments for GOI. Caution should be exercised when using gratification measurement scales from past literature unrelated to Instagram. Using scales meant for other media creates a potential threat of overlooking the Instagram-specific nuances of gratifications. More studies are needed to develop instruments measuring GOI and to establish their stability. Replications of studies in different contexts would also help check the stability of the gratification factors. There is a need to study the motivation for not using Instagram, which would enhance our understanding of this phenomenon. In addition to conventional typologies of gratifications, other theoretical concepts, such as bridging and bonding social capital (Phua *et al.*, 2017a) and U&G 2.0 (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) also provide alternative ways to study GOI.

Overall, GOI research in recent years has come out of its infancy (Sheldon & Newman, 2019). It has gained momentum. However, there is still much to be done, and more high-quality research studies are needed for a better and holistic understanding of the GOI.

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The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

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## SUPPLEMENTARY

### APPENDIX 1

**Sup Table 1:** List of variables and content categories used for content analysis.

Variable	Operational definition	Categories
Author affiliation country	This was accessed from the authors' affiliations mentioned in the articles.	List of 26 countries
Country of data collection	The country where the data collection took place.	List of 21 countries
Year of publication	The publication year mentioned in the article information. It is possible that the research might have been completed before that. However, for the analysis, the year of publication was considered.	
Type of article		Conference paper Journal article

Continued...



Gratifications of Instagram Use – A Systematic Literature Review

Comparison of different social media platforms over gratifications	Whether the research studied differences among various social media platforms over gratifications	No Yes
Types of methods used	Types of research methods used in the study	Both qualitative and quantitative Qualitative Quantitative
Types of quantitative methods used	The types of quantitative data collection methods used	Machine learning algorithms Online survey Paper-and-pencil Survey Survey (Did not mention the type of survey used)
Types of qualitative methods used	The types of qualitative data collection methods used	Ethnography Focus group discussion In-depth interviews Laddering interviews Mind maps Online ethnography Participant observation Phenomenology Telephonic in-depth interviews
Predictor variables of gratifications of Instagram	The variables used to predict the gratifications of Instagram	A list of 42 variables identified
Predicted variables of gratifications of Instagram	Variables predicted by the gratifications of Instagram	A list of 37 variables identified
Measurement of gratifications of Instagram	How did the study measure gratifications of Instagram	Analysis of content with machine learning Borrowed the scale from previous literature Developed own scale Explored gratifications with laddering method Explored gratifications with mind maps Not mentioned the source of the scale Qualitative study
Analyses	The analytical techniques used to analyze the quantitative or qualitative data	Analysis with machine learning algorithm Confirmatory factor analysis Cronbach's alpha Descriptive analysis Discriminant analysis Exploratory factor analysis Hierarchical regression analysis Independent sample T test

Continued.....

Discipline of article source	The title of journals and theme of the conference papers were classified into broader subject categories.	Behavior & Technology Business, Management, & Marketing Information science Media & Communication Medicine Psychology Science & Technology Social media and society Social science Technology and society
Objective of the study	The objectives addressed in the articles	To examine the gratifications of Instagram  To compare the gratifications of different sample groups  To compare the gratifications sought from different social networking platforms  To use the gratifications as the predictors to explain certain variables
Gratifications of Instagram	Gratifications of Instagram as identified in the study	To examine the predictors of gratifications
Gratifications of what?	Gratifications of using specific Instagram feature or using Instagram for specific purpose	A list of gratifications E-commerce Fake accounts Fashion Following someone Hashtags Instagram stories Instagram use in general Live streaming Online image management Photo posting Problematic social media use Public participation on government's Instagram account Self-disclosure Social networking sites in general Tagging

Continued....



		Laddering analysis MANOVA Multiple regression analyses ANOVA Pearson correlation Principal axis factoring (PAF) Principal components analysis Qualitative analysis Sentiment analysis Serial multiple mediator model Structural equation modeling Thematic analysis
Target population	The category of the sample group included in the study	All Instagram users Comments on Instagram posts Fans Foodstagrammers Instagram posts Instagram users who share photos Instagram users who upload mount bromo photos Mothers Students Teenagers
Type of sampling methods	Type of sampling techniques used to recruit respondents for study	Non-probability sampling Not mentioned Probability sampling Sampling from a respondent database of a research firm
Sampling techniques	The sampling techniques used to recruit respondents for study	Convenience sample Did not specify the sampling technique Purposive sampling Quota sampling Random sampling Sample of Instagram posts Sampling from a respondent database of a research firm Sampling from national sample survey Sampling through Qualtrics panel Snowball sampling Thematic sampling Volunteer sample
Sample size	Total number of respondents or elements studied	

Continued....

Sample profile - Gender	Gender of the respondent	Male Female
Sample profile - Age	Age of the respondent	
Limitations of the study	Limitation of the research as stated in the article manuscript	Limitation with generalizability of the findings Limitation with the sample recruited Limitation with measurements Limitation of the self-reported measures Limitation with inferring causality

## APPENDIX 2

**Sup Table 2:** Antecedents of the gratifications of Instagram

<i>Antecedent variables</i>	<i>Count</i>		
Gender	7	Political interest	1
Type social media platforms	7	Political efficacy	1
Age	4	Voting in 2016 elections	1
Income	2	Personality	1
Interpersonal interaction	2	Professional training background	1
Life satisfaction	2	Level of addiction to Instagram	1
Narcissism	2	Individualism and Collectivism	1
Number of followers on Instagram	1	Instagram use	1
Number of followings on Instagram	1	Home type	1
Anonymity	1	Class	1
Grandiose narcissism	1	College type	1
Vulnerable narcissism	1	The social activity	1
Primary psychopathy	1	Social activity	1
Secondary psychopathy	1	Mindset – Growth	1
Machiavellianism	1	Mindset - Fixed	1
Excessive reassurance-seeking	1	Machiavellianism	1
Interpersonal rejection	1	Psychopathy	1
Activities on Instagram	1	Personality - Big five inventory	1
Frequency of posting	1	Frequency with which individuals post on Instagram	1
Education	1	Type of Instagram account Rinsta and Finsta	1
		Time spent on Instagram	1

Continued.....

