



# **The Transformation of "Uses and Gratifications Theory" in the Context of Media Convergence: An Empirical Study on Cross-Screen Media Consumption Behavior of Generation Z**

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**SUMMARY:** *Primary aim of the study is to investigate the behavior of Generation Z in cross-screen media consumption and the reasons behind them. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to determine the factors that motivate Generation Z to use different devices for different activities such as communication, online gaming, and work. The study finds four main types in cross-screen use: Smartphone-Centered Type, Multi-Screen Efficiency Type, Immersive Entertainment Experience Type, and Lightweight Fragmented Consumption Type. Each of them is motivated by the different psychological factors such as social, emotional, and efficiency. The study also contributes to the understanding of media use and satisfaction by proposing the concepts of media complementarity and context adaptation, in which users maximize and media experiences through different devices and situational changes, respectively. The study redefines and revisits The Uses and Gratifications Theory in the form of the User-Device-Situation-Need framework to understand the complicated consumption of modern cross-screen media.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Cross-screen media consumption; Generation Z; Uses and Gratifications Theory*

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Background: Media Convergence and the Daily Practices of Generation Z**

With the enablement of technology, the content and social aspects of life are forming new practices within the realm of digital culture. Contemporary society has entered its media-centered phase, characterized by smartphones, digital networks, and forms of media. The habits of media usage have evolved, and younger generations consume media in more complex ways, and no longer are activities merely restricted to watching television or reading newspapers[1]. Digital natives like Gen Z, generally identified as individuals born in the years 1995 and 2009, have spent their whole lives in the vicinity of multiple different types of media. For this reason, their media consumption has become a subject of particular interest. Some empirical evidences point in this direction as well. The research has shown that more than 90% of the individuals watching a video online multitask, and that more than half of this group watch television while simultaneously using their mobile phones. Also, Gen Z's primary sources of entertainment and information are established services such as YouTube

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and TikTok, and 43% of this group report that they prefer these less traditional and more interactive forms of media as opposed to television[2].

These changes mean that the shift in patterns of behavior is mildly significant, and the theories of communication should start being re-examined in the context of the new media.

## 1.2 The Evolution of Theory and Gaps: From Single Media Use to Cross-Screen Combinations

"Uses and Gratification" theory allows us to understand how and why audiences choose certain media to fulfill certain needs and desires. While we watch television or read a publication, we need to remember that we are audiences, and that we are not passive, but rather, that we are active participants who engage a product for a purpose[3]. But given our converging media environment, we do not confront a single media product, but rather, a media environment made up of multiple screens. Users do not seek the gratification of a single screen, but rather, flexibly integrate multiple screens to navigate a situation, and complete a task[4]. This alters the way we understand the theory, given it properly lacks the tools to explain/understand cross-device behavior. If we focus television screens, for instance, we can shift to casting television content if the playback suddenly freeze[5]. If we focus television screens, for instance, we can shift to casting television content if the playback suddenly freeze. If we focus television screens, for instance, we can shift to casting television content if the playback suddenly freeze. In the synchronic behavior, users distribute different media across the time and place created by the devices[6].

In this way, we need to distance ourselves from the conventional 'media - need' cross-sectional model and implement a more integrated approach that focuses on balancing the interaction between 'user – device – context – need.'

## 1.3 Research Questions and Significance

Building on this background, the current study investigates Generation Z's real media lives and employs primary data to enhance Multifaceted explanatory "Uses and Gratifications" theory in the context of cross-screen[7]. We seek to answer the following questions: Are there any distinct certain combinations of patterns demonstrated in the cross screen consumer behaviour of Generation Z? of What psychological or social needs are the driving forces behind these patterns? This study aims to construct a more integrated theoretical framework to capture the mechanisms of the "uses-gratification" theory in a cross-screen context[8]. This study seeks to refresh classical theory by proposing "cross-screen combinations" as the principal unit of analysis and aims to construct mechanisms of "media complementarity" and "context adaptation". The dynamic model the "user-device-situation-need" defined in this study seeks to complete the explanatory void in the existing theories of media convergence[9]. This model also defined a path of analysis for future works in this field. The results of the study also seeks to offer more user-oriented insights for content production, advertising strategies, and terminal design in order to provide a greater user experience for the stakeholders.

# 2 Literature Review

## 2.1 The Development and Evolution of Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory developed over the course of decades, dating back to the 1940s, where the focus of early researchers studied the audience's use of media to satisfy their

needs. Some of the first pieces of literature for this theory stem from Herzog's work and Berelson's observations, where Herzog studied the listeners of radio dramas and Berelson studied the deprivation of readers during newspaper strikes. Herzog's work presented the demand side of the theory in that the audience is not passive in their media consumption but rather, seeks out media to satisfy various needs[10]. Berelson's work similarly upheld that media consumption is not passive in context, for there are various social and psychological needs that must be fulfilled. These early works paved the way to understanding the media that is consumed in accordance to the audiences needs, as well as the gratification received from the media. These works are the foundation of the Uses and Gratifications Theory[11].

The development of Katz's Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 1970s established the foundation of the theory. In the 1970s Katz and other scholars' work expanded this theory in the article *Personal Uses of Mass Communication*. Katz proposed that audience members select media, and media violence, in order to fulfil a psychological and social need, which are multiple and complex. Media do more than convey information, which is a dominant perspective, they also address further socially and culturally related problems. Their media-need-gratification paradigm also posited that the audience's behavior is motivated socially and culturally beyond what the media presented[12]. This paradigm became of great and immediate relevance in audience research and in particular in analysis audience's construction of media predominately in audience-focused media research[13].

Since the internet came to be, the Uses and Gratifications theory has been adapted to better explain the behavior of users in online environments. Users engage with media platforms like email, social networks, and online forums to satisfy users' cognitive, social, and self-identity needs[14]. The development of social media and online interactions has widened the theory's scope encouraging scholars to study the dynamics between media utilization and user needs in social media environments, and the impact of social needs in networked spaces on user behavior. However, these studies have primarily concentrated on one platform or one particular device, focusing on the specific idea of the \"satisfaction of the need on one platform\" and have been inadequate in explaining today's multi-screen, cross-device media.

The traditional \"media-need-gratification\" model is also facing new challenges due to deepening media convergence. Thanks to the growing availability of distinct devices (i.e., smart phones, tablets, TVs, computers) users no longer see a single platform as a means to satisfy their needs. In contrast, users switch between several devices, employing diverse screens to satisfy a range of situational demands. Therefore, the focus of the analysis must shift from \"using a particular medium\" to \"configuring a whole set of screens\". It is necessary to understand how various devices combine to satisfy users' multi-dimensional needs[15]. This makes the Uses and Gratifications theory even more relevant to media convergence, and how its framework needs to be broadened to understand satisfaction derived from a particular device by the user.

## 2.2 Media Convergence and the Reality of Cross-Screen Consumption

Jenkins' media convergence warn presciently about audience behaviors, content, and industry partnerships. The convergence of technology today and interconnectable devices, cross media, and varied cues is staggering. The single screen habits of media consumers have radically shifted to multi screen. Research indicates screen switching is habitual among users, predominately Gen Z, for whom the first screen is the smartphone and the television's role is secondary. Cross screen cases involve the simultaneous usage of devices[16]. This manifests in a user watching a short video on their phone, searching for more info on their computer,

and finally casting the video to a smart TV. The multi media usage has even prompted the creation of new content like micro-series. The cross screen micro-series consumption has prompted industry estimates of the China micro-series market, expected to exceed 100 billion yuan by 2027. This underscores the cross screen consumption and the ecological shift of content. However, existing studies have several gaps[17].

I am aware that it is not uncommon for studies to illustrate broad behavioral trends and patterns without delving deeper into the specific reasons that motivate such behavior. Furthermore, almost all studies that employ behavioral patterns to explain or theorize about the arrangements of screens completely ignore the relevance of "context."

## **2.3 Media Practices of Generation Z: Strategies, Preferences, and Identity Construction**

Generation Z was the first cohort of learners without a memory of life before the Internet and the first to exclusively learn through digital means[18]. For Gen Z, media is much more than a means of communicating information, it is a means through which one engages with the world, socially, and builds an identity. In the case of all types of screen media, Gen Z with a marked preference for the platforms that emphasize instant, visually oriented, and especially, entertaining and dynamic information (i.e. Youtube and Tik Tok, successively). In this context, the emergence and crazy popularity of micro-series stands out. They focus more on visual and auditory information, but they unite and organize around a common case, giving them a feeling of identity and belonging to the community[19]. Flexible, strategically and purposefully integrated, media devices. Generation Z media usage implies. In order to get the most out of their information and experience, they do not simply access and utilize one device. Instead, they employ a variety of devices to construct a 'media environment' that is reflexively determined by their context (e.g., a mobile device with a larger screen for watching a movie during transportation or a more comfortable desktop for relaxed, home use).

As pointed out by Hu Yong and Liu Chunyi, vertical-screen micro-series are not just a content format, but also reflect the new visual and media habits of the 'screen generation.' The strong alignment of this media format and its consumption habits means it is second nature for Generation Z to adjust to cross-screen consumption.

## **2.4 Innovations of This Study**

Considering the previous points, this study intends to make innovation in the following aspects. Our initial focus is on fragmented screen combinations as the primary unit to analyze how to overcome the challenges, multi-device behavior, and traditional Uses and Gratifications theory. Second, regarding the approach, we will integrate both methods, quantitative and qualitative, to focus not only on what users engage with, but to also attempt to answer why users provide this engagement. Finally, we incorporate people, devices, and the contextual situation to develop a flexible model and thus go beyond the context to broaden our theory on the mechanisms of adaption and selection behind the multi-screen consumption.

# **3 Research Design and Methods**

## **3.1 Research Approach and Overall Design**

To examine cross-screen media use behaviors and rationale within Gen Z, we are implementing a phased, mixed-method approach. This will allow us to appreciate the complexity of the media consumption behaviors of this generation. To begin, we will

distribute a large-scale survey designed to quantify and broadly capture the principal behaviors of this cohort along a number of behavioral dimensions. This survey will cover a range of media use behaviors centered around the type of device used, the content type, and the context of media use. We aim to delineate the contours of Generation Z's media use across behavioral dimensions and capture some of the core behavioral trends that exist in this segment. We will then follow this step with a collection of qualitative data in the form of text from interviews and/or written answers to determine situational and motivational factors shaping cross-screen media use behaviors. Ultimately, the qualitative analysis of evidence from open-ended questions will allow us to capture the primary psychological, emotional, and social factors influencing Gen Z's cross media use[20].

Prioritizing an “overview then detail” approach in this work aims to understand the topic in its entirety so that we can begin to identify certain patterns and understand the factors that lie underneath the surface of the patterns in question. This two-tier approach makes it possible to understand the entire scope of cross screen media use. In terms of research framework, we are building on the core logic of the Uses and Gratifications theory, which seeks to understand how people actively select and use media. However in this study, we adjust this theory in order to account for the multi-screen usage that is a salient characteristic of today's media usage. This research seeks to understand not only how different devices are used to serve different needs, but also how these devices are interrelated in a media ecosystem. More specifically, we are examining the relationships and interactions among the four components of ‘user’, ‘device’, ‘context’, and ‘need’. By using these variables, we hope to build a more thorough model of cross screen media activities.

### 3.2 Design and Implementation of Quantitative Research

There was a stage when we collected quantitative research data through the online survey we designed with care to ensure it was clear and easily understood by respondents. The survey was divided into four categories corresponding to the relevant aspects of cross-screen media consumption. The first category collected demographic data like age, gender, and occupation of the respondents, which was useful for the stratified analysis of the data and the identification of different relationships and trends in the data. The second category of the survey was intended to find which smart devices the respondents used the most and what was the most they spent in a day on those devices. This was to provide a better understanding of the technological context that the respondents' media consumption was based on. The third category was intended to assess cross-screen behavioral. The users of the eight most common cross-screen combinations provided data that was analyzed on a five-point Likert scale to assess the data on the frequency and the context of the switching of the screens used in varying situations. This scale was designed to give the respondents a better in-depth understanding of their data on the high prevalence of the multi-screen usage and the behavioral intensity of engaging with different devices one after the other. There was a stage when we collected quantitative research data through the online survey we designed with care to ensure it was clear.

Lastly, the fourth part deals with the usage scenarios and the participants' chosen devices for each case like home, commuting, and work or school. This section tries to understand the context and environment usage patterns and refine the understanding of the flexibility of cross-screen usage behavior. The context and environment flexibility of the cross-screen behavior. In order to maintain the quality control and the credibility of the data, we choose a commercial online survey platform that enables us to reach a wide geographical sample of Generation Z. After two weeks, we collected 512 valid responses. The sample was relatively well balanced for the key demographics like sex, age, or job, which decreased the likelihood

of biases and let us conduct cross comparisons for the screens' usage patterns for different subgroups. The quantitative results we managed to gather make it possible for us to portray a well-defined behavior of Generation Z cross-screen behavior and lay the groundwork for the qualitative analysis to come. By the application of a structured questionnaire to the key variables, we were able to efficiently create a data set that enables meaningful analysis of the most important patterns of media usage among younger audiences. The length of the fourth section was a direct result of the first three sections, which dealt with cross-screen behavior and the geographical sample of Generation Z. The aim to identify the major media usage patterns cross screens served a step further in the analysis.

### **3.3 Collection and Processing of Textual Data**

After we detected a few standard cross-screen patterns by quantitative means, we structured an open-ended textual data collection scheme. Some participants were asked to answer the following questions: When do you usually employ several screens at once or in sequence? How do you choose which screen to use, what content to view, and what do you think this pattern of use fulfills in terms of your needs? We garnered roughly 30,000 words in textual data, which we primarily processed using thematic analysis. To complete this, we first perused the documents and highlighted the main points, then we partitioned and sorted the information to distill the essentials, and finally we reached consensus on the main themes after several rounds of discussion to deepen and validate our findings.

### **3.4 Data Integration and Interpretation**

As part of the data integration, we employed a comparative approach. Here, we juxtaposed the behavioral patterns of the quantitative analysis with the motivations for usage of the textual analysis, allowing for the investigation of correlations and possible explanations. While simplistic, the approach effectively integrates the answers to the “what” and the “why” to provide a more holistic answer to the research questions.

## **4 Research Findings**

### **4.1 Cross-Screen Media Consumption Patterns of Generation Z (Quantitative Findings)**

Through cluster analysis of the questionnaire data, we identified four representative cross-screen usage patterns. Interestingly, each pattern not only differs in the device combinations used but also shows significant variation in preferred content and commonly used scenarios(As shown in Table 1).

*Table 1: Cluster Analysis Results of Generation Z's Cross-Screen Media Consumption Patterns*

| Pattern Type                            | Percentage | Core Device Combination                                    | Typical Content Preferences                                  | High-Frequency Usage Scenarios       |
|-----------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Smartphone-Centered Type                | 38.70%     | Smartphone as the main device, with tablet as a supplement | Short videos, social media, instant messaging                | Commuting, waiting, home relaxation  |
| Multi-Screen Efficiency Type            | 26.30%     | Balanced use of laptop, smartphone, and tablet             | Office work, learning, information gathering, online courses | Work, study, research                |
| Immersive Entertainment Type            | 22.10%     | Smart TV/projector + gaming console + smartphone           | Games, movies/TV shows, sports events                        | Evening, weekends, social gatherings |
| Lightweight Fragmented Consumption Type | 12.90%     | Exclusively smartphone                                     | Micro-series, news, podcasts                                 | Short time slots, mobile state       |

The Smartphone-Centered Type of user is the most common of the previously identified types. A Smartphone-Centered Type user is characterized by having their mobile devices within reach for the duration of their activity, only picking up other devices for short, periodical tasks. Their five or more hours of daily smartphone use includes screen switching 40% of the time, due to their multiple screens. A user best exemplified this by saying: "I often watch videos on my phone while chatting on WeChat on my tablet, and I occasionally switch to search for content I just saw." This shows smartphone-centric multitasking, while tablets and other devices act as HSAs, high-speed adapters. There is considerable digital media integration with the core motivation of this user being the need to stay interconnected across digital channels and continuously engaged. Those who fall into this category, the Multi-Screen Efficiency Type, are known for their skilled multitasking and media device usage, gaining reputation for being device optimators of the integration multitasking system. Each user exhibits their own unique ways of integrating their devices. It seems these individuals, more than others, are aware of the boundaries and potentials of each device and know how to optimize for the other devices in the system.

One person can utilize various types of technology at the same time to be as efficient as possible. They can have a computer for writing, a phone for communicating, and a tablet for accessing educational materials. This scenario is a very high level of organizational skills and the ability to utilize technology. This person would be able to use varying functions of productivity tools across multiple devices to maximize their productivity in a seamless manner. Immersive Entertainment Experience Type members are also the most likely to buy high end technology. They center their visual entertainment around large videos. They might also have large, expensive projectors for the entertainment to be a more immersive and better quality. Sometimes, they even have a small screen for the entertainment. They often use it, for example, to show a related video while they watch the bigger entertainment.

One user mentioned that he/she liked "trying to multitask, like watching a movie on a big screen and also using my phone to check for background info on the movie, or post to social

media.” This shows that people like to participate in social media and have entertainment at the same time. For the Lightweight Fragmented Consumption Type users, media consumption becomes much simpler. Almost all media are accessed through smartphones. This group of users mainly consume media that fits their busy lives like micro-series, instant news, and podcasts. These content types are very suitable for situations when a user wishes to use a few minutes to get information or have some entertainment, for instance, when waiting for a bus or having a small break at work. This situation demonstrates a need for content that is easily accessible and fits the schedule of users. This is very suitable for the fragmented structure of their timetables. This makes the time not wasted, resulting in very effective and the simple working consumption of media.

## 4.2 Deep Motivations and Needs Driving Different Combination Patterns

With the integration of the questionnaire and the interviews, first, we probed into the psychological motivation the four patterns might have, and then, through the five dimensions of needs in the Uses and Gratifications theory, we assigned a specific combination of needs to the particular pattern(As shown in Table 2):

*Table 2: Comparison of Motivational Needs in Different Cross-Screen Patterns*

| Needs Dimension            | Smartphone-Centered Type                        | Multi-Screen Efficiency Type                        | Immersive Entertainment Experience Type     | Lightweight Fragmented Consumption Type       |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Cognitive Needs            | Broad coverage, trending topics                 | In-depth exploration, systematic learning           | Background extension, detail exploration    | Instant information, quick browsing           |
| Emotional Needs            | Stress relief, emotional regulation             | Achievement satisfaction, progress control          | Immersive experience, emotional resonance   | Instant entertainment, boredom alleviation    |
| Personal Integration Needs | Image management, resource accumulation         | Skill enhancement, efficiency optimization          | Display of taste, knowledge boasting        | Trend following, avoiding being left behind   |
| Social Integration Needs   | Relationship maintenance, community interaction | Collaboration and communication, experience sharing | Shared experiences, social currency         | Topic acquisition, social conversation fodder |
| Situational Release Needs  | Filling fragmented time, waiting out time       | Multi-tasking, deadline coping                      | Leisure and relaxation, social ice-breakers | Intermittent use, brief disengagement         |

Smartphone-Centered Type users cross screen use to maintain social relationships. These users are always trying to find the best way to stay in touch with friends, family, and colleagues from different devices. One participant said: "I often watch a live sports game on my tablet and then discuss it with my friends on the phone. That instant share feels amazing, as if everyone is watching the game together and live." This example shows the need for

simultaneous experiences, instant contact, and real-time streaming with others to add a touch to the social side of shared media. Distance does not matter to users for social connections. Multi screen switching fulfills the social bond as a major source of the media consumed. These participants are not only able to meet the need for connection, but also social media in a way to navigate their landscape. These users can be called "functional optimizers" who have the ability to multitask and organize their devices to maximize productivity. Users have different media tools and adapt them to serve special, functional, productive goals as if they automated their devices.

One design student explained, "When I have a project to do, I use the tablet to look at reference images, the computer to do the design, and the phone to communicate to the clients. There is a clear separation of work for each gadget. " This purposeful usage of technology shows the impressive organization and multitasking skills of our Gen Z audience. Efficiency motivates our audience, and they do an impressive amount of work across multiple devices. Cloud syncing and file sharing between the devices allows our audience to do work seamlessly across all of their tools. Immersive Entertainment Experience Type Users seek emotional gratification and spend their time seeking out the biggest screens to view the most immersive content. Watching media on televisions and projectors is an important part of their media experience no matter the other content they have access to. Still, small screens like smartphones play an important part in completing the experience. A gamer described it by saying, "When I beat a level in the game, I use my phone to check guides, discuss on the community." What adds to the intrigue of problem-solving is the joy that comes with innovation at the spur of the moment. The emotional rush of these experiences is coupled with the ability to share this rush. The ability to engage emotionally and share digitally in real time is what defines the entertainment experience here. In the case of Lightweight Fragmented Consumption Type users, the motivation is to spend time during short spare intervals. Users of this type often scour micro-content episodes, filling brief spare intervals that occur in a day. A participant in sales stated that "I watch micro-series while waiting for clients or during my subway ride. Each episode is just a few minutes long, requires no mental effort, and is a great way to kill time." Such a consumption style shows the adaptation of today's youth to the fast and fragmented demands of their environment. Instead of lengthy and complex content, they prefer media designed to be consumed in short and small doses.

## 5 The Construction of the Theoretical Model and the Transformation of Uses and Gratifications Theory

### 5.1 From "Single Media Gratification" to "Combination Menu Gratification": A Shift in Theoretical Paradigms

While analyzing the data, we recognized a remarkable trend: the type of gratification received by Gen Z has changed considerably during this media era. Previously, people could be compared to customers selecting items from a menu, where they would choose one medium to fulfill a particular need. This approach aligns with traditional models of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), where individuals select a specific medium  $M_i$  to satisfy a particular need  $N_j$  from a set of predefined categories:

$$S_{ij} = f(M_i, N_j)$$

where:

$S_{ij}$  is the satisfaction derived from using medium  $M_i$  for need  $N_j$ .

$M_i$  represents the media selected (e.g., television, smartphone, etc.).

$N_j$  represents the needs (e.g., entertainment, information, social interaction, etc.).

Yet today's youth are more like a 'buffet manager' rather than a 'meal selector' since they are able to pick and mix different media elements to create a tailored and flexible media experience. The media-satisfaction relationship is therefore multi-faceted since users mix different media to address different needs and contexts. To better model this complexity, we introduce a 'combinative media gratification' function:

$$S' = \sum_{i=1}^n f(M_i, N_j)$$

where:

$S'$  represents the overall satisfaction from the combination of multiple media forms.

$N$  represents the number of different media used.

$M_i$  represents the set of media selected (e.g., smartphone, tablet, laptop).

$N_j$  represents the needs satisfied (e.g., social, cognitive, emotional).

Rather than relying on a single medium to satisfy a specific need, Gen Z seamlessly integrates multiple media and devices to form a comprehensive media experience. This shift from passive media consumption to active curation and mixing is crucial. The user now functions as a "media curator," choosing, combining, and controlling the flow of content. The gratification derived from this multi-screen, cross-device interaction can be modeled by introducing a flexibility coefficient  $F$  that reflects how well users integrate and adapt their media across different devices:

$$S_{total} = \sum_{i=1}^n f(M_i, N_j) \cdot F_i$$

where:

$S_{total}$  represents the total satisfaction from all media combinations.

$F_i$  represents the flexibility coefficient of each device  $M_i$ , which quantifies how seamlessly the media transitions across devices and how flexible the user is in adapting to various media contexts.

For instance, one user may use a computer for research, a tablet for note-taking, and a smartphone for communication, each tool being deployed for specific tasks. The deployment of devices has been customized to the tasks at hand, such that the computer is dedicated to serious activities like research, the tablet is used for note-taking, and the phone is reserved for communication. The total satisfaction from this customized combination can be expressed as:

$$S_{total} = f(M_{computer}, N_{research}) + f(M_{tablet}, N_{notes}) + f(M_{phone}, N_{communication})$$

To close, the patterns in how Gen Z engages with the media show a remarkable development from the traditional, mono-medium gratification, to a much more flexible, adaptive style where different media and devices are used in a synergistic way to achieve different objectives. It is now not just a matter of choosing one medium to fulfill one need. It is now a matter of assembling a unique media experience from different devices and platforms. By modeling these interactions with the use of the flexibility coefficient and the combination media gratification function, we are better able to understand the ways in which Gen Z purposefully chooses, customizes, and organizes their media environment. This

phenomenon not only enhances gratification, but also shows the intricacy of the modern media landscape, where users are not simple, passive consumers of media, but rather, active “media curators” in charge of the organization of their media experiences.

## **5.2 The Construction of the "User-Device-Situation-Need" Dynamic Model**

A dynamic model of media consumption has been created, which designs an approach of describing the phenomenon at hand. The model comprises of the following four factors: the user, the device, the situation, and the need. The user’s specific media literacy and personality traits, even if unconsciously, shape their approach to cross screen media consumption. As an example, there are my friends, the “tech enthusiasts”, who are the very first to learn and master the newest features on media devices. On the contrary, there are the conservative ones who stick to their media use on devices to the ways that they are most familiar to. These personal differences affect our selections of devices, as well as our strategies to use the devices. The limitations of the devices themselves, especially from a physical standpoint, are the next element of the model. The portability of the smartphones, the size of the screen on tablets, and the computers that have efficient input features affect their positioning in the media system. For instance, it would be unreasonable to carry a computer around to watch a short video, let alone use a smartphone to type a long paper. The devices avail to a certain extent that impacts our choices to use the devices. The next element in the model is specific situations of usage.

While watching a video, the device and manner of engagement can vary greatly depending on the context, e.g. while lying down in a dorm room, sitting in the back of a classroom, or on a commute home. When it comes to the usage of media, three physical dimensions—location, social context, and temporal factors—serve as a backdrop and impact the dimensions of our practices. Lastly, the intricate and fluctuating characteristics of these as they pertain to needs and motivation are very impactful. With respect to the actual use of media, it is uncommon to use a device in a manner solely to satisfy one particular need. Rather, needs are likely to overlap, as in the case where a person is using a device to gain information (cognitive need), while on the phone with a peer, (social need), and listening to music to facilitate and regulate the emotional system (emotional need). This overlap in needs is a primary motivator for cross-device usage.

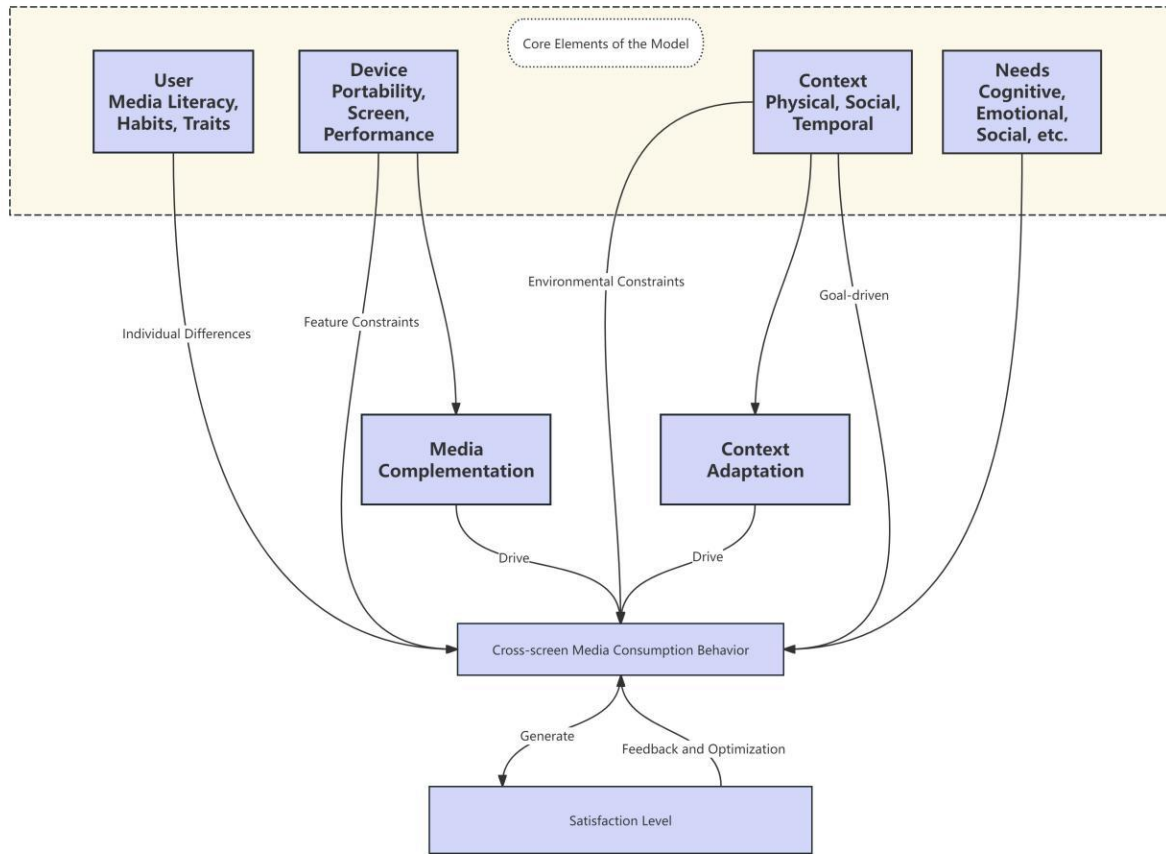


Figure 1: User-Device-Situation-Need Dynamic Model Diagram

As shown in Figure 1, two core mechanisms are particularly noteworthy:

1. **Media Complementarity Mechanism:** Generation Z exhibits the ability to use different devices to overcome the limitations of a single device. For instance, when the phone screen is too small to watch a video, they will use a tablet. When they want to watch videos on a smart TV but the TV is inconvenient to control, they will cast the video from their phone. This strategy of flexible complementation allows the entire media system to self-adjust.

2. **Context Adaptation Mechanism:** Another peak or another context of action leads to different device usage logic. During the commute, the same user has a smaller bare-bones configuration of “Phone + Headphones” but upon getting home it turns to the “TV + Phone + Tablet” full configuration. In the workspace, the configuration changes to “computer + phone” efficiency mode. The context adjustment enhances the user to achieve a considerably stable satisfaction experience across the different environments.

### 5.3 Updates and Extensions to the Uses and Gratifications Theory

Thus far, it seems clear from the study's outcomes that major weaknesses exist in the classical Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory which will need to be addressed in order for it to remain relevant within the media landscape. Updating the theory must involve the phenomena of cross-device media use, device interconnectivity, and varying media roles. Beginning with the U&G theory constructs, we advocate for the addition of the term, “media interconnectivity.” Historically, U&G theory has looked at the media-user connection as singular. One medium at a time and varying user selection based on the needs, characteristics, and affordances of that single medium. This approach, however is out of touch with the

current media environment. The theory fails to incorporate the ever-growing complexities of the interconnectivity of devices which is fundamentally impacting user experience. The interconnectedness of devices, be it a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or smart TV, has transformed the way a user interacts with and views different media. The user experience of a media content has undergone a radical change in how seamlessly they can shift from one device to another to continue their media consumption. The emergent phenomenon of seamless casting, cross-device synchronisation, and multi-screen collaboration is fundamentally changing the concept of a good media experience.

This phenomenon streamlining media literacy is opening a breadth of options regarding how users go about meeting their needs functionality, accessibility, and tailoring. On account of these developments, the U&G theory must adapt and expand its scope to the interconnectedness of devices and how those interconnections enhance or redefine gratifications. More critically considering the “situation” factor of the media consumption is warranted. Existing U&G theory posits that media users reach out to devices due to their needs and that media consumption is anchored to stable gratifications. Research, however, investigated the disparity within a single user and established that one user may present diverse constellation of gratifications and consumption patterns of media intersection with devices that is contextually responsive to the situation. Take as an example a user who may look for entertainment and social media interactivity during their leisure time, and information and productivity enhancing media during work tasks. This incidence counteracts the need and media consumption equilibrium proposition, constituting unevenness within an equilibrium as portrayed in previous theories. This signifies that inter recreational theory, where need is a disfunction of the time, social configuration, or physical location involves the principal factors to a theory.

To address the complexity around how various situational factors impact media trends, the U and G's Theory need to include the 'situation' aspect in the U&G's theory as an important variable that impacts the media, and the platform or device to use and the media role in the media consumption process also need to be revised as the role of the user. The extent to which users were considered as content consumers. Content users would opt to engage in media that would provide some need, be it information, entertainment, or social interaction, and The need. The social interaction aspect. The social aspect was the primary purpose. The primary purpose was social interaction. Cross-screen use which has been integrated into the use of multiple devices in everyday life has changed this. Generation Z is no longer a content consumer. Generation Z has changed the content consumption role of the user. The user has shifted the user role to content curator', or 'media planner' as the user has shifted to an active role where they control elements of media consumption, the devices and the content they use to manage control of the media they consume. The user has to manage elements such as device compatibility, content, time the user plans the media consumption and engagement, they also need to manage content dynamically if the content type, time the user plans to spend to consume the content, the user's attention to the content. The user engagement is attention management. For example, they would watch a youtube content the use would be distracted during the content, the user would switch to a tv version of the content.

This change in roles indicates that media is becoming more and more complex, and media literacy is becoming more paramount in the digital era. Gen Z cohorts must be adept at the operation of numerous devices, be proficient at the skills to multitask and manage attention to devices and screens. That is to say, U&G must engage more proactively and more intentionally as audiences consume more media, especially when media is dynamic and more fragmented. To sum up, there is an urgent need to adapt the original U&G to account for the active audiences, the technological convergence, and the contextual variables that determine

media consumption. Integrating these constructors may provide a better account of how people engage with media, and the primary motivations for this engagement, in a digital ecosystem that comprises various devices, and enhance the practical benefits of the new framework to media practitioners and technologists. These changes will improve the theoretical basis of U&G as well as provide a practical framework for media and technology practitioners.

## 6 Conclusion and Implications

### 6.1 Summary of Research Findings

By studying Generation Z's cross-screen behavior, we learned that four common-usage patterns have emerged. Some users hold on to a smartphone and build a media world around it. Others go full "tech commander" and become proficient in switching between several devices at a time. A few users actively create even more a pathetic entertainment system to build an experience that becomes an ultimate entertainment hub and some users simply use a smartphone to meet all their informational needs and reduce the more complex dimensions of their experience to a minimal. After more analysis we learned that each of these behavior patterns meet certain psychological needs. Social connection, while the smartphone becomes a companion. The need to control a scenario. The complex use of devices to become an emotional and social resonator. The need to smooth and reach a simple informational goal in a fragmented time. Identity and self-expression needs media behavior to become more than simple functionality and surpass a mere tool for self-expression. The complex model user, device, situation and the need to express themselves in a more complex media usage if themselves.

In particular, the two mechanisms of "media complementarity" and "context adaptation" demonstrate how young people flexibly allocate their media resources across diverse utilization contexts.

### 6.2 Theoretical Reflections

In terms of theory development, this research may contribute in a number of ways. First, it indicates that the classical Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory needs a fresh lens to capture the changes in the media. The older U&G model mainly talked about people and their engagement with one medium, under the assumption that consumers of media pursue their attention to a specific medium to satisfy one or a set of needs. However, this perspective is outdated, especially with young people who use multimedial outfit coordination. The theoretical emphasis therefore should "not be using one medium" but rather "media usage" as a term requires a shift in focus. Media consumption is about making a choice from an enormous selection. and more often than not, consumers of media mix different devices and types of media to achieve their needs in an effective and efficient way. The theoretical lens also needs to shift to focus on the effective and efficient use of a media combination and the way different media units work together to satisfy an array of needs concurrently. The shift from a "point" theory to a "surface" theory, or a "complex" theory, would capture the quintessence of media consumption in the 21st century. Second, it is perhaps the importance of situational factors in consuming media that has been overlooked for long also.

The research shows the same young person has different patterns of media use depending on the context. For example, during class, the student is efficient and may even be doing focused academic work, using a laptop or tablet to do research. However, when the student has left class and is back in the res, there is a shift to a more entertainment-focused media use,

such as using a phone, tablet, and TV all at once to watch a show and do social media. This situation-based capacity shift shows media use is context-dependent and demonstrates the complexity of media use. Studying the use of media without context of the situation—physical, social, or temporal—will always be an incomplete discussion. Studying media use in isolation is like studying how fish swim in a vacuum, without the contextual factors that make the study worthwhile.

### **6.3 Practical Implications**

There are multiple research findings that can be utilized in different industries. In regards to media content creation, there is a need to rethink the way the content is rendered on different screens. Generation Z demands the ability to hop seamlessly between devices. They want to be able to start content discovery on a mobile phone, shift to a TV, and opine on the content through their social media. Content creators can no longer concentrate on a single device and need to optimize their offerings to a multi-device environment. There is a need to create adaptive content that is synchronized so that the user can hop between devices and still enjoy the same content. There is also the need to rethink traditional strategies in marketing and communication. There is no need to apply the repetitive one-size-fit ads that are used in traditional media when it comes to a multi-screen environment. There is need to understand how users deploy their devices in a given situation to engrote their messages in context. Simple interactive ads can be used when a user is on the go, and immersive ads when the user is at home and is looking for leisure. There is also an element of multi-device interconnectivity that can be viewed as an added advantage for tech product developers.

Gen Z cares about the seamless functionality of devices, going beyond their individual capabilities to the collaborative experience they can provide across platforms. Thus, the attraction to products that allow seamless integration is strong, and businesses should create technology ecosystems that allow for a seamless and integrated experience across devices.

### **6.4 Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions**

Every study has limitations, and this one is no exception. For example, the data for this study was obtained mainly through online sources, and this could mean that there is underrepresentation of the Generation Z segment that eschews the internet. Also, this research only captures the use of several forms of media during a specific time period, and this fails to take into consideration the continuously changing media habits of young people. In addition, the research concentrated on the internet usage behaviors of young people on an individual level and to a large extent did not take into consideration the role of the social context, specifically family and community. Such limitations can also inform other researchers outside of this study. For instance, future researchers could conduct longitudinal studies that aim to determine how the media usage habits of members of Generation Z change over time. Another direction to consider is the introduction of other individual difference factors to determine how the different personality types affect media preferences. Additional and perhaps more innovative methods of data collection could also be employed to research the other factors of interest besides individual habits to shed light on the social factors. For example, there is the self-reported data on the devices used and the time spent on different activities. There is quite a lot to explore, particularly the impact of rapidly evolving AI technologies on the cross-screen engagement of young people, and the use of artificial intelligence generated content should be the focus of the research.

## About the Author

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