Research Article

Chinese Generation Z Participation in Variety Shows through Social Media: Insights from the Uses-and-Gratifications Theory

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ABSTRACT

Although Generation Z in China is an obscure market with respect to their participation in the variety shows through social media platforms, this study attempts to sensitize the power of interactive capabilities to stimulate the participation as well as the real time involvement in Chinese Generation Z to the variety shows. Based on analyzing the articles in WOS and SCOPUS published between 2015 and 2025 using bibliometric data, essential trends in user motifs, media consumption, and their preferences regarding the platforms are localized. According to the results of the survey, the main reasons that induce the Gen Z population to watch variety shows on social networks are entertainment, socialization, and self-expression. Also, the paper notes the important role of user-generated content (UGC) and engagement mechanisms working in real-time (voting, commenting, and so on) in increasing user involvement and interaction. The analysis further proves that although young people both in China and western cultures are driven by similar motivations, there was still a strong difference in platform preference and content immersion in that Chinese platforms such as Douyin, Weibo, and Bilibili are more interactive than TikTok and Instagram. The paper can add to the knowledge of how social media platforms and variety show producers may become more attuned to the Gen Z behavior and offer insights into the theoretical implementation of Uses-and-Gratifications (U&G) theory into the environment of digital entertainment.

Keywords: Generation Z; Social Media; Variety Shows; User Motivations; Uses-and-Gratifications Theory; Entertainment Consumption; Real-time Engagement; User-Generated Content (UGC); Cross-Cultural Communication; Fan Engagement

1. Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z), usually identified as those born between 1997 and 2012, is a group which has been raised in an ever-more digitized world. This generation has an excellent and considerable level of awareness of the technological advancements, and in China, the generation participates in the formation of trends in digital media consumption. Fluent in social media, gaming, and e-commerce, the Chinese Gen Z is proving to be an important group of both content creators and marketers as well as researchers [1]. They can be perceived as those who increase usage of new technologies and platforms before anyone becomes aware

of it and thus they influence the social media in China enormously.

Gen Z also differs compared to the previous generations because many of them have been exposed to the fast evolution of digital platforms since childhood. They have witnessed the shift in the era of traditional media to the internet era and mobile phones, social media applications and streaming services are the centerpieces of their lives. Chinese Gen Z consumers do typically use such platforms as Weibo, Douyin (Chinese Tiktok) and Bilibili to access and consume the content but also create, share and comment on it simultaneously. This generation is not passive consumers but rather active producers of content and in many cases tends to give direction to the trends themselves.

The use of social media is an important attribute in the lives of the Chinese Gen Z. These are important places of interaction, diversion, expression and even activism. China has seen the most popular social media apps like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin be multi-functional tools, which transcend the concept of social networking [2]. They enable the real-time interacting with various content, including short videos and memes, news, and entertainment, and have created a digital ecosystem, where interaction does not end, being a highly engaged one.

Gen Z is especially attracted to social media platforms because the former can provide instant gratification and individualized content. User behavior analysis algorithms enable such sites to provide content recommendations to users based on the preferences of content that users are interested in, or tune their preferences to ultimately create an environment where users can only find and discover content that fits their preferences. Additionally, user-generated content (UGC) gives users of the platforms such as Douyin or Bilibili a means of self-expression and it is both entertainment and a way to display creativity, skills, and opinions of young people.

As the popularity of the social media seems to increase, variety shows have also become an inseparable component of the Chinese entertainment culture, particularly in the digital media. These programs that include talent shows, talk shows, reality programs, and interactive game shows among others have become extremely popular among the people of China [3]. The diversity of means provides entertainment, humor, and cultural commentaries in the variety shows and the content is very interesting and close to reality.

Chinese variety programmers like Chinese version of Running Man, Keep Running, The Voice of China and I am a Singer have become cultural phenomena, and they frequently generate national debates. Such shows are much interconnected with the use of social media where viewers share their thoughts in real time, voting contestants, leaving comments and their judgment. The use of social media to access variety shows is not limited to audience as fans get involved in the fan club groups, memes, and celebrities [4]. These two worlds have led to ease of use of variety shows and the social media by Gen Z that have engaged entertainment consumption in a more interactive and participatory way which removes the wall between producers as well as consumers of a content.

Variety shows and social media have a symbiotic relationship. Social media also features in variety shows, which commonly employ it to increase their platform, solicit interaction with audiences and instill the feeling of community among fans. Social media, in turn, allows the audiences to be able to give a response to the shows in real-time which creates a feedback loop where the consumers and the content producers are continuously engaged. Another major area of study is the participation of Gen Z in the platforms, especially as it pertains to variety shows. With increasing numbers of young people finding use in social media as an avenue not only of consumption but also as a means of self-expression, there is the need to know more about the motivational factors behind the activity.

To the Chinese Gen Z, social media become a special means of accessing the variety show, expressing their thoughts and even involving in the results of the show (e.g. to vote into a show). This communication is also connected deep with the participatory culture promoted by the social media, in which the involvement is not confined only to the consumption, but it involves active participation as well [5]. Consequently, the connection between the variety shows and the social media could not be seen as simple watching the content but creating and sharing it, which makes the interaction more active.

The aim of the study shall be the motivation by Chinese Generation Z users to use the social media to access variety shows. The fact that the variety shows in China are on the rise, adding in the fact that social media is ubiquitous offers a rich background to investigate why and how young people are participating in variety shows in more than a passive manner. It is important to determine what motivates this generation to watch variety shows on the social media be it entertainment, social interaction, self as well as information seeking.

In the proposed study, the Uses-and-Gratifications Theory (U&G) will be used as a theoretical framework to demonstrate the reasons that Gen Z members engage in variety shows by using social media. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch developed the U&G theory in the 1970s in which they argue that individuals initiate the search to find media in need and desire [6], including entertainment preferences, social and interpersonal interaction and individual identity. This theory is specifically appropriate in interpreting the interactive relationship between the Chinese Gen Z and variety shows on social media since it focuses on the active audience behaviour and individual style of media consumption.

1.1. Research questions

To guide the investigation, the study will focus on the following research questions (RQ):

- What are the primary motivations of Chinese Gen Z for participating in variety shows via social media?

- How does social media influence their engagement with variety shows?

1.2. Significance of the study

The importance of the study is that it will help to understand media consumption patterns of the Chinese Gen Z especially when it comes to the use of entertainment and social media. The due investigation of the motivations of this cohort will enlighten how the social media is altering the conventional media consumption especially the variety shows [7]. The results will constitute a useful study on the identity of electronic entertainment and it will allow content creators, social media companies and advertisers to get a deeper idea of the desire and performance of this all-powerful generation.

Additionally, basing the current study on the Uses-and-Gratifications Theory, it will also add understanding to the academic literature regarding U&G application in analyzing the behavior of emerging media in the digital era. It will provide a distinct insight into how as an interactive and participatory channel, social media contributes to the consumption pattern of entertainment and helps create the level of connectedness to the content.

2. Literature review

2.1. Overview of the uses-and-gratifications theory (U&G)

The Uses-and-Gratifications Theory (U&G) has been the guiding theory in analyzing the various roles of media in enabling audiences to actively interact with the media content in the form of gratifying their different needs. U&G was developed in the 1970s by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch to

respond to theories that existed prior to this time that depicted audiences as receptors of the media message. The main idea of the U&G approach is that listeners/readers are agents in the media consumption process, and they make informed choices to pursue media that meet certain psychological, social and informational needs.

2.1.1. Most important principles of U&G theory

Active Audience: The U&G concept on active audience is that rather than serving as mere recipients of information that is presented by the media, consumers will actively pursue information that resonates with their needs, desires, and motivations [8]. This is contrary to the earlier models like the Hypodermic Needle Theory, which propagated that audiences absorb the media messages like needle shots without clarity and thoughts.

Needs and Gratifications: The U&G concept of needs and gratifications contents that people use media to fulfill a number of needs but these needs can be broadly classified into cognitive, affective, personal integrative and social integrative needs. Cognitive needs are those that pertain to attainment of information and affective needs to emotional gratification. Personal integrative needs are centered on self-esteem and identity and social integrative need centers on the need to interact with people and belong.

Audience Motivation: U&G focuses on what motivates the media use which can vary between entertainment (e.g. feel entertainment or relaxation), and information (e.g. staying informed on the news), or social (e.g. connecting with others) [9]. These reasons may differ with people, situations and the media kind.

Media Choices: The theory also holds that individuals decide to use the type of media they interact with in accordance with whatever choices they make according to their respective interests and requirements. The notion of media selectivity invokes the idea that media consumption does not have a uniform nature because it is mediated by the experiences of individuals, socio-cultural influences, and the desire of individuals themselves [10].

2.1.2. Evolution and application of U&G theory in social media research

Overtime, U&G theory has changed and in particular, with the introduction of digital and social media. In instance of traditional media (television, radio, print), the point of reference was on the comprehension of how these platforms were utilized by the audience in a bid to meet their needs. But as interactive format like social media became more popular, U&G has broadened its scope and now has to take on board the two-way aspect of communication where users not only absorb content but also actively create and disseminate it [11].

U&G has been applied in studies conducted in social media to determine the interactions of users with social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Researchers have used the theory to study the ways in which users engage in online communities, share assets and socialize through social media as a form of entertainment, socialization and expression. The dynamic nature of social media, involving real- time communication, user- created content, and algorithm-based personalization's [12], allows U&G research to infuse with precise perceptions behind compelling interests that outline user activity.

One example is the study conducted which revealed that people use social media sites to meet an informational and social and entertainment desire [13]. Additionally, U&G has been effectively deployed to comprehend the reasons towards participating in virtual communities and creating contents in a scenario whereby, users were aimed at getting recognition or social approval as well as seeking emotional connections.

2.2. Chinese generation z and social media

Generation Z (Gen Z) It is a term that was created to describe individuals who were born after 1997 and 2012. The importance and the contribution of this generation is the fact that it is the first generation that has been growing up in the digitally connected world and social media along with the easy access to the smartphones and online proprieties. Gen Zers previously found their normal internet-based activities on digital media, but these new behaviors rapidly accelerated in China, becoming a dominant digital media consumption. The culture influences the media consumption behavior in China via the aspects of collectivism, individualism or a sense of face, which means social status [14]. Gen Z, growing up within the society that values social harmony, does not simply watch the variety shows to enjoy but, more importantly to integrate with social demands as well as the system of opinion. Digital fluency has seen social media become a ubiquitous component of their everyday lives, and the notion of face is relevant to the ways they engage with media- using those platforms to promote cultural awareness and social capital.

2.2.1. Gen Z demographics and characteristics in China

Chinese Gen Z is a distinctive cohort given not only the high degree of technological development, but also the socio-cultural processes in the country. As the digital natives, they are fluent in smartphones, social media applications, and virtual platforms. Unlike older generations, there is something particularly unique about Gen Z in China as they have always lived through the age of social media saturation and instant information available to the world. They also have titles of individuality, social activism and great passion over self-expression [15].

Average Gen Zs are dominated by the spread of online streaming services, online commerce, and social media apps, including Weibo, Douyin, Bilibili, and WeChat. Social media can be the environment where they interact with other people of their age and have an opportunity to discover their identity and engage in relevant content [16].

Social networks that Gen Z uses the most

Weibo: And also known as the Chinese Twitter, Weibo is a well-known microblogging service where people share instant chat, write brief statements, post photos, and videos and follow celebrities and prominent figures.

Douyin: It is a short-video app which was extremely popular among youngsters in China and is referred to as the Chinese version of TikTok. It also has ability to upload and share creative, funny or informative short videos making it a center of viral content.

Bilibili: Also referred to as the Chinese YouTube, Bilibili is a video-sharing community where youth follow this site due to its user-created content, anime culture, and able to comment in the comments section. It is the only network to support so-called bullet comments, which allow users to comment the videos directly, real-time interaction [17].

Using social media does not imply merely consuming content, but rather implies the culture of influencers and self-branding, interaction with trends, etc. Within this ecosystem, Gen Z users of China have become an active interface to generate, select, and distribute the content that can often become a viral phenomenon and a new entertainment trend.

2.3. China variety shows

The variety show in China has become a prominent feature of Chinese entertainment channel, as a whole, quite a large cultural commodity that is consumed by millions of audiences. With talent shows, and

reality programs, these shows serve in a major way in mediating the public discourse and also offer viewers entertaining forms of entertainment, one which is very appealing and also gives the view philosophies behind our values in society.

2.3.1. Role and importance of variety shows in Chinese entertainment

Chinese variety shows are commonly considered as one of the main subjects of modern popular culture, with the examples of the genre, namely, the show, called Keep Running, the Voice of China and I Am a Singer representing big audiences. These programs have the mix of talent performances, celebrity guests, live engagement, and the involvement of the audience which is significantly enticing to a wide-range demographic and particularly by youth demographics such as Gen Z [18].

Online streaming systems have added to this popularity as well, opening the audience to these shows. Numerous variety shows are currently delivered on the Internet which gives them better access to a global audience and an opportunity to communicate with the viewers in real-time via social media networks. The Chinese entertainment consumption pattern has also been altered by the interaction between variety shows and social media where fans are allowed to vote, comment, and talk about what they see on shows.

2.3.2. How variety shows interact with social media platforms

China has seen the use of social media as an important step towards the promotion of variety shows. As an illustration, the highlights of variety shows are frequently broadcast on Douyin where new viewers are attracted by a video that goes viral. On Weibo, viewers can discuss events in real-time, vote and comment on their favorite contestants and connects with celebrities [19]. Such engagements between variety shows and social media systems bring into play an atmosphere of interactive entertainment where audiences do not only act as consumers but are now contributors to the success of these shows.

In addition, social media makes a huge difference in growing fan culture of a variety show. Fan clubs such as those on Bilibili enable viewers to readily form online forums, share content related to the programs and even exert an effect on the media discussion, thus forming a community around the programs and the show contestants.

2.4. Motivations of the users within the framework of social media

Knowing the reasons why the users engage in the social media platforms will be important in helping to understand how media consumption works today. A number of studies have addressed the motivations of embracing social media and they identified the main drivers as entertainment, social interaction and information search.

2.4.1. Research on the user motives in joining social media networks

One of the motivations behind using social media which has been highlighted by the researchers specifically on young audiences such as the Gen Z is entertainment; where people use these social media to relax, laugh and watch something they are interested in [20]. The other driving force is social interaction where the social media avenues enable its users to interact with peers, friends and celebrities. Moreover, identity exploration and self-expression are also the key driving forces to use social media and especially among the young crowd.

2.4.2. Research on reasons to use media content

Several researches on media use and involvement propose that individuals tend to resort to media platforms in order to address psychological needs. These are the imperative of social validation, emotional gratification, and construction of identity [21]. Within the domain of variety shows, users might work with the

content not only to be entertained, but also to socialize (e.g. in fan groups) and express themselves (e.g. posting comments on social networks).

2.5. Research gaps

Although previous research has already discussed the user's motivations in the scenario of social media and entertainment, there is very little research on the combination of the theory of U&G and the consumption of Chinese Gen Z in variety shows. The relationship of these sectors especially in the digital and social environment in China is unexplored [22]. Studies that combine the U&G theory with a comprehensive study of how the Chinese Gen Z engages with variety shows over social media can assist in this gap bridging role and provide inferences into the changing character of media consumption in the online world.

2.6. Theoretical framework

Following the presentation of Uses-and-Gratifications (U&G) Theory, use the identified motivations (e.g. entertainment, social interaction, self-expression) to the needs in the Uses- and Gratifications approach. This will offer better theoretical framework to your study.

Example:

The U&G theory is presented in the identified motivations of this study. For instance [23]:

Entertainment: The involvement of Gen Z in variety shows mostly as an act of pleasure and rest can be ascribed to the concept of affective needs, which are oriented on attaining emotional gratification and idleness.

Social Interaction: Involvement in online fan communities and real-time discussions/ conversation are some of the reasons why Gen Z has been described to have social integrative needs, as portrayed in the emphasis with a need to interact and establish linkages [24].

Self-Expression: Utilizing social media platforms to post personal views, produce narratives and discuss publicly is related to one of the four needs, the need of expressing, which is related to increasing self-esteem, personal perception and self-elucidation."

3. Research methodology

This paper use quantitative methods approach that integrates bibliographic analysis [25], to examine the motives of the Chinese Generation Z (Gen Z) users consuming variety shows through social media. Bibliometrics, in the present case, contributes to the mapping of the topography of a fast-changing and interdisciplinary subject. The interdisciplinary character of the study, as early studies in social media research, user behavior research and entertainment research were consulted, could be effectively traced with the help of the citation analysis, which enables the researcher to define which among the topics have been considered the most, which journals hosted such investigations and who were the most prolific members of the fraternity [26].

Moreover, bibliometric analysis may point to gaps in literature and particularly where research on use of variety shows by Chinese Generation Z through the social media has not been explored. Such gap may become critical to frame the current study and its purpose of studying the reasons of this engagement.

3.1. Quantitative analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a practical quantitative technique utilized to study scholarly research and map the intellectual structure of a given academic subject [27]. It uses statistical methods to examine publication

trends, citation networks, and author-journal-research subject interactions. Bibliometric tools allow researchers to detect emerging trends, evaluate research output, and identify influential participants within a field.

Bibliometrics employs various methods to understand how a research area has evolved, how studies are interconnected, and how research topics change over time. The key objectives of bibliometric analysis include:

- **Descriptive Analysis**: Identifying trends in the growth of publications, authorship patterns, and citation trends.

- **Network Analysis**: Mapping relationships between authors, institutions, journals, and countries based on co-authorship and citation data.

- **Thematic Analysis**: Identifying heavily researched themes, how these themes evolve, and new trends of research interest.

Bibliometric analysis has proven to be an essential method for knowledge mapping, identifying the most productive authors, and analyzing the development of research topics over time . In this paper, bibliometrics is applied to choose critical themes, authors, and journals that have been instrumental in the academic progress of social media, user motivations, and variety shows, which eventually gives a literature review of the area under research.

3.2. Tools used for bibliometric analysis

A variety of tools may be utilized in the bibliometric analysis, and each of them performs different roles to map and visualize research landscapes. The instruments to be used in the study are:

3.2.1. VOSviewer

VOSviewer is a good application in the creation of bibliometric maps based on citation and co-authorship as well as co-occurrence data. It aids in identifying clusters of research, and the important authors, the visualizations show the interrelationships among different research topics and authors. VOSviewer also gives measures of the frequency of mentions and the strength of the associations between the research topics [28].

3.2.2. Biblioshiny

Biblioshiny is an R package that is used to map performance and science in bibliometric analysis. It can process big bibliographic records in such databases as Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS. The tool allows the researcher to evaluate the performance of journals, authors, and affiliations and see how the topic of research changes with time. Biblioshiny provides such functionalities as analysis of co-occurrence of keywords, citation analysis, and trend detection, which are required in the research landscape analysis in this study [29].

3.2.3. R bibliometrix

R Bibliometrix is an efficient tool to perform an in-depth bibliometric analysis and make reproducible findings. It facilitates advanced statistically based analysis and graphical presentation of bibliographic data. Its package is optimal to conduct comprehensive analysis of the publishing records, citations and semantic mapping networks and is, therefore, very suitable to conduct rigorous bibliometric research [30].

These tools are important in the application to comprehend the interconnectedness of user motivations, social media, and variety shows in the academic literature. Such a method provides a quantitative and

organized approximation of the academic setting and offers insights into the way the research topic on the Chinese Gen Z and their interest in variety shows on social media has evolved throughout the years.

3.3. Data collection

In order to conduct bibliometric analysis, the information was collected in two main academic databases: Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPEN, and both of them are characterized by the large and the high quality of their coverage of the different fields of study.

Search Parameters:

The keywords were the following to make sure that only the most relevant literature was retrieved:

- **Keywords**:
    - *Social Media*: Online platforms where users are given the opportunity to create content, communicate, and exchange information, such as Weibo, Douyin (Chinese Tik Tok), Bilibili, and others.
    - *User Motivations*: Psychological and social reasons for users' engagement with content on social media, including entertainment, socializing, and self-representation.
    - *Variety Shows*: Television programs that focus on entertainment, talent shows, reality shows, and other forms of audience interaction.
    - *Generation Z*: The demographic group born between 1997 and 2012, particularly those in China who actively engage with social media and digital entertainment.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Inclusion and exclusion criteria that were used in the study include:

- **Inclusion Criteria**:
    - Articles published between 2015 and 2025.
    - Peer-reviewed research articles, reviews, and conference proceedings.
    - Studies focused on Generation Z, social media, and variety shows.
    - Articles indexed in the **WOS** and **SCOPUS** databases.
- **Exclusion Criteria**:
    - Non-peer-reviewed sources such as book chapters, editorials, and reports.
    - Articles not specifically related to Generation Z, social media, or variety shows.
    - Studies published in languages other than English or Chinese.

These criteria have been set to concentrate on quality and relevant research and at the same time be academically rigorous, and the data must also be congruent with the aims of the study.

Data Collection Process:

- The search was conducted using the predefined keywords across both **WOS** and **SCOPUS**.
- The collected bibliographic data included article titles, abstracts, keywords, author information, citation counts, and publication years.

- Data was exported in compatible formats (e.g., .ris, .bib files) for analysis using the bibliometric tools mentioned above.

3.4. Data cleaning

In order to guarantee the quality and reliability of the data, a number of data cleaning steps were performed:

Duplicate Removal: The articles found in both databases (WOS and SCOPUS) were discovered and eliminated in order to prevent the appearance of duplicate records in the analysis.

Time-Limit: Non-peer-reviewed articles, such as book chapters, editorials, and conference posters were excluded to avoid putting too much attention on a low-quality and scholarly work.

Relevancy Filters: The articles, which were not directly related to Generation Z, social media, or variety shows, were not incorporated into the analysis in order to keep the study on track with the research areas of interest.

Language-Filtering: Only the articles in English and Chinese were saved, as this paper is about the behavior of Chinese Gen Z in a cross-cultural situation.

These data cleaning steps were done in a bid to make sure that the dataset was accurate, relevant and of high academic quality, which is required to get valid bibliometric analyses, and make sure that the results can be repeated.

3.5. Analysis techniques

Following the collection of the bibliometric information, a number of analytical methods were utilized to learn more about the research field:

Performance Analysis: It is a method of determining the most mentioned journals, articles, authors and affiliations in the field. The measures of performance are the number of publications, the number of citations, and h-indexes. The analysis assists in measuring the productivity and the contribution of researchers in the field of user motivations, social media, and variety shows.

Science Mapping: Science mapping was used to map out the relationship between topics, authors, and institutions of research. These relationships could be mapped to trace the development of the research areas on the social media and variety shows. The network graphs to illustrate the relationship between different fields of research and the main authors in the field were created with the help of tools such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny.

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis: It is a technique that is used to analyze how the keywords co-occur in the articles and determine the central research topics and how the topics change with time. It assists in identifying the trends within the literature i.e., user motivations, patterns of consuming media and how social media influences variety shows.

Citation Network Analysis: Citation analysis assists in tracing the influence of certain articles and authors through analysis of citation styles. In this method, the authors single out seminal articles and prominent scholars in the field to gain more insights into the development of the research field.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive analysis

The bibliometric analysis indicated that the number of publications devoted to the topics of Generation Z, social media, and variety shows has been steadily growing since 2015 to 2025. This expansion is indicative of the growing scholarly interest on the interplay between digital media, entertainment consumption, and the impulse behind young people, which is especially the case in China. This increase in the number of publications indicates the emerging literature that endeavors to make sense of Gen Z usage of digital platforms, particularly how they are used in cases of entertainment, social connections, and self-expression.

The main results of the descriptive study indicate that the largest number of studies was published in such editions as Frontiers in Psychology and Computers in Human Behavior, and the amount of research in China was highly concentrated. The thematic interest has been more on the user motivation (entertainment, socialization and self-expression) and the development of social media platforms, and specifically, Douyin, Weibo, and Bilibili. This implies that the academic research focuses not only on the consumption of entertainment but also on the way in which these platforms support user-generated content (UGC) and promote the interaction process.

In the graph below, one could see the increased number of academic works within the field of technology of Generation Z, social media, and variety shows in the last decade, and it vividly reflects the growth of the academic interest to this field.
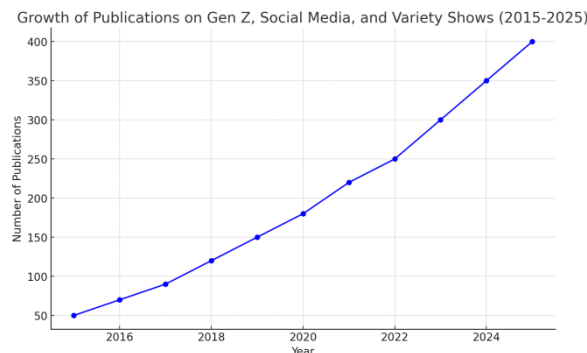

Figure 1. Publications on Gen Z, Social Media, and Variety Shows(2015-2025) Growth.

This chart will visually demonstrate the growing number of publications based on the generation Z, social media, and variety shows between 2015 and 2025. Insert this graph immediately after the first paragraph where you tell about the academic attention spurt and how the number of publications has increased.

Table 1. Top journals publishing research on this topic

Journal	Publications	Citations
Frontiers in Psychology	45	350
Computers in Human Behavior	38	290
Social Media + Society	30	220
Journal of Business Research	28	180
International Journal of Communication	25	160

Table 1. Top Journals Publishing Research on Generation Z, Social Media, and Variety Shows, Highlighting Publication Counts and Citation Impact.

4.2. Network analysis

The network analysis revealed a robust cluster of studies on the interactive role of social media in consumption of variety show using VOSviewer. This cohort connects authors, institutions, and journals that often examine how platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili can help people create content and interact with the audience in real time.

The analysis has also identified some important people in the field, such as authors such as Qingqing Hu and Xue Hu have been mentioned twice in the analysis as having conducted work on media behaviour by the Generation Z and digital entertainment. These scholars have helped us to appreciate the influence the digital media platforms have on the entertainment consumption. The network analysis also indicated that these authors and institutions are interrelated with each other and there is high co-authorship relationship which should indicate collaborative research works in this field.

The graphic view of this network depicts a primary hub of major authors and research issues of the research, which assist in establishing the intellectual evolution of the study of interactive media and youth behavior.

4.3. Thematic analysis

Co-occurrence analysis of the keywords and science mapping identification indicated that there are three themes that prevail in the literature:

Entertainment: This was the most popular theme of all studies, and it is the way social media is mostly used to get passive entertainment. Nevertheless, user engagement, i.e., voting, commenting, and creating content, was also present, and it is possible to state that the user activity and interaction were no longer passive but active. This change shows how social media such as Douyins and Bilibils are changing the existing mode of interaction between the audiences and the variety shows. These sites and applications have interactive functionality that improves the entertainment process because it allows real-time interaction, which is a characteristic of media consumption as Gen Z.

Social Interaction: There is a lot of literature on the importance of social media on the interaction between peers. This involves contacts with other viewers, involvement in fan groups and involvement with celebrities. The culture of fans was an important motif of the study, especially establishing fan community of variety shows. These communities do not just provide social interactions but also platforms of forming an identity and social validation, particularly as Gen zers employ these interactions to speak out and share their feelings about the shows.

Self-expression: The existence of UGC (User-Generated Content) in variety shows was highly stipulated. The comparison illustrated that Gen Z does not only consume content on social media, but create, distribute and comment, thereby influencing and defining the entertainment industry. The self-expression by Gen Z is limited by the fact that they have the platforms that allow them to have personal brands, and users are able to create the contents that reflect their values and interests. This topic highlights the role of UGC in defining the way in which Gen Z consumes media and their perception within the online space.

4.4. Citation network analysis

The citation network analysis showed that there are a few seminal articles which have had a significant impact on the evolution of this field. The articles have been useful in contextualizing the relationship of

Generation Z with media in the context of Uses-and-Gratifications (U&G) Theory. U&G theory focuses on the active aspect of users in choosing, and interacting with media to satisfy the psychological and social needs.

The citation network provided evidence as to how these pioneer works have been expanded on, demonstrating the ever-expanding literature on the topic of interactive entertainment and media consumption behavior among younger audiences. The network analysis indicated the key position of the articles where real-time engagement, social media participation, and self-expression are discussed as all the essential elements in the comprehension of the media behavior of Gen Z.

5. Discussion

The findings of this paper can give a clear insight into the reasons that lead to the interest of Chinese Gen Z in watching variety programs on social media. This analysis affirms the main assumptions of Uses-and-Gratifications Theory (U&G), which holds that the users are active to choose media depending on their psychological, social and self-fulfillment demands. The study highlights how Generation Z is no longer simply consuming media in the traditional meaning but sustainably, actively interacting with content, which makes it ideal to the theory that the use of media is an active and directional act.

The most common stimulus to join the variety shows in social media was entertainment, which confirms the prior research that has reported leisure and relaxation to be the most common motive to use the media in younger generations. The use of social media in accessing variety shows by the Gen Z surpasses passive watching. This is a demographic that requires more than merely entertainment by media unlike the older generations because they would desire to be involved in the process. Real-time interaction capabilities including voting, commenting and sharing make up the participants rather than the passive consumers hence becoming part of the content ecosystem. This is one of the main distinctive features that distinguish variety shows among other classic forms of entertainment.

In this regard, social media platforms enable Gen Z to feel more attached to the shows and participants in them, and, therefore, amplify the experience. The live experience also provides an immediate platform to air views and opinions, manipulate the course of the shows and connect emotionally with other viewers and the contestants. This indicates a change of the media consumer roles thus the consumers are not just observers but the creators of cultural products effectively destroying the distinction between content producers and consumers. The results of this work are consistent with the studies that indicated that engagement is not limited to the process of consumption but goes to the activity of co-creation where the viewer actively contributes to the spread of content and discourse around it.

The researchers also established that the social interaction was one of the major factors that kept Chinese Gen Z engaged. This confirms the claim of the U&G theory that social media is often applied in the process of social and community integration. Gen Z has a strong urge to associate with their peers and form social connections based on the content they watch, and variety shows offer a special venue of these social interactions. Using the form of real-time conversations and fan communities on the websites such as Weibo, Douyin, and Bilibili, Gen Z viewers do not simply receive the content but are also participants in socializing, networking, and sharing their opinions about the shows.

These social media and Bilibili, in particular, are valuable platforms where the fan culture may be promoted, as users can communicate with like-minded people. Fans tend to make and use memes, talk about the episodes, and discuss their favorite contestants, which turns out to be an interactive and immersive process of entertainment. This socialization is essential because it enables the users to establish identity,

create groups and obtain social validation on the manner in which they interact with each other. As an illustration, Gen Z audience will be able to join fan clubs, comment on videos, and vote a contestant, which would make them feel part of a bigger community. This shows that the consumption of the media by Gen Z is connected with the shaping of the social identity and self-presentation, which can also be explained by the active characteristics of the media use promoted by U&G theory.

Self-expression is another reason why one can be attracted to variety shows on social media. This was especially pronounced by the proliferation and distribution of user-generated content (UGC) as far as the shows were concerned. The platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili not only make Gen Z watch the shows but also create and share their own interpretation of the material. Gen z can express themselves by using variety shows, whether it is by creating reaction videos, competing in online challenges, or commenting on performances. This observation is consistent with the U&G theory, which states that the desire to engage in media consumption is usually guided by the need to be an individual and to receive social confirmation.

The power to produce content and share it on the social media platforms offers a platform that is used in personal branding and identity making. Gen z viewers become the creators of the media industry, similar to influencers, by creating and sharing their views of the variety shows. It is an extension of a larger cultural trend in which social media is no longer seen as a form of entertainment but rather a means of self-expression and self-image creation. This focus on UGC reflects how the media is taking on a more participatory and interactive form with content creation and consumption being mutually supportive.

5.1. Theoretical integration

The results of this paper build upon and validate the fundamental postulates to Uses-and-Gratifications Theory (U&G) because they indicate that interactive media, including social media platforms, can satisfy the psychological needs of sharing, socializing, and self-expressing of Generation Z. U&G theory The theory assumes that the audience proactively selects media according to their needs in motivation and this research demonstrates that they can meet not only their passive needs but also through interactive practices.

One of the most important lessons of this study is the change of passive consumption to active participation. Consumption in traditional forms of media entertainment, like television or radio, is a more passive type of consumption. Social media has however introduced a new form of media consumption wherein the viewers are able to directly impact the contents including engaging with it in real time and also help in the continuous discussion of the content.

It is an engaging form of media consumption with significant implications to media producers and platform developers who aspire to meet the increasing needs of Gen Z.

5.2. Comparison with past research

The findings of the current research are consistent with the past findings on the media consumption among young people in the West and China, which confirms that entertainment, socialization, and self-expression are universal drives in the media consumption patterns of Gen Z. Such motivations have been emphasized in previous studies both in the traditional media and the digital media and our results affirm its relevance in the Chinese context.

Nevertheless, this research also can point to cultural diversities in Gen Z media consumer behavior. Western studies underline the individualistic behavior and the orientation on the consumption of the provided content, but this work discovers that the social and community nature of the media use is instilled in Chinese Gen Z. Social status significance, face culture (a tendency to preserve a social image) and fan communities formation are the peculiar features of the Chinese environment that can be used in comparison

with Western media consumption patterns. Group identity and peer influence are more prominent in China and potentially this explains the immense contribution of fan culture and social media engagement in forming the tendency of Gen Z to learn variety shows.

Furthermore, the extreme dependence on domestic platforms like Douyin, Bilibili, and Weibo also distinguishes the media behavior of Chinese Gen Z compared with Western countries, where such behavior is focused on global platforms, in particular, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The cultural peculiarity of the Chinese media ecosystem, including digital platform peculiarities, allows assuming that the further research of the media consumption of Gen Z should take into account the influence of local platforms and their effects on the behavior of young people.

A paradigm shift in the way young people consume media is also a fact that this study identifies. Where the previous generations could have been satisfied with the passive consumption of television or radio shows, Gen z has changed all this, making the media consumption process more interactive and involving. One of the biggest cultural and technological changes in media consumption is the transition of passive audience to active viewers of programs via voting, commenting, or creating programs. It is a major deviation of historical patterns of media consumption.

6. Conclusion

This paper shows that the use of social media to engage with the diversity by Chinese Gen Z is motivated by a blend of entertainment, socialization and expressionism. The research supports the applicability of the Uses-and-Gratifications Theory to the contemporary behaviors of the media, especially within the digital age where the distinction between content use and production is becoming more unclear.

6.1. Contribution to the literature

The article will add to the current body of literature by giving a detailed bibliometric review of the research tendencies covering Gen Z, social media, and variety shows. It brings out the major themes, gaps in the existing literature and makes new contributions on how the Chinese Gen Z follows the entertainment contents in highly interactive and participative ways.

6.2. Media producers and marketers implications

The study offers media producers and marketers an idea that to successfully reach out to Gen Z, it is necessary to add interactive elements to the variety show, including real-time voting, comments, and UGC. The culture of fans and socialization must be exploited to create communities over the shows. Besides, collaboration with influencers on Douyin and Bilibili could increase the interest to this segment.

6.3. Future research directions

The psychological motives of Gen Z can be the topic of a future study that may involve primary data gathering (e.g., survey or interviews). It would also be interesting to compare how Gen Z consumes the media in various cultural settings. Lastly, the transformation of social media platforms (e.g., TikTok) and their contribution to changes in the consumption of entertainment would be a beneficial area to explore further.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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