Descriptions of Snapchat Usage by French and U.S. Social Media users

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ABSTRACT

The following study explored how differently French and American Social media users use Snapchat. Thirteen semi-structured interviews with six French participants (aged 18-25) and seven American participants (aged 18-25) who used Snapchat were conducted via Zoom and analyzed using thematic analysis. Results showed that, not only did the features used within Snapchat were different between the two sample groups, but the role of Snapchat on interpersonal relationships and social status also differed. This study described major usage differences between the two sample groups but dove deeper into how culture affects how people use media. As most media is created in the United States, scholars often focus on American groups to conduct their research and generalize it to the world population. This study is one example on how culture needs to be a factor when conducting media research as it affects the way media is used and perceived.

DESCRIPTIONS OF SNAPCHAT USAGE BY FRENCH AND U.S. SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

The world of social media is very focused on American society especially as most networks have been created here. Auxier & Anderson (2021) say that 81% of American adults have reported using YouTube, 69% Facebook, and 25% Snapchat. However, there are not many studies that show the social media use of other countries let alone compare them to that of the United States. Ferrand & Federico (2013) wrote that, in France in the early 1990s, social media was mostly used by scholars for research and theory, but that from the early 2000s to 2013 social media use in France had changed drastically and became more mainstream.

Being born and raised with two different cultures makes it easier to comprehend the importance of understanding other cultures. American society is very self-centered and often does not realize that people from different cultures do things differently. Taspinar (2010) wrote that people who are not American or have never lived in the United States often do not realize the extreme self-centered nature of Americans in all aspects of their culture. As the world is becoming more and more tech savvy and the usage of social media is growing on a global scale, now is the best time to study cultural differences in social media usage. Rozin (2003) conducted a survey with groups of respondents from all different cultural backgrounds that showed very basic statements such as "It is immoral to disobey your parents" and "Old people deserve more respect than younger people in society"; the answers to those differed immensely depending on the groups' cultural backgrounds. If simple statement like these vary so much, how can we expect social media usage to be the same? Tsai and Knutson showed that social media videos were more popular with the American public when they showed anger, rage, or negative emotions; on the other hand, the study showed that in non-western cultures such as Japan, a video is more likely to go viral if it shows more positive emotions (Ramachandran, 2021). Culture plays a major role on how people react, interact with, and use social media.

From 2014 to 2021 Snapchat has grown from 46 million active users to 319 million (Statista,2022). Snapchat is a very fast-growing social media platform that allows its users to send photos, video, and private messages to friends as well as post them on their "story" for all their friends to see. Snapchat has been the subject of many communication studies as it has introduced a very modern take on electronic communication. As sated previously, it is imperative for people to understand cultural differences and how different cultures communicate which is why studying the distinctions in how people describe their Snapchat usage in France compared to the U.S. is a worthy topic of communication research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To compare descriptions of Snapchat usage by French and U.S. social media users, previous research will be discussed to provide background information as to how these two cultures differ in their use of Snapchat. The goals of the study are to identify how French people use Snapchat as well as how Americans do so. By utilizing uses and gratification theory this study will further explore the idea of how a culture influences the use of a social media platform. To complete a comprehensive study, the literature review will examine studies carried out on social media in America as well as social media in France. The literature review will then focus on Snapchat in these two respective countries. Finally, the framework of the uses and gratification theory will guide greater understanding as to how people use Snapchat to communicate and why different cultures might use this social media platform differently.

Social Media and Snapchat in The United States

The first ever social media network, SixDegrees.com, appeared in 1997 (Dewing, 2012). From there, many social networks have been launched and many have disappeared. "By the late 2000s, social media had gained widespread acceptance and some services gained huge numbers of users. For example, in November 2012, Facebook announced it had 1 billion users worldwide, of whom the majority were American. In July 2012, Twitter had an estimated 517 million users" (Dewing, 2012, p. 2).

While social media is seen quite negatively by the public sphere because of controversies surrounding its practices and its effects on mental health, it is still used quite extensively. Roughly seven-in-ten Americans say they use social media platforms (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Auxier and Anderson (2021) also reported that these numbers have been stable over the past five years. Social media consumption has been growing amongst generations and according to Gordon (2014), mobile app users aged 35-40 used social media apps for an average of 80 hours per month. Even 80% of Gen Xers (people born between the 1960s and 1980s) have reported being on Facebook and Twitter in 2017 (Bose,2017).

While people of all ages are active on social networks, age does play a big role as to which platforms are most popular and the number of platforms that are being used. "Majorities of 18- to 29-year- olds say they use Instagram or Snapchat and about half say they use TikTok, with those on the younger end of this cohort – ages 18 to 24 – being especially likely to report using Instagram (76%), Snapchat (75%) or TikTok (55%)" (Auxier & Anderson, 2021, p. 5). In 2016, 97.5% of young adults in America reported using at least one social media site (Villanti et al., 2017). In the same study, 85% of respondents reported using 6 or more social media site regularly while most reported regularly using an average of 7.6 sites (Villanti er al., 2017). While Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are more popular amongst younger generations, Auxier and Anderson (2021) said that people 65 and older were more likely to use Facebook more than any other platform.

Madden (2010) wrote that a big reason for the popularity of social media in the United States is that there are few other spaces-online or offline- that allow people of all generations, whether under the age of 18 or over the age of 65, to communicate across the same network. Valuable connections can be made through shared videos and photos (Madden, 2010). Social media is not only a way for companies and organizations to reach a large amount of the population but for the majority, social media is a way for individuals to stay connected with the ones they love (Dewing, 2012).

Snapchat has been one of the quickest and most unprecedented growth in the history of instant messaging services and social networking sites (Piwek & Joinson, 2015). Snapchat was founded by three Stanford University undergraduates in 2011 and is today one of the most well-known ephemeral communication networks (Lemay et al., 2017). Anderson (2015) discussed that Snapchat is mostly used by young adults and had upwards of 100 million active daily users in 2015.

One of the main reasons people use snapchat is to maintain relationships. A study that used focus groups at Midwestern University comprised of young adults indicated that Snapchat was reserved for their closest interpersonal relationships (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). The participants of these focus groups explained that, in their experience, Snapchat enhanced their family relationships, current friendships, and romantic relationships (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). Another study revealed that "over 47% of young adults started using Snapchat because their friends were using it, and because it's fun to use (17%), with other reasons being: easy and free (8%), curiosity (6%), communication (5%), and privacy (2%). Almost 80% of users reported that they use Snapchat to interact with no more than 12 people on a regular basis" (Piwek & Joinson, 2015, p. 361).

The participants in the Midwestern University study said that while Snapchat allows them to communicate in their existing relationships, that they do not use Snapchat to create new relationships "Snapchat is more personal." Said one of the young adults (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). Many of the participants thought that using Snapchat is more about keeping ties with close friends and that using the app to communicate with strangers would be awkward

(Vaterlaus et al., 2016). A few participants viewed Snapchat as a "secondary step" or a "next step in the relationship" first building a relationship through voice or text and then progressing the relationship with Snapchat to show "what I look like." This was consistent with the general perception that Snapchat was used to enhance existing relationships. Overall, the use of Snapchat is growing in the United States, especially amongst young adults, and has become one of the most popular social networks in the country.

Overall, Snapchat's popularity in the United States has been steadily growing over the years due to its unique approach to online communication. A big reason Americans seem drawn to use Snapchat is that it is an easy way of maintaining relationships with friends thanks to its large user base.

Social Media and Snapchat in France

Much of the literature and research done on social media by French scholars revolves around the impact of social media on different aspects of life. Not many French or American scholars have focused solely on social media usage rates in France which is why this section of the review of literature will primarily focus on the research that has been done and that will bring value to this project.

In many countries, the analysis of social networks has been constantly expanding and supported by the international scientific association INSNA and journals such as Social Networks, Connections, JOSS (Journal of Social Structures), and in the Spanish-speaking world, REDES (Revista hispana para el análisis de redes sociales) (Ferrand & Federico, 2013). In France, the highlight of recent years is the structuring of this scientific community within the framework of the AFS (French Sociology Association). To coordinate research on this theme, several researchers took the initiative, in 2005, to create a group. The first step was the creation of a discussion list, and the second was that of creating within the French Sociology Association (AFS), the RT 26 "Social Networks" (Ferrand & Federico, 2013). The events organized by RT 26 reflect the vitality of social network analysis in France. At the 2006 AFS Congress in Bordeaux, the group organized four sessions on the theme of relations and websites as social resources. During that event about twenty papers were presented on the networks of professionals, the surroundings and social worlds, the relationship between networks and communication or between networks and politics (Ferrand & Federico, 2013).

The proliferation of digital social networks has created new types of social relationships in France. The internet users state various aspects of their identity, either for the benefit of friends or at least of people belonging to circumscribed circles or on content-sharing sites for a much wider audience (Cardon, 2013). Such a proliferation weakens the separation between traditional public space and ordinary conversations of individuals (Cardon,2013). Many French scholars have been sceptic on the effects of social media on society and question whether it encourages conformity, or on the contrary gives a richer sense of culture to its users. Cardon (2013) notes that, with social networks, people with limited social capital can sometimes broaden their relational perimeter and benefit from social and cultural opportunities.

Many French researchers have been wondering for at least thirty years about the impact of the diffusion of technologies on the sociability of individuals. Facebook, because of its popularity and the practices it generates, is a particularly interesting case study. Dang Nguyen and Lethiais (2016), used data from a survey, which had a sample size of 2,000 French Facebook users, to better understand the link between social network use and sociability. While there is a positive link between Facebook's intensity of use and sociability, the social network is rarely seen as a way to strengthen that sociability (Dang Nguyen & Leithiais, 2016). More specifically, the study shows that Facebook contributes more to increasing weak links than strong ones, and that its perceived influence on sociability is highly dependent on the social and generational context: the less culturally and financially endowed classes perceive a stronger impact of the online service on their sociability (Dang Nguyen & Leithiais, 2016).

In France, YouTube is the most used social network (86% of French people), 28% go there every day or almost, but only 6% publish content at the same frequency. Facebook is a close second with 82% . More than one in two French people use Facebook daily and 17% publish content every day. On the other hand, Tiktok is one of the platforms on which Internet users are most active, with an average of twelve connections per month – as often as on YouTube (IPSOS, 2021). The motivations for going on different networks are not the same either: women say they go on platforms to share and find inspiration; they will prefer Pinterest (65%), Facebook (55%), or Instagram (54%). The men find themselves between fans and exchange, hence their presence on Twitch (73%), Tumblr (70%), and Reddit (69%). As for online shopping (Social commerce) via social networks, it is more women aged 25 to 44 who will go through Facebook or Instagram to buy beauty products or ready-to-wear clothes (IPSOS, 2021).

Media consumption by young people under the age of 20 continues to diversify in France. The time spent on screens continues to grow, especially on smartphones and Snapchat is now their favorite messaging app (IPSOS, 2018). On their smartphones, the 7 to 12-year-olds favor gaming applications; the 13 to 19-year-olds strongly diversify uses: social networks, messaging, music, videos, etc. Among the platforms, YouTube remains at the

forefront, followed by Snapchat which continues to grow rapidly, including amongst the very young generations of 7 to 12-year-olds (IPSOS, 2018).

When asked what content young European adults sent through Snapchat the most frequent answers were that they sent funny things (98.7%), pictures of themselves (85.7%), and pictures of what they are currently doing (85.7%) (Utz et al., 2015). The streaks, well known by snapchat users, disappear if snaps are not sent regularly between two users. It is therefore relevant to link this function to the notion of usage intensity. In a study conducted by Guérin (2020) results of surveys distributed to young French people show that among the features specific to Snapchat, streaks seem much more used, as 73% of the surveys attest, than the snap score or trophies that are functionalities available within the app. The gender distribution shows that boys, like girls, are concerned about "having streaks" (61% of boys and 77.5% of girls). The other two functions mentioned above are much less used; a quarter of respondents say they do not know the snap score function (Guérin, 2020). Overall, Snapchat has grown a lot in France and a big reason for that seems to be due to the big attraction that streaks has brought to the social network.

While research of social media is still a growing field in France, the statistics show that Snapchat is mostly used by the young French population and that its popularity is still rising due to features such as streaks.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The theory of uses and gratifications emerged in the 1940s, especially with the research of the pianist Schuman who tried to demystify the motives that encouraged people to listen to the radio (Bryant & Miron, 2004). However, it was in 1959 that the theory really began when Elihu Katz wanted to bring a new approach to the research of mass communication (Bryant & Miron, 2004). Indeed, this researcher was not interested in the impact of the media on their audience as many had done before, but rather in people's use of these media. This new approach has allowed researchers to consider the audience as active rather than just passive beings, as they were previously considered (Bryant & Miron, 2004). In fact, the theory seeks to explain how individuals choose and use media among all those available in their environment to satisfy certain needs and achieve certain goals (Katz et al., 1974).

By analyzing the social and psychological functions of the mass media proposed in the literature, Katz formed five major groups of needs: Self-actualizing, esteem, belongingness and love, safety, and psychological (Katz et al., 1973). Thus, the individual selects the media that interests them according to their needs and they interpret the messages in their own way. Once the needs have been defined, the theory is based on the typology of McQuail et al., (1972), which groups together four major functions of the media from which individuals will derive a gratification: inform, persuade, transmit culture, and entertain.

The media that have been selected by the individual allow them to feel either of these gratifications. The main idea is that mass communication is used to connect or disconnect through various relationships with different types of others, whether they are friends, family, community, or self. The theory, therefore, attempts to understand the range of individual gratifications of the need "to be connected" through the different media that have their own content and support (Katz et al., 1974). In this research, Snapchat, is considered as the medium selected by individuals to fill a specific need and thus derive gratification. By applying the theory of uses and gratification, this study aims to provide a better understanding of how individuals from two different cultures use Snapchat differently.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Scholars such as Auxier & Anderson (2016) have done extensive research on statistics regarding social media use in the United States and how these mediums are used. At this point, however, little attention has been given to how Americans describe their use of Snapchat and what functionalities of the app attract them most. Thus, the first research question is posed:

RQ1: How do American people describe their use of Snapchat?

While social media analysis is a growing field in France and scholars such as Guérin (2020) have done very significant research on the popularity of Snapchat in young French adults, there are still major gaps that need to be filled. Not many French or American scholars have focused on how French people describe their usage of Snapchat. Thus, the second research question is posted:

RQ2: How do French People describe their use of Snapchat?

METHODS

The research method for my study will be based on qualitative work. In order to best understand the differences in how people use Snapchat according to their cultural differences, qualitative research will gather the greatest amount of relevant information and content through interviews as numerical data will not be a factor in this

study. This study will use the interpretivism paradigm as it believes that reality has multiple layers, and more than a single phenomenon can be interpreted many ways. In the case of this study, Snapchat is used and interpreted differently based on culture.

Method Description

I will be conducting interview-based qualitative research to answer my research questions. Qualitative methods have been used in social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. When comparing qualitative and quantitative research methods, it is easy to see that there is a big difference between natural world phenomena and human, and this difference is due to the ability that humans have to speak (Danaee Fard, et al, 2007). Qualitative research methods are formed to help researchers understand human beings and their social and cultural living beds (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011). As the goal of the research being done is to understand differences in Snapchat use due to cultural variations, an interview based qualitative study will help give the best understanding.

The research paradigm I will be using is interpretivism. Interpretivists look at a single phenomenon that may have multiple interpretations rather than one truth that can be studied or found by quantitative measures (Pham, 2018). "Interpretivism researchers tend to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context instead of trying to generalize the base of understanding for the whole population" (Pham, 2018, p.3). In this study, Snapchat is the phenomenon that is being perceived and used differently based on differing cultural upbringings.

Participants

The population of interest for this study includes individuals over the age of 18 that are users of the Snapchat app as well as other social media networks. Through the help of my father who is a professor as well as social networking, and contacting friends, I will hopefully acquire 12-14 interviewees that are willing to participate. Of those 12-14 interviewees, half of them will be from France and the other half from the United States. In order to acquire as many participants as possible I will reach out to some of my friends from France and ask for their help in finding potential interviewees. If I need further help gaining participants, I will utilize the CST 110 Research Pool to recruit more interviewees.

Procedure

I will be conducting semi-structured or moderately scheduled interviews that will include discussions of the utilization of social media networks in general, and dive deeper in the utilization of Snapchat. I will begin the interview by letting the interviewee know that the topics discussed, as well as their names and personal information, will remain confidential. The interviews will vary in length due to the uncertainty of the participants' depth of answers but will go anywhere between 30 and 60 minutes. I will audio record every interview, as well as take detailed notes to ensure all the information needed is documented and accurate.

Analysis

For this study, I will be using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of themes across a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis allows researchers to recognize and make sense of different meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The thematic analysis method is a way making sense of commonalities and identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

To begin coding my data, I will need to read and go over the data collected to understand the content better as well as recognize reoccurring themes and ideas. Once that is done, I will focus on the research question and highlight anything from the data gathered that relates to those questions. To keep all of the data neatly organized, I will be taping each individual utterance and excerpt from the interview transcripts to a notecard with the corresponding research question, interview number, page number, and line number. Next, each stack of codes will be put under their corresponding research question to break them down further into thematic groups based on the utterance in the stack of codes. The goal of this is to have narrowed down piles for easier reference and more relevant information. The thematic analysis technique will help me keep my data organized as well as make sure that the information needed is arranged by themes.

RESULTS

Upon completion of data analysis, the researcher uncovered four overarching themes; both research questions have the same four themes which yielded different results. The reasoning behind choosing the same themes for each research questions was to compare the data. These four themes were the use of audio recordings, the role of snapchat on social status in high school, the friendships people have with those they snap, and the use of streaks. All of these themes are explained below.

RQ1: How do American people describe their use of Snapchat

The purpose of RQ1 was to understand the ways American people use snapchat, which features they use, and how the app affects their daily life. The idea of choosing which social media to use, thus which features to use, based on needs stems from the uses and gratification theory, the theory to lead this study. Four themes emerged.

Audio recordings

One of the features offered on Snapchat are the audio recordings. The audio recording feature is available within the app when one slides right to send a written text, once in the text area the user has the ability to click on the audio recording to send a voice memo to the whomever they would like. This feature was made available by Snapchat in order to accommodate people's busy lives and make messaging faster and easier.

This theme was chosen as the data collected from participants from RQ1 all responded with similar answers. It was made clear that American users of Snapchat do not use audio recordings. While none of the participants reported using audio recordings very much, some participants did not even know that audio recordings were even a feature of the app. Emma, who is an avid Snapchat user, stated "I didn't even know Snapchat had audio recordings". Another participant, Riley, said "I had no clue I could do that". While it is evident that participants who did not know about a feature would not use it, many participants that did know about the feature still chose to not take advantage of audio recordings. Another participant, Carter, stated "I know about audio messages, but I never use them because I'll usually just type instead".

When participants that knew about audio recordings were asked why they chose to ignore the feature, they could not find a specific reason. When Ella was asked if she used audio recordings she said, "absolutely not, but there is no reason why, I just don't". The very few American participants that used audio recordings did so as a last resort. Connor stated, "I really never use audio recordings, the few couple times that I have, it was because I was in a situation when I really couldn't type". While audio recordings are a feature that makes messaging faster and easier, it is not a popular feature amongst American Snapchat users.

The role of snapchat on social status in high school

The second theme emerged while participants were asked about how their social status has changed since using Snapchat. Participants answered that it has no effect on their social status today but that in High School, Snapchat played a big role in developing people's social statuses. Many American Snapchat users start using the app in middle school and accumulate statistics of usage and many aspects of Snapchat usage can be seen by friends on the platform.

Participants started by saying that they rarely think of Snapchat's effects on their social status and that other than broadening their social circles it has not really done much. On the other hand, when the follow up question about those effects in high school, answers quickly changed. One participant, Emma, stated, "while this has changed, in high school Snap was a huge social status tool, people looked at others' best friends list and their Snap score but also their location to see who was at who's house". The reoccurring responses showed that American Snapchat users were very observant of others' Snap scores and best friends lists. Another participant, Maddy, said "Best friends list the biggest one, it was always about trying to get best friends with popular people". Not only were Snap scores and best friends lists important but keeping a good image was too; Amelia stated, "In high school it was a big thing, I felt the need to Snap a lot of people and my stories had to be prefect".

Throughout the interviews this theme kept on emerging and answers from one participant to another were very much alike. Every participant without exception stated that in college and in adulthood Snapchat does not have a big effect on social status as most people do not feel the need nor do they care about what other people do on the platform. However, Snapchat was very important in forming a social status in high school and was a tool to climb up within this status.

The friendships people have with those they Snap

This theme arose when participants were asked what relationships they have with the people they Snap. A couple of main points reoccurred throughout the interviews; American people tend to Snap those they are not

particularly close with but want to get closer to. The participants said that they tend to use text messages for those they acknowledge as close friends.

Snap is often used as a tool to meet new people and create new friendships, Emma stated, "I have a wide range of friendships, a few close friends but mostly acquaintances. A lot of people I Snap, I Snap to get closer, and I mostly text my close friends". Another participant, Riley, said "my friendships on Snap are usually super casual like not important but most of my close friendships were strengthened by snap and some even started on Snap". Snapchat is mostly used by American people to get to know new acquaintances and strengthen relationships.

Some participants have also talked about the importance Snapchat has played in building romantic relationships. Connor stated, "I definitely ask for the Snap of girls I'm interested in when I first meet them, it is such a great tool to build that relationship and get to know them better before maybe moving onto giving them my phone number". Overall, the second theme showed that the large majority of American Snapchat users choose to interact on the platform with those they want to get closer to whether it is for a friendship or a romantic relationship.

The use of streaks

Streaks, as mentioned previously, are a way to keep track of how many days in a row one person sends a Snap to another. Streaks are a way for people to keep in touch and while it is a very popular feature amongst the American participants it also seems to be one of unimportance.

While almost every single one of the American participants reported using the streaks feature on Snapchat, they also said that they were not important to them. One participant, Maddy, said, "I participate in streaks but they're usually not super important. If I have streaks with close friends it's easy to remember them but otherwise I tend to forget them". Streaks are unimportant to many of its users yet so many people keep on participating in them and one reason that was mentioned a few times was the fear of disappointing the person the streak is held with; Riley said "I don't care about streaks at all but if someone starts them I will usually keep up because I feel bad if I don't, I don't want them to think I don't like them or am mad at them or something like that".

American users also use streaks as a means to get closer or to get to know someone better. Carter stated, "I'll have streaks with people I just added or if I want to get close to someone, like I had a streak with my current girlfriend before we were together". While streaks are not an important feature for most, they remain widely used as a tool to stay in touch with friends or even to get closer to people.

RQ2: How do French people describe their use of Snapchat

The purpose of the second research question was to understand the ways French people use snapchat, which features they use, and how the app affects their daily life. While the goal is similar to the first research question and the themes are the same, the data collected is completely different with the change in sample population. It is also worth noting that the quotes used for this research question have been translated from French to English by the researcher who is fluent in both languages.

Audio recordings

The use of Audio recording for the American population was very minimal and for some the feature was completely unknown. The results for the French population is quite different; some of the participants referend to the audio recordings as their favorite feature while others described it as the main reason for using Snapchat.

When participants were asked if they used audio recordings, Guillaume, stated "Well obviously, I rarely send typed messages it is much easier to send an audio recording and I can do it while I'm moving, and I don't have to really think about it". The ease of use that audio recordings bring to the platform is very attractive to the French participants and some even said that the app would not be quite as relevant without the audio recordings. One participant, Maxime, said "In reality, when I'm talking to anyone on snap it's only through audio recordings". Maxime, like many other French users, use Snapchat primarily to send audio recordings.

Another participant, Thomas, said "I'm lazy, even when I have the ability to types in the text feature of Snapchat I just don't because I can simply record myself, it takes less time and it's also a much better way to actually show intonations. When the conversation is serious it's complicated to tell if someone is being sarcastic or is joking through text and audio recordings make this confusion inexistent". Not only are audio recordings used for their ease, but French users also describe the feature as necessary when having an important conversation that is mediated as feelings and intonation can be better understood.

The role of snapchat on social status in high school

When asked about how Snapchat affects their social status, many French users found the question to be a bit humorous as they never really gave much thought to it. While social media is widely used throughout France, it seems as though Snapchat is not one that it used as a tool to enhance social status.

Most of the responses collected when the question was asked looked like Thomas' response who stated "It really does not affect my social status at all. Snap can help me meet more people but does not really play a role in my social status". Another point that was discussed during interviews with French people was the ability to reach more people with ease; Maxime stated, "I wouldn't say that my social status has changed with my use of Snapchat, but I do think that I can reach a lot of people, I often make announcements on my story and such about an event or something I am trying to sell".

When it came specifically to social status in high school, answers did not change. Laurine said, "the majority of people did not care at all, there might have been a small group of people that looked at the scores and all that but that was definitely a very small group of people". Social status of French users is not affected by the use of Snapchat. People do not take particular interest in Snap scores or best friends list as the American participants did.

The friendships people have with those they Snap

French users were also all unanimous on what kind of friendship they have with those they send Snaps to. The French participants only send Snapchats to people they are close to and did not understand why anyone would feel the need to Snap people they barely know nor would they feel comfortable doing so.

One participant, Thomas, stated "I have no reason to Snap people I don't know well; I really only communicate through Snap, so I just do so with those that I am close to". While the French participants all reported sending Snaps almost exclusively to their close friends, there were a few participants that talked about sending snap to get someone's number; Maxime said "I only Snap people I am good friends with but there have been a few times where I met a girl that was a friend of a friend or something like that that I Snapped in order to get her number". Unlike the American participants, French Snapchat users really only send Snapchats to people they have already made a connection with. French people do not use Snapchat as a tool to get closer with someone, the app is used more so as an easy daily communication platform.

The use of streaks

Streaks are a feature that French people are very much aware of, but it is not as popular with them as it is with the American participants. People in France reported having, at one point or another, enjoyed keeping up with streaks but quickly getting annoyed with them and trying to avoid them as much as possible.

The initial responses when asked what the significance of streaks were to them, French participants said that they did not care for them at all, Guillaume stated, "I don't have time for them, I forget about them, and I just don't care about that enough to pay attention to them". On the other hand, when asked if they ever did care about streaks many of them reconsidered their answers and changed their thoughts. One participant, Thomas, said "Well I don't think I ever took them super seriously, but I did have quite a good number of streaks when I was in high school, but I grew out of that". All over the board, answers were very similar in that French users don't like streaks and try to avoid them as much as possible as they tend to forget or just do not have time for them.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to use elements from the uses and gratification theory in order to compare the use of Snapchat between French people and American people. The theory's main aspect used for this research was the approach of considering the audience as active rather than just passive beings. As mentioned previously the theory seeks to explain how individuals choose and use media among all those available in their environment to satisfy certain needs and achieve certain goals (Katz et al., 1974). This theory is a great tool that might explain why there is a difference in Snapchat usage between the two countries' populations.

RQ1: How do American people describe their use of Snapchat

The four overarching themes that emerged for both research questions were the use of audio recordings, the role of Snapchat in social status in high school, the friendships people have with those they Snap, and the use of streaks. These four themes were chosen because of similarity in response within the sample group and the difference in responses between the two sample groups of American people and French people.

The results from RQ1 revealed that American people do not use audio recordings very often. In fact, many of the participants did not even know about the feature. This result is particularly interesting when looking at the uses and gratification theory which explains that people use specific media (or feature) to satisfy a need. In the case of the American population audio recording are not needed to satisfy a need.

This study also extended upon Auxier & Anderson's (2021) study on social media use in 2021. Auxier & Anderson found that Snapchat was the most used social media platform amongst younger generations. This study showed that people heavily used Snapchat as a means to ameliorate their social status. While many reported not paying much attention to people's Snapchat settings the older they got, most said that in high school, the Snap scores and best friends list were a great indicator of a person's popularity. In order for people to grow their social status, a heavy use of the platform was necessary which holds forth with Auxier & Anderson's study (2021).

The participants reported having friendly relationships with those they Snap but only a few of those friendships are very close relationships. Many American users use Snapchat as a way to get closer with the person they are communicating which expands on Vaterlaus et al. (2016) study on Snapchat behaviors and young adult interpersonal relationships which says that their sample group of American people explained that, in their experience, Snapchat enhanced their family relationships, current friendships, and romantic relationships (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). Snapchat is often used as a tool for enhancing and creating close friendships.

The use of streaks is well known throughout Snapchat users. The participants of this study showed that streaks were popular in terms of use, but that most do not actually enjoy participating in them. The main reason participants kept up with their streaks was to not offend the person on the other end. Some also reported having a feeling of security when those they are close to keep up with their streaks. These results also expand upon Auxier & Anderson's (2021) study on the popularity of the platform as it is necessary for users to send Snaps every day.

RQ2: How do French people describe their use of Snapchat

As mentioned previously the four overarching themes that emerged for this research question are the same as the first research questions which were the use of audio recordings, the role of Snapchat in social status in high school, the friendships people have with those they Snap, and the use of streaks. While there is a lot of research available on social media usage in the United States, the research on French social media usage is very limited as mentioned in the review of literature. The discussion for the second research question will thus be focused on the comparison of the two sample groups.

Audio recordings are a perfect example of difference in Snapchat usage between French and American people. While there has not been any research done on the use of audio recordings in France, the fact that audio recordings were so popular amongst the French participants makes a great argument for the uses and gratification theory. While the American users do not seem to have a need to be fulfilled by audio recordings, the French users do. Audio recordings were so important to the participants that some said it was the only reason they use Snapchat as much as they did.

Another big difference in Snapchat usage between American participants and French participants was the impact on social status Snapchat has. When asked about the impact on their social status, French participants reported having very little interest in using the app as a means to ameliorate their social status. Even when they were asked about the effects in high school, French participants still did not seem to have ever been interested in other people's Snapchat usage. The only real effect that Snapchat had one anything related to social status was the fact that Snapchat helped them meet new people.

The friendships people have with those they Snap is also much different in France. French participants reported using snapchat as a primary means to talk to their close group of friends which expands on the research done by IPSOS (2018) on the dynamic and diverse consumption of social media which indicated that the time spent on screens continues to grow, especially on smartphones and Snapchat is now favorite messaging app of young French people. The main reason people use Snapchat is daily communication with their friend group which would explain its growth in usage.

Streaks seem to be something that French people were interested in when the app first became popular amongst their age group, but the feature phased out with age. Streaks are very unimportant to the French participants, and, unlike the American participants, they have no interest in trying to keep up with them. While streaks are a widely used feature around the world and seem to be used by most American users, the French Snapchat users do not find any use in participating in them.

LIMITATIONS

Time and experience were the main limitations that came up while conducting this study. This researcher had one month to conduct all interviews and analyze the data which was not quite long enough to create a more in-depth analysis of Snapchat use between two different populations. Thirteen interviews were not a large enough sample size to make any great realizations which was mostly due to the time limitations.

Another limitation for this study was the lack of already existing research on the use of social media in France which did not allow for much expansion of studies in the discussion part of the paper.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could look at comparing two European countries and their use of Snapchat in order to understand if the differences in use between France and the United States are specific to those two countries or if there are more similarities between European countries. This future study would take a very similar process to this research and could use interviews of two different sample groups to uncover similarities and differences. Another future research possibility would be to understand the specific needs that Snapchat satisfies for each of the sample groups looked at in this study. Once again, the process for this study would look very similar and would follow a qualitative approach. The high school culture difference could also be analyzed as to possibly explain the reason social status is such an important aspect of Snapchat in American high schools. Interviews would be a great way to uncover those results.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to gain insight on how culture affects to use of social media. While there is extensive research done on social media use in the United States, there are not a lot of available studies on the social media use in other countries as the majority of scholars interested in this topic are American and might not have access to sample populations from outside countries. This study is a step towards better understanding how different cultures seek to fulfill different needs and thus use mediated platforms in different ways. Snapchat is just one example of many but shows that even the simple concepts can be perceived and used in divergent manners. This qualitative study utilized semi-structured, in-depth interviews to allow 13 participants from two different sample populations to share the way they use Snapchat and how it affects them on a day-to-day basis. This study provided some key takeaways for understanding what features are important to American and French populations on Snapchat and how they differ from one country to the other. They main factors that produced those differences were the type of communication desired through the app, the importance given to its use as an indicator of social status, and the specific needs sought after while using Snapchat.

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APPENDIX

1. How many times a day do you open the Snapchat app?
2. What are some of your favorite features on Snapchat?
   a. How often do you use audio recording?
   b. How often do you participate in streaks?
   c. How many times have you used the "story" feature?
   d. Are the little accomplishment awards of any interest to you?
3. How does it make you feel to receive a Snapchat notification?
   a. Could you describe the feeling of receiving a Snap from someone close versus someone you do not know as well?
4. How important is it for you to keep up with your Snapchat streaks?
   a. how often do you forget about them?
   b. How would you describe the importance of keeping up streaks with close friends?
   c. Do you tend to lose streaks if you are not close with the person?
5. What kind of relationships do you have with the people you Snap?
   a. How can Snapchat strengthen relationships?
   b. How often do you Snap people you do not know well?
6. How differently do you react to a Snap when it is a typed message as opposed to a simple picture?
7. How would you describe the effects that Snapchat have on your social status?
   a. How would you describe the way most people would respond to this question?
8. A lot of college students seem to use the app for group chats, how significantly do group chats impact the way you use the app?
9. When receiving a friend request on Snapchat what does your decision process look like on whether to add them or not?
10. How deep is your level of communication through the app?
    a. Could you describe the meaningfulness of your conversations?
    b. Do most of your Snaps include text?