

IMPACT OF HEDONIC AND UTILITARIAN GRATIFICATION GAINED FROM EPHEMERAL CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of ephemeral social media content, such as Instagram Stories, Snapchat Stories, and WhatsApp Status, on consumer engagement, framed within the Uses and Gratifications Theory. It investigates how hedonic gratification (entertainment and enjoyment) and utilitarian gratification (usefulness and information) derived from temporary content shape engagement, and whether effects vary by age. Using a descriptive-analytical, quantitative design, primary data were collected from 119 respondents through a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire via convenience sampling, and analysed in SPSS using reliability analysis, multiple regression, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation, testing four hypotheses. The results show that hedonic and utilitarian gratification significantly predict consumer engagement, jointly explaining 37.5 per cent of its variance ($R^2 = .375$), with hedonic gratification exerting a marginally stronger effect ($\beta = .374$) than utilitarian gratification ($\beta = .365$), though this difference was not statistically confirmed. Age significantly affects utilitarian gratification and content preference but not hedonic gratification or overall engagement, offering partial support for the age-related hypothesis. Hedonic and utilitarian gratification are also significantly correlated with engagement, confirming the proposed relationships. These findings extend the Uses and Gratifications framework to ephemeral digital formats and offer practical guidance to marketers, brands, and content creators designing story-based campaigns.

Keywords: Ephemeral Content, Instagram Stories, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Hedonic Gratification, Utilitarian Gratification, Consumer Engagement

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Theoretical Framework

Social media has shifted markedly from permanent posts toward ephemeral, self-deleting formats such as Instagram Stories, Snapchat Stories, and WhatsApp Status. This transition has changed how users consume and interact with digital content, encouraging quick, frequent, and real-time engagement rather than deliberate, curated posting. This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which

conceptualises media users as active agents who deliberately select content to satisfy specific psychological and functional needs, rather than as passive recipients of information.

Within this framework, two broad categories of gratification are considered. Hedonic gratification refers to the emotional and experiential benefits users derive from content- entertainment, enjoyment, fun, visual appeal, and emotional satisfaction, and is typically associated with engagement in creative, visually attractive, and interactive stories. Utilitarian gratification, in contrast, refers to the functional and practical benefits obtained from content, such as useful information, product knowledge, offers, and decision-making support. Consumer engagement, the outcome variable of interest, denotes the intensity of a user's participation with content, encompassing behaviours such as viewing, liking, replying, sharing, clicking links, and making purchase decisions. Because ephemeral content disappears within 24 hours, it further creates a sense of urgency and habitual checking behaviour, the effectiveness of which depends on how well it satisfies users' hedonic or utilitarian needs. Age is considered as an additional demographic factor, as motivations and content preferences plausibly vary across life stages, with younger users gravitating toward entertainment-oriented content and older users toward informative content.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the rapid growth of ephemeral content in digital marketing and everyday communication, there remains limited clarity on which type of gratification- hedonic or utilitarian exerts a stronger influence on consumer engagement, and whether this relationship is stable across age groups. Existing research has largely examined social media gratification and engagement in isolation or in the context of permanent posts and general platform usage, with comparatively little attention paid to the combined effect of hedonic and utilitarian gratification specifically within ephemeral formats, or to demographic variation in these effects. This study addresses that gap by examining how hedonic and utilitarian gratification derived from ephemeral social media content jointly influence consumer engagement, and whether these effects differ across age groups.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the effect of age on content preferences, hedonic gratification, utilitarian gratification, and consumer engagement.
- To examine the impact of hedonic and utilitarian gratification derived from ephemeral social media content on consumer engagement.
- To analyse the relationship between hedonic gratification, utilitarian gratification, and consumer engagement.
- To compare the relative influence of hedonic and utilitarian gratification on consumer engagement.

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

Corresponding to the objectives above, the study formulates and empirically tests the following four null (H₀) and alternative (H_a) hypotheses:

H₀₁: Age has no significant effect on content preferences, hedonic gratification, utilitarian gratification, and consumer engagement.

H_{a1}: Age has a significant effect on content preferences, hedonic gratification, utilitarian gratification, and consumer engagement.

H₀₂: There is no significant impact on consumer engagement as a result of hedonic and utilitarian gratification gained from temporary social media content.

H_{a2}: There is a significant impact on consumer engagement resulting from hedonic and utilitarian gratification derived from temporary social media content.

H03: There is no significant relationship between hedonic and utilitarian gratification with consumer engagement.

Ha3: There is a significant relationship between hedonic and utilitarian gratification with consumer engagement.

H04: There is no significant difference in the influence of hedonic and utilitarian gratification on consumer engagement.

Ha4: There is a significant difference in the influence of hedonic and utilitarian gratification on consumer engagement.

1.5 Significance of the Study

By jointly examining hedonic and utilitarian gratification within the specific context of ephemeral content, this study offers marketers and brands empirical guidance on whether entertaining or informative content drives greater engagement, helping to refine content strategy and campaign design. For influencers and content creators, the findings offer practical insight into balancing fun and informative elements to sustain audience interest. For academic research, the study contributes to the still-emerging literature on ephemeral digital content by extending the Uses and Gratifications framework to a format that remains comparatively underexplored relative to permanent social media posts.

2. Review of Literature

This review integrates prior empirical work thematically around the core constructs of the present study ephemeral content, hedonic and utilitarian gratification, and consumer engagement, rather than summarising studies individually, to identify points of convergence, divergence, and the specific gap this study addresses. Sources were drawn from Google Scholar, ShodhGanga, and ResearchGate.

2.1 Ephemeral Content and Consumer Behaviour

A consistent theme across studies on ephemeral content is that its temporary, self-deleting nature fundamentally alters why and how users engage with it, compared with permanent posts. Work on Instagram and Snapchat Stories converges on the view that ephemeral formats are valued precisely because they feel spontaneous, authentic, and less curated, encouraging users to document experiences, express identity, and share moments in a more conversational register than permanent content allows (Villaespesa, 2020). This spontaneity is closely tied to a psychological mechanism identified across the literature: the temporary availability window generates Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and habitual, repeated checking behaviour, which in turn heightens attention and emotional engagement with the content (Lawal, 2026; Shah, 2026).

Beyond attention capture, this urgency-driven mechanism has been linked to concrete behavioural and commercial outcomes: scarcity and time-pressure cues embedded in ephemeral formats translate FOMO into impulse buying, particularly among younger users, with interactive elements such as polls and countdown timers amplifying this effect (Shah, 2026). At the brand level, using large-scale survey data (N = 728), entertainment, informativeness, interactivity, aesthetic quality, and perceived relevance of ephemeral content have been shown to jointly build brand authenticity and self-brand connection, which subsequently drive brand love and customer engagement (Nguyen, 2024). Taken together, these studies establish ephemeral content as a distinct engagement mechanism operating through both an emotional/urgency pathway (FOMO, habitual checking) and a content-quality pathway (entertainment, aesthetics, informativeness) though the same urgency mechanism that drives engagement has also been shown to produce negative side-effects such as shortened attention spans and compulsive usage (Lawal, 2026), a tension that the ephemeral-content literature has yet to reconcile with its otherwise favourable marketing framing.

2.2 Hedonic and Utilitarian Gratification

Across markedly different consumption contexts, in-game virtual goods, quick-commerce grocery delivery, and sustainable dining, the literature consistently finds that hedonic gratification (enjoyment, emotional satisfaction, self-expression) and utilitarian gratification (value for money, efficiency, practical benefit) operate as parallel, largely independent predictors of consumer outcomes rather than substitutes for one another (Sir, 2026; Punwatkar, 2026; Sarwar, 2026). This dual-pathway pattern recurs even where the relative weighting of the two gratifications differs: utilitarian value has been found to be a marginally stronger predictor of purchase intention for in-game skins than hedonic value (Sir, 2026), whereas hedonic value has been found to play the stronger mediating role in willingness to pay premium prices for sustainable dining (Sarwar, 2026). Applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework to quick-commerce, both motivations have similarly been shown to combine with situational cues such as flash discounts and app convenience to jointly drive impulse buying and basket expansion (Punwatkar, 2026).

The consistent finding that neither gratification dominates universally, but that their relative strength is context-dependent, is directly relevant to ephemeral social media content: it implies that the balance between entertainment and usefulness observed in offline or transactional settings cannot simply be assumed to transfer to story-based digital formats, and instead needs to be empirically tested within that specific context, which is precisely the contribution of the present study.

2.3 Consumer Engagement in Social Media Contexts

Studies of consumer engagement on social media converge on treating it as a multidimensional construct spanning emotional, behavioural, and cognitive components, with emotional engagement (excitement, attachment, enjoyment) generally emerging as the strongest predictor of downstream outcomes such as purchase intention, followed by behavioural engagement (liking, sharing, commenting), while cognitive engagement (attention, interest) shows a comparatively weaker association (Marwaha, 2026).

A second, complementary strand of this literature complicates the measurement of engagement by showing that a substantial share of consumption is silent. “Digital lurking”, in which users remain cognitively engaged and influenced by content without producing any visible interaction, has been documented through high Instagram Story completion rates and passive YouTube viewing, indicating that conventional engagement metrics such as likes and replies understate true influence (Priyadarshini, 2026). A parallel “Humour-Engagement Gap” has been reported in meme marketing, where consumers who clearly enjoyed branded humour still engaged passively rather than visibly, even though the content strengthened subliminal brand recall and purchase intention (Kumar, 2026). Read together, these studies suggest that self-reported engagement measures, of the kind used in survey-based research such as the present study, likely capture both visible and latent engagement more completely than platform-recorded interaction metrics, but also that researchers should interpret “low” engagement scores cautiously, since passive consumption may still reflect meaningful influence.

2.4 Research Gap

The reviewed literature independently establishes three things: that ephemeral content operates through a distinct urgency- and quality-driven engagement mechanism; that hedonic and utilitarian gratification jointly and independently shape consumer outcomes, with their relative influence being context-specific; and that consumer engagement is multidimensional and only partially captured by visible interaction. However, no study in this review integrates all three strands that is, none jointly models the relative influence of hedonic and utilitarian gratification specifically on engagement with ephemeral social media content, nor examines whether this relationship varies by age. Prior hedonic–utilitarian research is

concentrated in offline or transactional settings (gaming, quick-commerce, dining), while ephemeral-content research has treated engagement largely as a downstream outcome of content quality without decomposing the underlying gratification structure. This study addresses that gap by jointly testing the relative and combined influence of hedonic and utilitarian gratification on consumer engagement with ephemeral content, and by examining age as a boundary condition on these relationships.

2.5 Hypotheses Development

Building on the literature reviewed above, four hypotheses are developed to structure the empirical analysis. First, since younger users are more susceptible to urgency- and FOMO-driven ephemeral content while older users lean toward practical, information-seeking use (Shah, 2026; Lawal, 2026), age is expected to influence content preferences and gratification outcomes, giving rise to H01/Ha1.

Second, since hedonic and utilitarian value jointly and significantly predict consumer outcomes across varied contexts (Sir, 2026; Punwatkar, 2026; Sarwar, 2026), both gratification types are expected to significantly impact consumer engagement with ephemeral content, giving rise to H02/Ha2.

Third, drawing on evidence that entertainment and informativeness both build the emotional connection that drives engagement (Nguyen, 2024), hedonic and utilitarian gratifications are expected to be significantly and positively related to consumer engagement, giving rise to H03/Ha3.

Finally, because prior context-specific studies disagree on which gratification dominates the utilitarian value has been found to be marginally stronger in one context (Sir, 2026) while hedonic value has been found to be the stronger mediator in another (Sarwar, 2026) it remains an open empirical question whether one gratification exerts significantly greater influence than the other on engagement with ephemeral content, giving rise to H04/Ha4.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component captures consumer behaviour and content preferences with respect to ephemeral content, while the analytical component tests the relationship and relative impact of hedonic and utilitarian gratification on consumer engagement.

3.2 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, comprising closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale across five sections: basic demographics, content preference, hedonic gratification, utilitarian gratification, and consumer engagement. Secondary data were drawn from academic journals, research papers, and online sources to inform the theoretical foundation and literature review.

3.3 Sampling Method, Area, Unit, and Size

Convenience sampling was used due to time and resource constraints. The sampling area comprised social media users primarily students and young adults actively using platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook. The sampling unit was the individual social media user who views and engages with ephemeral content, and the final sample size was 119 respondents.

3.4 Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire was organised into five sections: Section A captured basic demographic and usage information (age, gender, platform, and viewing frequency); Section B measured content preferences across seven categories using multiple-choice items; and Sections C, D, and E measured hedonic gratification, utilitarian gratification, and consumer engagement respectively, each through five-point Likert-scale statements ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” This structure allowed each

construct to be captured through multiple indicators, supporting subsequent reliability and regression analysis.

3.5 Tools Used for Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS for reliability testing, multiple regression, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation, while Microsoft Excel was used for data coding and descriptive summarisation.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic and Usage Profile of Respondents (N = 119)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 18	6	5.1%
	18–24	87	73.1%
	25–30	13	10.9%
	30+	13	10.9%
Gender	Male	33	27.7%
	Female	86	72.3%
Primary platform	Instagram	91	76.5%
	WhatsApp	20	16.8%
	Snapchat	7	5.9%
	Facebook	1	0.8%
Viewing frequency	Daily	50	42.4%
	Frequently	41	34.7%
	Occasionally	23	19.5%
	Rarely	4	3.4%

Source: Primary survey data (2026).

The sample was dominated by respondents aged 18–24 (73.1%) and female respondents (72.3%), with Instagram as the overwhelmingly preferred platform for ephemeral content (76.5%). A majority of respondents viewed stories daily or frequently (77.1% combined), indicating a habitually engaged sample well-suited to studying story-based engagement behaviour, though the age and gender skew should be considered when generalising the findings.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.877	24

A Cronbach's alpha of .877, well above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicates high internal consistency across the 24 Likert-scale items, confirming that the measurement instrument is reliable.

4.3 Regression Analysis: Impact of Gratification on Engagement

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.612 ^a	.375	.364	.55874	1.942

Table 4: Coefficients (Dependent Variable: Consumer Engagement Average)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error				
			Beta			Tolerance
(Constant)	.196	.348		.563	.574	
HG_Average	.395	.084	.374	4.709	<.001	.861
UG_Average	.443	.096	.365	4.596	<.001	.861

The Model Summary (Table 3) shows an R^2 of .375, indicating that 37.5% of the variance in consumer engagement is explained by hedonic and utilitarian gratification, with the remainder attributable to other factors. The Coefficients table (Table 4) shows $p < .001$ for both predictors, confirming a significant impact of hedonic and utilitarian gratification on consumer engagement. The beta values indicate the individual influence of each gratification type: hedonic gratification ($\beta = .374$) has a slightly stronger influence on consumer engagement than utilitarian gratification ($\beta = .365$).

Hypothesis decision: Since both predictors are significant at $p < .001$, the null hypothesis H02 is rejected and the alternative hypothesis Ha2 is accepted hedonic and utilitarian gratification derived from ephemeral social media content have a significant impact on consumer engagement.

Hypothesis decision: The standardised coefficients for hedonic ($\beta = .374$) and utilitarian gratification ($\beta = .365$) are very close in magnitude, and no formal test of coefficient equality was conducted. Given this narrow margin, the null hypothesis H04 is not rejected the data do not provide strong evidence of a significant difference in the relative influence of hedonic versus utilitarian gratification on consumer engagement, even though hedonic gratification shows a marginally higher point estimate.

4.4 One-Way ANOVA: Effect of Age

One-way ANOVA was used to test the effect of age on hedonic gratification, utilitarian gratification, consumer engagement, and content preferences.

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA Hedonic Gratification

ANOVA					
Hedonic Gratification_Average					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.977	3	.659	1.519	.213
Within Groups	49.463	114	.434		
Total	51.440	117			

Since $p > 0.05$, hedonic gratification of consumers is not affected by age.

Table 6: One-Way ANOVA Utilitarian Gratification

ANOVA					
Utilitarian Gratification_Average					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.124	3	1.041	3.306	.023
Within Groups	35.915	114	.315		
Total	39.039	117			

Since $p < 0.05$, utilitarian gratification is significantly affected by age; specific age groups prefer utilitarian gratification more.

Table 7: One-Way ANOVA Consumer Engagement

ANOVA					
Consumer Engagement_Average					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.591	3	.530	1.083	.359
Within Groups	55.845	114	.490		
Total	57.436	117			

Since $p > 0.05$, consumer engagement is not affected by age groups.

Table 8: One-Way ANOVA Content Preferences

ANOVA					
Content Preferences_Average					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.143	3	.714	3.113	.029
Within Groups	26.169	114	.230		
Total	28.312	117			

Since $p < 0.05$, age has a significant effect on content preferences; content preferences differ by age.

Hypothesis decision: Age significantly affects utilitarian gratification ($p = .023$) and content preferences ($p = .029$), but not hedonic gratification ($p = .213$) or consumer engagement ($p = .359$). The null hypothesis H01 is therefore partially rejected Ha1 is supported for utilitarian gratification and content preferences, while H01 is retained for hedonic gratification and consumer engagement, which do not vary significantly by age.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

Table 9: Correlations

		HG_Average	UG_Average	CE_Average
Hedonic gratification Average	Pearson Correlation	1	.372***	.510***
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	118	118	118
Utilitarian gratification Average	Pearson Correlation	.372***	1	.504***
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	118	118	118
Consumer engagement Average	Pearson Correlation	.510***	.504***	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	118	118	118

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Through Pearson's correlation test, all variables show statistically significant positive correlations ($p < .001$), indicating that higher hedonic and utilitarian gratification are associated with higher consumer engagement.

Hypothesis decision: Since hedonic gratification ($r = .510$), utilitarian gratification ($r = .504$), and consumer engagement are all significantly and positively correlated ($p < .001$), the null hypothesis H03 is

rejected and the alternative hypothesis Ha3 is accepted a significant relationship exists between hedonic and utilitarian gratification and consumer engagement.

4.6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 10: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result	Decision
H01 / Ha1: Effect of age on content preferences, HG, UG, and CE	One-way ANOVA	Significant for UG ($p=.023$) and content preferences ($p=.029$); not significant for HG ($p=.213$) or CE ($p=.359$)	Partially rejected
H02 / Ha2: Impact of HG and UG on CE	Multiple regression	$R^2=.375$; both predictors significant, $p<.001$	Rejected Ha2 accepted
H03 / Ha3: Relationship between HG, UG, and CE	Pearson correlation	$r=.510$ (HG–CE) and $r=.504$ (UG–CE), both $p<.001$	Rejected Ha3 accepted
H04 / Ha4: Difference in influence of HG vs. UG on CE	Comparison of standardised beta coefficients	$\beta(\text{HG})=.374$ vs. $\beta(\text{UG})=.365$ narrow margin, no formal equality test	Not rejected

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Effect of Age on Content Preferences and Gratification (H01/Ha1)

Consistent with the ANOVA results, enjoyment and emotional satisfaction from ephemeral content appear to be preferred uniformly across age groups, whereas the perceived usefulness of informative content is valued more strongly by respondents aged 25 and above. Consumer engagement itself does not differ significantly by age, but the specific content types preferred do vary, echoing the observation that younger users are more susceptible to urgency- and FOMO-driven content, while older users lean toward practical, information-oriented material (Shah, 2026). This partial support for Ha1 is significant for utilitarian gratification and content preference, but not for hedonic gratification or consumer engagement, suggesting that age shapes what users seek from ephemeral content more than how much they ultimately engage with it.

5.2 Impact of Gratification on Consumer Engagement (H02/Ha2)

Both hedonic and utilitarian gratification exert a statistically significant, positive impact on consumer engagement, jointly accounting for 37.5% of its variance, supporting Ha2. This finding aligns with evidence that digital consumers respond to a combination of emotional and functional motivations rather than either in isolation (Sir, 2026; Punwatar, 2026), reinforcing the view that ephemeral content strategies should not rely on entertainment or information alone.

5.3 Relationship Between Gratification and Engagement (H03/Ha3)

The positive and significant correlations between both gratification types and engagement confirm that greater enjoyment and greater perceived usefulness are each independently associated with higher engagement, supporting Ha3. This mirrors the finding that entertainment and informativeness both drive emotional connection and, subsequently, engagement behaviours such as sharing and purchasing (Nguyen, 2024).

5.4 Relative Influence of Hedonic and Utilitarian Gratification (H04/Ha4)

Hedonic gratification shows a marginally stronger standardised effect on engagement ($\beta = .374$) than utilitarian gratification ($\beta = .365$), suggesting that enjoyment and emotional satisfaction are slightly more influential drivers of engagement with ephemeral content than usefulness, though the difference is modest and both effects remain strong and significant. This is broadly consistent with evidence that emotional engagement is typically the strongest predictor of purchase-related outcomes on social media (Marwaha, 2026), while also supporting evidence that utilitarian value continues to play a substantial, near-equal role in consumer decision-making (Sarwar, 2026). Given the narrow margin between the two coefficients, Ha4 is not supported; hedonic and utilitarian gratifications appear to be near-equally influential drivers of engagement with ephemeral content.

6. Implications of the Study

Theoretically, the study supports and extends the Uses and Gratifications Theory by confirming that users actively engage with ephemeral content to satisfy both hedonic and utilitarian needs, and by demonstrating that this dual-gratification structure applies specifically to fast-disappearing digital formats, an area of the literature that remains comparatively underdeveloped relative to permanent-post research. The weak role of age in hedonic and overall engagement outcomes, contrasted with its stronger role in utilitarian gratification and content preference, adds nuance to how demographic variables should be incorporated into UGT-based models.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of combining reliability testing, multiple regression, one-way ANOVA, and correlation analysis to build a layered understanding of both the strength and the boundary conditions of gratification effects. The consistently high reliability ($\alpha = .877$) and significant model fit provide confidence in the survey-based measurement approach, while also highlighting the need for larger, more demographically balanced samples in future applications of this model.

7. Recommendations

- Brands and marketers should design ephemeral content that is simultaneously entertaining and informative, since both gratification types significantly drive engagement.
- Given the marginally stronger role of hedonic gratification, businesses should prioritise visually attractive, creative, and interactive story content.
- Utilitarian elements product details, recommendations, tutorials, and updates should remain a core component of story content to sustain engagement among users seeking practical value.
- Content strategy should be age-differentiated: users aged 25 and above may respond better to informative, practical content, while entertainment-oriented content can be used more universally.
- Interactive features such as polls, quizzes, question stickers, countdowns, and swipe-up links should be used to convert passive viewing into active engagement.
- A balance between promotional and entertaining content should be maintained, as excessive promotional framing may reduce user interest, consistent with the low preference observed for discount- and offer-based content.

8. Limitations of the Study

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations: the relatively small sample size (119 respondents) limits generalisability; convenience sampling may introduce selection bias; the sample skews heavily toward the 18–24 age group, under-representing other age cohorts; responses are self-reported and may reflect perception bias; the study examines only two gratification constructs, excluding other potential drivers of engagement such as trust or influencer credibility; and time and resource constraints limited the scope and depth of analysis.

9. Scope for Future Research

Future studies would benefit from larger and more demographically diverse samples spanning different age groups, professions, and regions. Comparative research across platforms (Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook) could reveal platform-specific engagement patterns, while incorporating additional variables such as trust, influencer impact, brand loyalty, purchase intention, and FOMO would enrich the explanatory model. Longitudinal designs could further clarify how engagement with ephemeral content evolves over time, and industry-specific studies (e.g., fashion, food, education, travel) could offer more targeted managerial insights.

10. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that both hedonic and utilitarian gratification derived from ephemeral social media content significantly and positively influence consumer engagement, together explaining over a third of its variance, with hedonic gratification showing a marginally stronger effect. Age meaningfully shapes utilitarian gratification and content preference but not hedonic gratification or overall engagement, underscoring that the emotional appeal of ephemeral content resonates broadly across age groups while its practical value is more age-contingent. As ephemeral formats continue to grow as a dominant mode of digital interaction, these findings offer both theoretical grounding and practical direction for marketers, brand managers, and content creators seeking to design story-based content that more effectively attracts and retains consumer attention.

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