Individual discussion on “What motivates the creators of the Metaverse?
A study on the effects of intrinsic need satisfaction and external incentives.”

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Recap of the research question and the main findings

As previously discussed in the research by Student FAU (2023), numerous studies have examined the goals and motivations of content creators and consumers of social media, online games and social networking games. These studies have analyzed media usage, content creation patterns, and underlying motivations.

The purpose of this study is to explore the Metaverse-like platform Minecraft and aims to set a foundation for future research in this domain. It extends prior Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) research, originally developed by Student FAU (2023) by differentiating between external and internal motivations. Additionally, it introduces the time invested in content creation, content creation intention and the sharing of experiences within these virtual environments as dependent variables.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the motivations driving content creation in Minecraft. The research model included 17 constructs and 14 independent variables. Internal motivations encompass cognitive needs (skill development, information dissemination), affective needs (enjoyment of creating content), personal integrative needs (self-expression), social integrative needs (social interaction: make contact, keep contact, sense of community, helping behaviour) and tension relief needs (passing time, escapism). External motivations include financial incentives (income, actual income), reputation and professional advancement.

The findings supported the initial hypotheses that internal motivations, such as enjoyment, self-expression, and skill development, are positively associated with the average weekly time invested in content creation, the intention to continue creating content, and positive word-of-mouth.

Conversely, while external incentives like financial rewards and popularity influenced the time spent on content creation, they did not significantly impact creators’ long-term commitment to content producing and sharing content. Thus, the hypotheses positing a positive association between external motivation and intention to continue creating content, as well as word of mouth, were not supported.

Theoretical implications and interpretation

Our results support the Uses and Gratifications Theory, as proposed by Blumler and Katz (1974), which suggests that individuals are active seekers of media that fulfil their needs. The finding that internal motivations – such as enjoyment and skill development - significantly influence content creation in Minecraft aligns with UGT's emphasis on intrinsic rewards. This suggests that even in digital environments, personal satisfaction and growth remain primary motivators.

Ruggiero (2000) identified three key characteristics of modern digital media: interactivity, demassification, asynchronicity. Our findings suggest that these characteristics play a crucial role in shaping motivations for content creation in Minecraft.

a) Interactivity
   Unlike traditional media, digital platforms allow real-time feedback and engagement, enabling users to not only consume content but also create and modify it. This study demonstrates that intrinsic motivations, particularly skill development and enjoyment, drive engagement in Minecraft, reinforcing the idea that interactivity is a core motivator in digital media consumption. This is evident in activities such as engaging with audiences, modding the game, and participating in communities.
b) Demassification
   Unlike traditional mass media (TV, radio), the digital platforms allow for personalized content experiences. Minecraft communities reflect this through niche content (e.g., redstone tutorials, adventure maps, PvP servers) catering to specific player preferences. The ability to create personalized content experiences in Minecraft suggests that creators seek unique gratifications beyond passive media consumption. Self-expression and social engagement emerge as critical drivers, highlighting the need for UGT research to further explore individualized content creation.
c) Asynchronicity
   Digital media consumption is not bound by time constraints, meaning users can access content whenever they choose. Minecraft content - such as YouTube videos, Twitch streams, and forum discussions - can be consumed at the user's convenience. Our findings indicate that while external rewards may influence short-term engagement, they do not sustain long-term commitment to content creation.

Blumler and Katz (1974) the UGT theory considered audiences as rational and goal-directed in media consumption, that the audience is represented by active users, who make conscious decisions to fulfill their needs. However, the passive media consumption was not represented by this study.

The theory was expanded by Rubin (1984) attempted to solve this problem by delineating between ritual and instrumental types of media use:

- Instrumental (active) use – purposeful, goal-driven media consumption
- Ritualistic (passive) use – habitual or entertainment-driven use without clear goals

Thus, in Rubin's view, there are degrees to the term "active audience" and the distinction between instrumental and ritualized media use may help refine the concept of audience activity in uses and gratifications research.

Our study sought to explore this distinction in the context of Minecraft content creation.

To differentiate between active creators and casual players, our survey included questions such as:

- *Do you mainly build content to play it yourself or to share it with others?*
- *What kind of content do you create for Minecraft that others can use?*

This distinction was crucial, as active content creators are internally motivated to develop their skills and produce content, whereas casual players primarily engage with Minecraft for entertainment and escapism. Our assumptions for this were that active users are likely to sustain long-term content creation, whereas passive users engage with Minecraft primarily for short-term media consumption.

User-generated content (UGC) plays a pivotal role in Minecraft (Payne & Huntemann, 2019). One of the most notable examples is *WesterosCraft*, a massive recreation of *Game of Thrones' Westeros*, built by dedicated modders. Another example is *The Uncensored Library*, a digital repository created by journalists, designers, and activists to promote free speech and fight censorship. This project was awarded for its creative use of gaming as a platform for digital activism. Other examples of UGC include in-game computers, calculators, and fully functional games built using Redstone and command blocks.

These examples support the argument that Minecraft serves as a platform for creative expression, activism, and innovation, further reinforcing the role of motivations in content creation.

Practical implications and limitations

The findings of this study provide important insights into the motivations of Minecraft content creators within the metaverse. However, several areas remain open for future research. The results indicate that those internal motivations, such as skill development, self-expression, and sense of community, play a significant role in content creation, whereas external motivations, such as professional advancement, have a more indirect influence. Future studies could explore how these motivations evolve over time, especially as the metaverse continues to expand.

Additionally, while this study focused on Minecraft as a metaverse-like platform, further research should explore other digital content creation platforms, such as Fortnite Creative or VR-based metaverse platforms. Comparing these platforms could provide valuable insights into the broader creator economy and the sustainability of user-generated content ecosystems.

Another key area for future research is the role of financial incentives in content creation. Our findings show that most Minecraft content creators earn very little to no revenue from their content creation activities. Future studies could examine whether monetization strategies influence content creators' long-term engagement and output.

Since internal motivations are key drivers for content creation, platforms like Minecraft should foster intrinsic rewards by offering learning modules, community-building initiatives and skill development resources. Supporting these aspects may enhance engagement and encourage content creators to contribute over an extended period.

Another important aspect is collaboration within content creator communities. Many users face difficulties in finding collaborators, as search efforts involve multiple posts or direct outreach. Future research could explore mechanisms of collaboration within communities.

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has certain limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce bias, as participants might overestimate or underestimate their motivations and content creation efforts. Second, the sample size was limited to specific online communities and may not fully represent the broader population of Minecraft content creators. Lastly, some participants misinterpreted survey questions, often associating them with social media content creation rather than Minecraft-specific content creation.

Consclusions and discussion summary

In conclusion, our study highlights those internal motivations, particularly skill development, self-expression, and sense of community, are the primary drivers of Minecraft content creation. While professional advancement as an external motivator

does not directly sustain long-term content creation, it does contribute to word-of-mouth engagement.

Compared to the previous study by Student FAU (2023) on Roblox content creation, both studies emphasize the importance of internal motivation. However, while enjoyment and passing time were the strongest predictors of continuance intention for Roblox creators, our findings indicate that skill development and self-expression play a more dominant role for Minecraft content creators. This suggests that Minecraft content creation may be more strongly tied to personal growth and creativity rather than mere entertainment or time passing. Additionally, whereas external motivations were not a predictor of Roblox content creation at all, our study found that specific external motivations, such as professional advancement, still played a minor but noticeable role in influencing engagement.

Reflection on own contribution and learning

Initially, our group consisted of Franziska, Julia, and me. Later, Lusil joined our team, which I found beneficial as the four of us brought more diversity, ideas, and a dynamic work environment. Although it is common for students to form groups with friends for convenience, we were relatively new to each other, yet our collaboration worked well. Over the course of the project, including three interim presentations, the final presentation, additional data analysis, and writing our paper, we met almost every week to work together.

Each team member was initially responsible for bringing in 50 survey participants, aiming for a total of 200 responses as a group.

During the first interim presentation, Lusil and I worked on the theoretical framework, while Franziska and Julia focused on analyzing the target groups.

For the second interim, I worked on the research model in collaboration with Franziska, while Lusil and Julia worked on the study design and adaptation of the survey accordingly.

By the third interim, we continued refining our study design. Franziska and I worked on the survey, while Lusil and Julia focused on planning the data analysis.

For the final presentation, we collaborated closely, ensuring all aspects of the project were well integrated.

Individually, each of us aimed to gather the required number of participants, and during the interim stages, we divided tasks so that everyone had a specific role. And before presenting our parts, where we worked primarily, we looked together at each other's parts and gave feedback or suggestions to improve.

Initially, I planned to reach out to Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking communities to expand our survey reach. However, I received very few valid responses from these groups, which was frustrating. As a result, I shifted my focus to German-speaking communities, where the response rate was higher. Additionally, English-speaking audiences were generally more active in participation.

Some of the theories Lusil and I initially developed for the literature review were ultimately excluded, as they were not relevant to our methodology.

Looking back, we only started considering alternative data collection methods by the third interim, when only a few weeks remained before the final presentation. In hindsight, if we had addressed this earlier, such as during the first interim, we could have gained more time for analysis and refinement.

Overall, Lusil and I focused on the theoretical aspects, while Franziska and Julia worked on comparisons with the Roblox study.

Lusil primarily handled the data analysis tool, which presented several challenges as none of us had prior experience with the tool. We navigated these difficulties through multiple group meetings, aided by YouTube tutorials and ChatGPT.

Franziska, as our project owner, managed all external communication on behalf of the group.

Towards the final weeks of the project, I underwent a serious operation that left me unable to speak and was hospitalized for several days. During this time, my team members stepped in and took over many responsibilities, for which I am very grateful.

This course allowed me to experience working on a mini master's thesis in an engaging and collaborative way. While we did not achieve the maximum number of responses due to time constraints, I learned how to use a new analytical tool and gained valuable experience in writing the discussion section. As emphasized at the beginning of the course, this section is often overlooked but remains a crucial component of any academic paper.

References

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