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Motives and Enjoyment of Watching Dashcam Videos on Social Media: A Phenomenological Study on Generation Z in Semarang

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the psychological motives and gratifications that underlie Generation Z's consumption of user-generated dashcam videos on social media, using the Uses and Gratifications Theory as the guiding framework. A qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach was employed to explore participants lived media experiences. Nine Generation Z individuals aged 18–21 years were selected as digital natives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring motivational patterns. The findings reveal eight dominant viewing motives: passing time, companionship, escape, enjoyment, social interaction, relaxation, information acquisition, and excitement. The results indicate that dashcam video consumption reflects a multifaceted media use pattern in which viewers pursue both utilitarian benefits, such as road safety awareness, and emotional gratification. The study confirms the applicability of the Uses and Gratifications Theory to emerging user-generated audiovisual content. Dashcam viewers function as active media users who selectively engage with niche content to satisfy specific psychological and informational needs, highlighting the evolving dynamics of digital media consumption among Generation Z.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the digital era has made social media an integral part of everyday life, transforming the way audiovisual content is recorded, distributed, and consumed. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have evolved into major channels for sharing a wide range of video content, including dashcam footage. Dashcam videos are recordings captured by vehicle-mounted cameras that continuously document events on the road. As mobile extensions of surveillance systems such as Closed Circuit Television, they reflect the convergence of surveillance technology, participatory media culture, and digital distribution via online and on-demand platforms (Sari & Budiono, 2023).

Dashcam videos have attracted growing public attention for their evidentiary value in documenting traffic incidents. Prior research confirms that dashcam footage provides strong legal and insurance evidence, reinforcing perceptions of accountability and fairness in traffic disputes (Adamová, 2020). Beyond their legal function, these videos circulate widely on

social media because of their dramatic and entertaining appeal. Unexpected, spontaneous, and real-life incidents captured on dashcams often stimulate audience curiosity and attract substantial viewership (Jambulingam et al., 2018). Emotional responses such as excitement, tension, and thrill contribute to pleasurable viewing experiences and positive mood states (Subramanian et al., 2023).

In addition to entertainment, dashcam videos can serve an educational purpose by allowing viewers to observe driving behavior, traffic rules, and accident-prevention strategies. Studies indicate that dashcam footage can enhance road safety awareness by documenting dangerous driving behavior and encouraging more cautious practices (Park et al., 2016). The sharing of dashcam videos has also generated public engagement in accident investigations and broader social discussions (Daraghmi & Shawahna, 2023). Research conducted in South Korea shows that motivations for sharing dashcam videos include reciprocal altruism and social justice, as well as financial incentives (Park et al., 2016). Cross-national findings in China, Korea, and Russia similarly identify altruism and social justice as dominant motives, while monetary rewards are secondary (Subramanian et al., 2023). Furthermore, scholars argue that dashcam content contributes to the normalization of surveillance culture by legitimizing surveillance technologies as instruments of self-protection and truth production (Yang, 2024).

Although previous studies examine dashcam technology mainly in legal, forensic, and surveillance contexts, they rarely address dashcam videos as media content consumed for gratification on social media. This reveals a gap in understanding audience interpretations and lived viewing experiences within algorithm-driven platforms. This gap becomes more pronounced when considering Generation Z as a distinctive audience segment. Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2012, has grown up in a digitally interconnected environment (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). As digital natives, they engage intensively with mobile technology and social media platforms (Chang & Chang, 2023). Media consumption among this generation is closely linked to information-seeking behaviors, access speed, and platform convenience (Hai & Xiong, 2025). In Indonesia, social media plays a central role in shaping Generation Z's media habits. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram function as crucial communication infrastructures (Hidayat et al., 2024), while YouTube usage continues to increase significantly, with Indonesian users spending an average of 31 hours and 28 minutes per month on the platform in 2024 (We Are Social, 2024).

Informational needs strongly influence video consumption preferences (Widya Damayanthi, 2023), and account characteristics further shape users' motivations to access specific content (Ni, 2023). Social interaction, feedback exchange, and community engagement are central to Generation Z's digital practices (Ramdani, 2024), fostering trust and social bonding (Amelia & Wibowo, 2023) and strengthening their sense of belonging (Ahdiat, 2024). Dashcam videos align with Generation Z's preference for authentic, real-time, and informative content (Li & Reider, 2024). Nevertheless, audience perceptions are influenced by contextual factors such as cultural norms, privacy values, and legal frameworks (Štitilis & Laurinaitis, 2016), as well as perceptions of technological usefulness and convenience (Gruchmann & Jazairy, 2025). Despite these insights, little is known about how Generation Z interprets dashcam videos not merely as surveillance artifacts but as everyday media content that fulfills psychological, informational, emotional, and social needs.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a relevant theoretical lens to address this issue. The theory conceptualizes audiences as active agents who deliberately select media to satisfy specific needs (Katz et al., 1973). Media use is considered goal-oriented and psychologically mediated (Griffin et al., 2019), with effects occurring through internal processes rather than direct influence (Kasirye, 2022). Rubin's (1981) typology identifies enjoyment, information seeking, excitement, and social interaction as primary motivations for media consumption. While early applications focused on traditional media such as

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television, radio, and newspapers (Li & Reider, 2024), the framework has been widely extended to social media contexts (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). It remains relevant in contemporary digital environments (Özkoçak & Tuna, 2025).

Empirical applications of Uses and Gratifications Theory to surveillance-based user-generated videos, such as dashcam content, remain limited, particularly in Indonesian contexts. Few studies explore how audiences, especially Generation Z, phenomenologically experience and integrate such videos into everyday social media routines. Addressing this gap, this study asks how Generation Z audiences in Semarang interpret dashcam videos in terms of motives and gratifications. Using a phenomenological approach, the study repositions dashcam footage as media content for gratification and extends Uses and Gratifications research to algorithmically curated social media environments.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative exploratory method to understand how individuals interpret and give meaning to social phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is suitable for investigating relatively under-researched topics and aims to generate foundational insights and emerging conceptual understanding. The research was conducted through several systematic stages. First, the research problem was mapped, and research instruments were prepared, including interview guidelines based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Second, informants meeting the predetermined criteria were selected. Third, in-depth interviews were conducted offline and recorded to capture detailed participant experiences, while field notes documented contextual situations and non-verbal expressions. The final stage involved transcription, coding, thematic categorization, and interpretative analysis.

This study also applies a phenomenological approach to understand how individuals experience and interpret specific phenomena (Kuswarno, 2009). Qualitative research in this tradition seeks to capture participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings as they are constructed in natural contexts (Moelong, 2018). Through this approach, the researcher aims to understand Generation Z's subjective experiences in consuming dashcam video content and the meanings they attach to these media practices. Data analysis follows the phenomenological procedure proposed by Moustakas (1994), which includes several sequential stages: listing significant statements, reducing and eliminating irrelevant data, clustering statements into thematic units, validating themes against the original transcripts, and constructing textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences. These steps allow the researcher to develop a comprehensive textural–structural interpretation of the phenomenon.

The participants consisted of nine Generation Z individuals aged 18–21 years. This cohort was selected because they represent digital natives who have grown up with constant exposure to digital technologies and social media platforms, making them highly familiar with user-generated video content such as dashcam footage. Individuals in this age range are also at a formative stage of media consumption, where preferences, motivations, and gratifications are actively shaped by social interaction, entertainment, and information-seeking needs. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, beginning with an initial informant who met the criteria and subsequently recommending additional participants with similar characteristics (Naderifar et al., 2017). The process continued until sufficient information was obtained and data saturation was reached.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement and member checking, while transferability was supported through detailed contextual descriptions. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting research procedures and analytical decisions, and confirmability was enhanced through reflexive

journaling. Additionally, triangulation was applied by comparing responses across informants and examining the consistency among interview data, methodological procedures, and theoretical constructs to ensure credible and reliable findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Media Uses Purposes

From a phenomenological perspective, the motivations underlying participants' engagement with dashcam video content reflect diverse forms of meaning-making shaped by personal interests, emotional responses, and interpretive frameworks. Qualitative studies using phenomenological approaches have shown that social media users construct and interpret their media experiences in richly subjective ways, shaped by context, affect, and everyday practices (Elnur & Akgün, 2025). Anchored in the Uses and Gratifications theoretical lens, which positions audiences as active agents in fulfilling their media-related needs, contemporary research demonstrates that individual motivations for media use are goal-directed and tied to personal and social needs rather than passive consumption (Hoque & Hossain, 2023).

Phenomenological applications of this theory further suggest that motivations to engage with digital media are not static categories but are co-constructed through users' lived experiences with media environments and their interpretive engagement with content (Almakaty, 2025). The thematic clusters identified in this study illustrate the main motivations underlying participants' engagement with dashcam videos. Table 1 summarizes the primary themes that emerged from participants' experiences.

Table 1. Thematic Clusters of Media Uses Purposes

Theme	Core Meaning	Participant Associated
Incidental Exposure and Algorithmic Encounter	Dashcam videos appear unexpectedly during routine scrolling; viewing emerges from algorithmic recommendation rather than intentional search.	P1, P7
Aesthetic and Sensory Appreciation	Viewers appreciate unique visual qualities (e.g., low resolution) and experience dashcam videos as aesthetic or artistic content.	P2
Curiosity Toward Risk, Conflict, and the Extraordinary	Viewers are drawn to accidents, interpersonal conflict, or paranormal events captured unexpectedly.	P3, P4
Moral Evaluation and Reflective Learning	Videos are used to assess fairness, consequences of violations, and as reminders for cautious driving.	P5, P6, P8, P9

Source: Primary Data (2025)

As shown in Table 1, four main themes characterize participants' motivations for viewing dashcam videos: incidental algorithmic exposure, aesthetic appreciation, curiosity toward extraordinary events, and moral reflection. Several participants reported encountering dashcam content incidentally while scrolling through algorithmically curated feeds. This finding suggests that engagement with the content is often initiated by platform recommendation systems rather than intentional search behavior.

Another important pattern concerns aesthetic appreciation. Some participants perceived the raw and low-resolution nature of dashcam footage as visually distinctive, interpreting it as a form of authentic or artistic media experience. This perception aligns with research suggesting that imperfect or unpolished digital visuals can enhance perceived authenticity in user-generated media environments. Curiosity about unexpected events, such as accidents or interpersonal conflicts, also emerged as a significant motivational factor. Participants described being drawn to situations that involved uncertainty, risk, or dramatic interactions. Such experiences reflect sensation-seeking and curiosity-driven media consumption, which are well-documented motivations in Uses and Gratifications research.

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Finally, several participants interpreted dashcam videos as sources of moral evaluation and reflective learning. They assessed responsibility, fairness, and consequences depicted in the footage, particularly in situations involving traffic violations or acts of altruism. These interpretations demonstrate how viewers actively construct ethical meaning from mediated real-world events. To better understand how these motivations are experienced at an individual level, Table 2 presents the textural descriptions derived from participants' lived experiences.

Table 2. Textural Descriptions of Media Uses Purposes

Participant	Textural Description
P1	Experienced dashcam videos as *incidental entertainment* emerging from routine scrolling. She did not intentionally seek the content but enjoyed what appeared on her feed. The experience was casual, spontaneous, and integrated into daily digital habits.
P2	Experienced dashcam videos primarily as *aesthetic objects*. He appreciated the low-resolution quality and perceived it as having artistic value. His engagement was rooted in sensory pleasure and visual texture rather than narrative or informational content.
P3	Experienced dashcam videos as *curiosity driven viewing*, particularly focused on accidents and interpersonal conflicts. Her experience involved heightened attention toward dramatic or suspenseful interactions captured unexpectedly.
P4	Experienced dashcam videos as *access points to paranormal phenomena*. His viewing was driven by interest in supernatural sightings, making the experience thrill-oriented and centered on the extraordinary.
P5	Experienced dashcam content as *narratives of human events*, especially positive or altruistic acts. She was emotionally drawn to videos depicting people helping others and saw the content as morally uplifting and meaningful.
P6	Experienced dashcam videos as *entertaining moral lessons*, especially when reckless drivers faced direct consequences. She perceived these moments as humorous and satisfying, blending entertainment with ethical evaluation.
P7	Experienced dashcam videos as *emergent digital encounters* similar to ADR, content that appeared due to algorithmic patterns. He viewed the videos as part of the normal media environment rather than intentional consumption.
P8	Experienced dashcam videos as *reflective reminders of road safety*. Watching accidents invoked awareness and caution about driving, creating an experience grounded in practical learning and risk consciousness.
P9	Experienced dashcam videos as *both cautionary and engaging*, focusing on traffic accidents. Her experience blended emotional engagement (shock, concern) with self-reflection about safety and personal vulnerability.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The textural descriptions in Table 2 illustrate how each participant experienced dashcam content in everyday media use. For instance, Participant P1 described incidentally encountering dashcam videos while scrolling, emphasizing the spontaneous nature of the experience. Similarly, P7 highlighted how algorithmic recommendations shaped exposure patterns without deliberate intention to search for such content. Other participants emphasized sensory and emotional experiences. Participant P2 viewed dashcam videos primarily as aesthetic objects, appreciating their visual texture and authenticity. Meanwhile, participants P3 and P4 described curiosity-driven engagement, particularly when the footage depicted accidents, conflicts, or unusual phenomena.

Several participants also interpreted dashcam videos through a moral or reflective lens. Participants P5, P6, P8, and P9 reported learning from observed events, particularly regarding traffic safety and responsible driving behavior. These interpretations suggest that dashcam videos may function as informal sources of behavioral reflection within everyday media consumption. Beyond individual experiences, phenomenological analysis also examines the structural conditions that shape these experiences. Table 3 presents the structural dimensions that contextualize participants' motivations for media use.

Table 3. Structural Descriptions of Media Uses Purposes

Theme	Structural Description
Motivations for Media Use	Experiences occurred within contexts of free time, breaks between tasks, and moments of cognitive fatigue. Media provided structure during unoccupied moments.
Social and Relational Gratifications	Participants' sense of social presence was shaped by digital environments that allowed interaction without physical presence. Group chats, comment sections, and shared content created relational closeness.
Cognitive and Informational Needs	Media use was driven by situational demands such as assignments, deadlines, or urgent informational needs. The accessibility and speed of digital platforms shaped these experiences.
Emotional Regulation	Participants used media in response to emotional triggers, stressful events, overwhelming tasks, or a need for distraction. Media environments enabled quick emotional shifts.
Habitual and Routine Use	Media was integrated into daily rhythms, often mediated by technology proximity (smartphones) and environmental cues (notifications).
Identity Expression and Self-Presentation	Experiences were shaped by social norms, platform affordances, and expectations of visibility. Participants navigated curated identities through posted content and interactions.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The structural descriptions in Table 3 indicate that several contextual factors shaped participants' experiences. Media use often occurred during free time, periods of cognitive fatigue, or transitional periods between daily activities. In these situations, social media platforms served as readily accessible spaces for quick engagement.

Emotional conditions also influenced media use. Participants frequently turned to short-form video content to regulate mood, relieve stress, or seek brief moments of distraction. Additionally, social media platforms enabled relational experiences through comment sections, group chats, and content sharing, creating a sense of social presence even in individual viewing contexts. Together, these structural conditions illustrate how algorithmic media environments facilitate routine, low-effort engagement with content such as dashcam videos.

Across participants, the experience of watching dashcam videos on social media is characterized by a dynamic interplay between algorithmic exposure, sensory interpretation, affective curiosity, and moral or reflective engagement. Generation Z does not consume dashcam content passively; rather, they actively negotiate meaning through diverse interpretive frames, ranging from visual aesthetics to moral evaluation, emotional stimulation, or behavioral caution.

Dashcam videos serve as a mediated source of real-world events, supporting awareness of traffic behavior and perceived risk. Algorithmic recommendation systems facilitate repeated incidental exposure, shaping viewing frequency and duration across platforms (Bucher, 2018). The perceived authenticity of unedited footage heightens attention and prompts behavioral reflection, supporting prior findings on mediated visibility and self-regulation (Andrejevic, 2010).

Furthermore, algorithmic recommendation systems play a crucial role in shaping exposure patterns. Participants frequently encountered dashcam videos via platform-generated suggestions rather than through intentional search. Such incidental exposure illustrates how digital platforms structure media engagement while still allowing users to interpret and negotiate meaning actively. From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the potential value of dashcam content for road safety communication and media literacy initiatives. By presenting authentic real-world situations, dashcam videos may encourage viewers to reflect on driving behavior and risk awareness within everyday digital media environments.

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Type of Gratifications

Within the framework of Uses and Gratifications theory, media users seek a variety of experiential benefits that align with their personal needs, intentions, and situational contexts; classic research on Uses and Gratifications shows that audiences actively seek media to satisfy motives such as information, entertainment, social interaction, and escapism rather than passively consume content (Filipovic, 2012). When applied to social media, Uses and Gratifications has demonstrated that users engage with online platforms to fulfill cognitive, affective, and social needs that are contextually shaped by individual backgrounds and media environments (Azizah, 2020). When viewed through a phenomenological lens, these gratifications represent lived meanings that emerge from participants' embodied and interpretive encounters with dashcam videos, consistent with phenomenological methods that foreground the subjective construction of meaning in lived experience (McLeod, 2024). The primary forms of gratification identified in this study are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Thematic Clusters of Gratifications

Theme	Core Meaning	Participant Associated
Information Seeking	Viewing dashcam videos as a source of factual, situational, or confirmatory information regarding road events (e.g., accidents, routes, public incidents).	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7
Relaxation and Restoration	Using dashcam content to unwind, relieve cognitive load, or take mental breaks from academic or work routines.	P1, P2, P3, P6, P9
Enjoyment and Entertainment	Watching for pleasure, amusement, or aesthetic satisfaction.	P1, P4, P6, P7
Passing Time	Consuming dashcam videos incidentally while scrolling or to fill idle time.	P1, P4, P5
Social Connection / Companionship	Using dashcam videos as shared viewing material to strengthen social bonds or create communal experiences.	P8
Escape from Routine	Using dashcam viewing as a temporary detachment from daily responsibilities, stress, or repetitive activities.	P8
Excitement / Arousal	Seeking stimulating affective experiences (surprise, thrill, shock).	P6

Source: Primary Data (2025)

As shown in Table 4, participants reported several types of gratification from watching dashcam videos on social media. The most dominant motivation was information seeking, in which viewers perceived dashcam videos as sources of factual insights into real-world road incidents, traffic conditions, and driving behavior. Another significant form of gratification was relaxation and restoration. Participants described watching dashcam videos as a way to relieve mental fatigue after academic or work-related activities. The relatively short, spontaneous nature of the content allowed viewers to engage with it without significant cognitive effort.

Participants also reported enjoyment and entertainment, particularly when watching unexpected or dramatic incidents captured in the footage. In addition, some viewers consumed dashcam videos to pass the time, especially during idle moments while scrolling through social media feeds. Less frequently, but still significantly, participants described gratifications related to social connection, in which dashcam videos served as shared viewing material among peers or family members. In these cases, the videos became conversation starters that strengthened interpersonal interactions. The experiential dimension of these gratifications is more clearly evident in participants' individual accounts presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Textural Descriptions of Gratifications

Participant	Textural Description
P1	Experiences dashcam videos as enjoyable, relaxing, and informative; often emerges during casual social-media scrolling.
P2	Experiences relaxation and informational clarity; uses videos to confirm real-world incidents.
P3	Experiences curiosity-driven engagement with trending incidents; finds relaxation in low-effort viewing.
P4	Experiences pleasure in altruistic or orderly road behavior; uses videos to fill waiting time.
P5	Experiences dashcam videos as sources of practical travel information and light entertainment.
P6	Experiences relaxation, information verification, and excitement from authentic emotional expressions.
P7	Experiences information seeking and enjoyment from observing driver conflicts or behavioral dynamics.
P8	Experiences companionship through group watching; uses videos for emotional escape.
P9	Experiences relaxation after academic activities; uses content as a mental cooldown.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The textural descriptions illustrate how participants experienced different forms of gratification in their daily interactions with dashcam content. For example, Participant 1 described watching dashcam videos as both relaxing and informative, often while casually browsing social media. Participant 2 emphasized the informational value of the videos in helping confirm real-world incidents.

Meanwhile, Participant 6 experienced excitement and emotional stimulation when watching authentic emotional reactions captured in the footage. Similarly, Participant 8 described watching dashcam videos together, which fostered a sense of companionship and shared engagement. These experiences highlight how the gratifications derived from dashcam content extend beyond entertainment, encompassing informational, emotional, and social dimensions. To understand the broader contextual conditions shaping these gratifications, Table 6 presents the structural dimensions of participants' experiences.

Table 6. Structural Descriptions of Gratifications

Theme	Structural Description
Digital Environment	Experiences emerged within algorithm driven social media feeds (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube).
Temporal Structures	Viewing occurred during breaks, idle time, or post activity unwinding periods.
Social Contexts	Experiences shaped by individual routines, peer-group interactions, and family environments.
Affective Conditions	Participants sought relief from boredom, stress, academic fatigue, or emotional tension.
Cognitive Orientation	Driven by curiosity, desire for real-world validation, or observational learning about road behavior.
Media Characteristics	Raw and spontaneous nature of dashcam footage supports perceptions of authenticity and credibility.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The structural descriptions in Table 6 indicate that the characteristics of digital media environments shaped participants' gratifications. Algorithm-driven social media feeds, particularly on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, played a central role in delivering dashcam content to viewers. Temporal factors also influenced consumption patterns. Participants typically watched dashcam videos during short breaks, transitional moments between tasks, or after completing academic activities. In these contexts, the content served as a quick and accessible form of relaxation.

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Emotional conditions further shaped engagement. Participants often turned to short-form video content when feeling bored, stressed, or cognitively fatigued. The spontaneous, unpredictable nature of dashcam footage provided low-effort entertainment while offering insights into real-world driving situations. The lived experience of Generation Z in consuming dashcam videos on social media is characterized by the intersection of information-seeking, emotional regulation, moral meaning-making, and curiosity-driven engagement. These gratifications align with previous studies showing that Generation Z actively uses social media as an information resource, not merely for entertainment, and engages in selective information seeking across diverse contexts (Setio Devi et al., 2024).

Uses and Gratifications research further indicates that motivations such as social interaction, emotional attachment, and information seeking significantly influence digital engagement among this cohort (Hoque & Hossain, 2023). Studies of visual social media formats demonstrate that emotional and psychological gratifications, including relationship building, novelty, and entertainment, are closely associated with user engagement behaviors (Lu & Lin, 2022). Moreover, algorithmic curation of social feeds plays a defining role in shaping what content users encounter and how they interpret and engage with it (Bareither & Wirth, 2025). Dashcam videos thus operate as authentic visual narratives that provide informational value, emotional engagement, and meaningful context within Generation Z's everyday digital routines.

Competing Media

The Uses and Gratifications theory posits that media compete not only with one another but also with non-media activities for individuals' limited attention and time. The assumption that different media vie for users' engagement provides an initial framework for understanding how individuals ultimately select specific media platforms for consumption (Griffin et al., 2019). This competitive dynamic was clearly reflected in the participants' accounts of their preferred platforms for accessing dashcam video content.

Participants accessed dashcam videos primarily through short-form video platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, while some also encountered the content on YouTube or Facebook. The patterns of exposure, frequency, and viewing duration are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Media Pattern

Participant	Primary Platforms Used	Year First Exposed	Viewing Frequency	Average Viewing Duration
P1	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube	2015	Every two days	5 - 10 minutes
P2	TikTok, Instagram	2014	Once per week (rare)	3 - 5 minutes
P3	TikTok, Instagram	2017	2 - 4 times per month	Up to 15 minutes
P4	TikTok, YouTube	2020	Daily (algorithm-driven)	Up to 20 minutes
P5	TikTok	2017	2 - 4 times per week	Up to 15 minutes
P6	TikTok, Instagram, Facebook	2023	Frequent; several times per week	30 - 60 minutes
P7	TikTok	2024	Daily (FYP driven)	10 - 15 minutes
P8	Instagram, TikTok	2024	Daily (follows dashcam accounts)	Up to 10 minutes
P9	Instagram, TikTok	2020	3 times per week	Up to 5 minutes

Source: Primary Data (2025)

As presented in Table 7, TikTok and Instagram emerged as the dominant platforms through which participants encountered dashcam videos. Most participants reported viewing the content regularly, though the frequency and duration varied depending on

individual routines and platform engagement habits. Some participants experienced brief viewing sessions lasting only a few minutes, typically while casually scrolling. Others reported longer viewing durations, particularly when the algorithm continuously recommended similar content. To further understand how these experiences unfold in everyday media practices, participants' lived experiences are described in Table 8.

Table 8. Textural Description of Competing Media

Participant	Textural Description
P1	Experienced dashcam content for nine years; encounters videos every two days on TikTok and Instagram; watches 5-10 minutes per session; perceives dashcam videos as readily available through algorithmic exposure.
P2	Has consumed dashcam videos since 2014; experiences infrequent encounters (weekly); watches short sessions (3-5 minutes); primarily exposed through TikTok and Instagram.
P3	Has been exposed since 2017; experiences dashcam content two to four times monthly; typically views around 15 minutes per session across TikTok and Instagram.
P4	Began exposure during COVID-19 (2020); experiences daily algorithm-driven encounters on TikTok; spends up to 20 minutes watching per session; uses TikTok and YouTube.
P5	Has watched since 2017; experiences encounters two to four times weekly; typically 15-minute viewing sessions; exposure largely through TikTok.
P6	Began in 2023; experiences frequent, multi-platform encounters (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook); watches significantly longer sessions (30-60 minutes).
P7	Started watching in 2024; experiences daily TikTok exposure driven by recommendation algorithms; watches dashcam videos for 10-15 minutes.
P8	Has engaged for six months; experiences daily exposure through Instagram due to following multiple dashcam accounts; watches up to 10 minutes per session.
P9	Has consumed since 2020; experiences dashcam content three times weekly; session duration up to5 minutes; exposure mainly via Instagram, then TikTok.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The textural descriptions illustrate the diversity of participants' exposure patterns. For instance, Participant 1 described encountering dashcam content regularly over nearly a decade, primarily through algorithmic exposure on TikTok and Instagram. In contrast, Participant 2 reported less frequent encounters and shorter viewing sessions.

Table 9. Structural Description of Competing Media

Theme	Structural Description
Platform Affordances & Algorithmic Curation	Participants' experiences were shaped by short-form video ecosystems, rapid content updates, and algorithmic personalization—especially on TikTok and Instagram. Algorithms surfaced dashcam content without active searching, generating routine, effortless exposure.
Temporal Availability & Competing Daily Activities	Engagement duration (5–60 minutes) was shaped by academic schedules, leisure time, and waiting periods, with media use competing with other daily activities and producing varied viewing frequencies.
Historical Onset and Exposure Trajectory	The year of first exposure (2014-2024) shaped familiarity, confidence navigating platforms, and habitual viewing patterns. Early adopters integrated dashcam content into long-term routines, while recent viewers exhibited algorithm-driven discovery.
Cross-Platform Ecosystem	Some participants (e.g., P6) engaged with multiple platforms, while others stayed within one primary app. Platform diversity shaped the depth, duration, and type of dashcam content encountered (e.g., TikTok for short clips, YouTube for longer compilations).
Algorithm-Driven Passive Consumption	Several participants (P4, P7, P8) experienced passive exposure due to TikTok/Instagram's recommendation systems. The structure of feed-based, infinite-scrolling environments created unintentional yet sustained consumption.
Interest Reinforcement Through Following Behavior	Participants who followed dashcam accounts (e.g., P8) experienced intensified exposure as platform algorithms amplified similar content. This structure encouraged daily encounters and shaped duration of viewing sessions.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

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As shown in Table 9, the structural conditions that shape these patterns are summarized. Participants who began watching dashcam content more recently often experienced algorithm-driven discovery, particularly through TikTok's recommendation system. This pattern highlights the role of platform algorithms in introducing new forms of content into users' digital routines.

Across participants' experiences, dashcam video consumption emerged as a dynamic, algorithm-shaped media practice woven seamlessly into the rhythms of daily life. Research indicates that personalized recommendation systems significantly influence user engagement and what content surfaces in users' feeds, shaping exposure patterns without deliberate search behavior and reinforcing habitual interactions with algorithmically curated content (Huang & Liu, 2025). Habits of social media use are shown to be predictable and embedded within daily routines, as personalized feeds contribute to habitual engagement and momentary, low-effort sessions throughout the day (Meier et al., 2023).

Systematic reviews further demonstrate that algorithmically curated environments help structure the ways in which youth encounter and select digital content, contributing to ongoing selective exposure and routineized media use (Ahmmad et al., 2025). Over time, these interactions become habitual, with users encountering dashcam videos as brief yet recurring moments of entertainment, curiosity, or information-seeking. This pattern demonstrates how algorithmic media environments structure selective exposure while still allowing users to interpret and engage with content according to their own interests and motivations.

Media Influence Different People Differently

Another key assumption of Uses and Gratifications theory is that media influence individuals differently depending on their personal experiences, motivations, and interpretive frameworks (Ruggiero, 2000). Although participants accessed similar dashcam content on social media, each formed distinct perceptions of road risk. Nevertheless, a shared experiential outcome emerged: all participants reported heightened vigilance while driving. Prior research demonstrates that exposure to visual representations of real-world risks can increase attention, risk awareness, and precautionary orientations, even when individuals' interpretations differ (Nabi & Myrick, 2019). The thematic patterns of perceived media influence are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Thematic Clusters of Media influence different people differently

Theme	Core Meaning	Participant Associated
Heightened Road Vigilance	Increased general caution- Attentiveness to surrounding traffic- Anticipation of potential hazards	P1, P8, P9
Fear of Being Recorded / Visibility Awareness	Concern about appearing in someone else's dashcam- Self-monitoring in public driving contexts	P2
Behavioral Adjustments Based on Observed Risks	Consistent use of turn signals- Yielding to emergency vehicles- Careful lane-changing	P3, P4
Recognition of Specific High-Risk Situations	Intersections as danger points- Motorcyclists' unsafe maneuvers- Traffic-light crowding	P6, P7
Minimal Perceived Influence	Dashcam videos seen as informational but not transformative- Limited behavioral change	P5
Mediated Awareness of Collective Road Behavior	Understanding patterns of risky driving- Perceiving traffic as a shared risk environment	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8. P9
Heightened Road Vigilance	Increased general caution- Attentiveness to surrounding traffic- Anticipation of potential hazards	P1, P8, P9

Source: Primary Data (2025)

As shown in Table 10, several participants reported heightened vigilance on the road after watching dashcam videos. Exposure to accident footage and risky driving situations increased their awareness of potential hazards while driving. Some participants also reported developing a sense of visibility, becoming more cautious about the possibility of being recorded by other drivers' dashcams. This perception reflects a form of ambient digital surveillance that influences everyday behavior. Other participants described specific behavioral adjustments, such as consistently using turn signals, yielding to emergency vehicles, or exercising greater caution at intersections. Participants' individual experiences are further detailed in Table 11.

Table 11. Textural Description Media Influence different people differently

Participant	Textural Description
P1	Experienced heightened vigilance while driving, shaped by the realization that many road users lack adequate competence. Dashcam exposure made her more alert to unpredictable behavior from others.
P2	Experienced increased caution due to fear of being recorded by others dashcams and potentially becoming part of online viral content. This sense of perpetual visibility made him drive more carefully.
P3	Experienced increased alertness, especially when encountering ambulances. Dashcam videos depicting emergency vehicles navigating traffic made him more responsive in yielding.
P4	Experienced behavioral adjustments in daily driving, specifically ensuring the consistent use of turn signals and lane-change communication, modeled after incidents observed in dashcam recordings.
P5	Experienced only minimal behavioral changes; although she found dashcam videos informative, they did not strongly influence her sense of caution or driving habits.
P6	Experienced heightened vigilance toward motorcyclists who weave through traffic. Frequent exposure to accidents involving such maneuvers shaped his sense that these behaviors pose significant danger.
P7	Experienced increased caution at intersections after repeatedly seeing dashcam footage of collisions occurring at crossroads. Intersections became cognitively marked as high-risk zones.
P8	Experienced a general increase in traffic awareness, becoming more observant of surrounding vehicles and potential hazards after repeated exposure to accident content in dashcam clips.
P9	Experienced heightened attentiveness while driving, shaped by continuous viewing of dashcam videos depicting near-misses and accidents, prompting increased situational awareness.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The textural descriptions reveal how participants interpreted dashcam content in relation to their own driving experiences. For instance, Participant 1 described becoming more alert to unpredictable driving behavior, while Participant 2 reported increased caution due to concerns about being recorded. Several participants also described recognizing specific high-risk traffic situations after repeatedly watching dashcam footage. For example, intersections and motorcyclists weaving through traffic were frequently perceived as potential danger points. However, not all participants reported significant behavioral change. Participant 5 viewed dashcam videos primarily as informational content, with little influence on driving habits. The structural conditions underlying these interpretations are presented in Table 12.

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Table 12. Structural Description Media Influence different people differently

Theme	Structural Description
Vigilance Shaped by Observed Risk	Participants internalize recurring patterns of risk displayed in dashcam footage, such as unpredictable motorists, sudden collisions, or emergency vehicles navigating traffic. These mediated scenes become interpretive frameworks that structure how participants orient themselves on the road, prompting heightened anticipation of danger and more attentive scanning of their surroundings.
Self Monitoring and Awareness of Being Observed	Exposure to videos depicting everyday road events being recorded and circulated on social media leads some participants to develop a sense of "ambient surveillance." This awareness that their own behavior could be captured and publicized shapes their driving choices, encouraging more cautious, rule consistent conduct to avoid becoming part of viral content.
Behavioral Adjustment as a Response to Perceived Norms	Participants translate the driving norms inferred through dashcam videos—such as yielding to ambulances, using turn signals, and maintaining lane discipline—into their own behavioral modifications. These adjustments arise from seeing what "ought" to happen on the road and recognizing the consequences when such norms are violated.
Differential Influence Based on Personal Relevance	While many participants experience meaningful shifts in risk perception and behavior, others report minimal impact. For these individuals, the videos offer information but do not deeply restructure their driving consciousness. This variability reflects individualized meaning making processes emphasized in phenomenological and Uses and Gratifications perspectives.
Awareness of Traffic Vulnerabilities	Repeated exposure to dashcam footage highlighting vulnerable traffic situations—such as motorcyclists weaving through gaps or intersections prone to collisions—sharpens participants' sensitivity to specific environmental hazards. This structural awareness guides moment to moment decision making, particularly in contexts they now perceive as risk centers.
Embodied Reorientation in Driving Experience	Across participants, dashcam videos act as mediating artifacts that reshape the embodied experience of driving. Participants describe a more grounded awareness of their physical presence in traffic, heightened situational monitoring, and a recalibrated sense of bodily risk as they imagine themselves within the scenarios depicted in the videos.

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The structural analysis indicates that repeated exposure to dashcam footage functions as a form of mediated observational learning. Participants internalized the risk patterns depicted in the videos and incorporated these insights into their interpretation of real-world driving environments. At the same time, the degree of influence varied across individuals. Some participants experienced meaningful behavioral adjustments, while others interpreted the content more casually. This variability reflects the selective and interpretive nature of media effects emphasized in Uses and Gratifications theory.

Across participants, dashcam video consumption emerged as a mediating force that subtly reshaped how individuals inhabit and interpret driving. Consistent with research showing that exposure to driving-related content on social media can influence road attitudes and subsequent driving behavior (Stefanidis et al., 2022), repeated encounters with accident and near-miss visuals contributed to a transformed awareness of risk and responsibility on the road. Viewing live footage of crashes and critical moments has been shown to elicit significant emotional and cognitive responses, reinforcing attention to driving hazards (Giannini et al., 2013). Participants described becoming more attuned to traffic flow, anticipating hazards, and adjusting practices such as signaling earlier and maintaining distance, echoing findings that media portrayals of risky driving predict real-world driving attitudes. At the same time, individual interpretations varied, reflecting selective and personalized media effects as emphasized in Uses and Gratifications theory.

Taken together, the findings reveal that dashcam video consumption among Generation Z represents a multifaceted media experience shaped by algorithmic exposure, curiosity, emotional engagement, informational needs, and reflective learning. A key theoretical insight emerging from this study concerns the role of algorithmic incidental exposure. Unlike

traditional Uses and Gratifications assumptions that emphasize deliberate media selection, participants often encountered dashcam videos via platform recommendations while scrolling. This phenomenon suggests a shift from gratification-seeking toward algorithmically mediated gratification discovery, in which digital platforms help surface content aligned with users' latent interests.

Nevertheless, audience agency remains evident. Participants actively interpret the content through aesthetic appreciation, curiosity about unexpected events, and moral evaluation of driving behavior. Dashcam videos thus function not only as entertainment but also as sources of informal learning and risk awareness. Overall, these findings extend Uses and Gratifications theory by demonstrating how audience motivations operate within algorithmically structured media environments. In such environments, users and platform systems interact dynamically, shaping how media content is encountered, interpreted, and integrated into everyday life.

CONCLUSION

This study explores Generation Z's experiences, motivations, gratifications, and perceived behavioral influences in engaging with dashcam videos on social media using a phenomenological approach based on Moustakas' textural–structural analysis. The findings show that dashcam videos function as meaningful mediated artifacts rather than incidental entertainment, often encountered through algorithmic exposure and integrated into everyday media routines. Consistent with the Uses and Gratifications perspective, the content fulfills multiple needs, including information seeking, curiosity, relaxation, entertainment, and informal learning. At the same time, the perceived authenticity of raw footage strengthens its credibility as visual evidence of real-world events. TikTok emerges as the primary gateway due to its algorithmic feed and short-form design, with Instagram and YouTube playing complementary roles. Repeated exposure also increases participants' vigilance in traffic situations, suggesting that dashcam videos may indirectly contribute to risk awareness and self-monitoring in everyday driving contexts.

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