

From Curiosity to Fatigue: A Qualitative Inquiry into BeReal Engagement and Dropout Patterns Among Asian Young Adults

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Abstract

BeReal has emerged as a prominent example of “spontaneous social media,” designed to promote unfiltered and time-bounded sharing. Although early uptake has been strong among young adults, many users disengage after initial trial, raising questions about how novelty, authenticity expectations, and everyday routines shape sustained participation. Guided by Uses and Gratifications Theory and interpreted through the MAIN model, this qualitative study explored BeReal engagement and dropout patterns among Asian young adults. Using conventional qualitative content analysis of participant responses (n = 158), three themes were developed: (1) the pursuit of authenticity, where users valued BeReal’s time constraints and dual-camera format but also questioned whether authenticity can be maintained when posting late or selectively; (2) audience captivation, showing a trajectory from curiosity and low-effort entertainment to fatigue driven by repetitive routines, limited features, and notification burden; and (3) social connection, indicating that BeReal use was sustained when close ties actively participated but declined when peer networks became inactive or the trend lost momentum. Overall, findings reveal a clear curiosity-to-fatigue pathway in which obtained gratifications (novelty, realism, low pressure, relationship maintenance) can shift into failed gratifications (boredom, redundancy, annoyance, reduced choice), contributing to disengagement. This study extends spontaneous social media scholarship by foregrounding dropout as a core phenomenon and offers practical insights for platform design and digital well-being initiatives in Asian contexts.

Keywords: BeReal; spontaneous social media; authenticity; social media fatigue; dropout and discontinuance; uses and gratifications; MAIN model; young adults; qualitative content analysis; Asian context

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1 Introduction

Spontaneous social media apps (and "spontaneity" functions within mainstream social platforms) are built to produce what might be considered real and unpolished content because they do not give users as much freedom to plan, curate, and polish their postings (Bulchand-Gidumal, [2023](#)). Unlike applications like Instagram and Tik Tok where consumers frequently have ample time and resources to edit, filter, and strategize their impressions, spontaneous apps place restrictions on design that force consumers to share in the moment (Bulchand-Gidumal, [2023](#)). These limitations are often coupled with ephemerality, which makes spontaneous social media a cultural course correction to the perceived inauthenticity of self-presentation as highly mediated on the internet (Bulchand-Gidumal, [2023](#); Toma, [2017](#)). This change also is consistent with more general data that authentic self-representation on the Internet can be associated with more positive well-being effects, and highly controlled self-presentation could actually increase the stress or social comparison pressures (Bailey et al., [2020](#); Grieve and Watkinson, [2016](#); Kreling et al., [2022](#)). Since spontaneous social media is a rather new phenomenon, empirical studies are still in its emergent phases, and the initial research is mostly mapping the platform logics of BeReal and the authenticity ideals it endorses (Maddox, [2023](#); Martorell et al., [2024](#); Snyder, [2024](#); Taylor, [2023](#)).

The bright example of spontaneous social media is BeReal. It was released in 2020 and quickly became visible to young adult users; in 2023, it was reported to have 33 million monthly active users (Curry, [2023](#)). The architecture of the platform is based on the daily and concomitant prompts in each time zone and a narrow frame (two minutes) to encode and share a two-camera image, with silence on the latter marked visibly; the app also focuses on the lack of improvement options (e.g., no filters) as one of its authenticity stories (BeReal, [2023](#); Davis, [2022](#)). Although the popularity of BeReal has been most evident in Western contexts, especially among college communities (Davis, [2022](#); Holtermann, [2023](#)), the social media practices of young people and young adults in general are primarily influenced by local cultural norms, peer relations, and daily limitations that could change the meaning of being real, how it is practiced, and assessed. In Asian settings such as, the existing research has shown that authenticity in youth is frequently negotiated in dense social networks in which belonging, reputation and relational harmony have become important (Chua & Chang, [2016](#)). Nevertheless, the question of how such social conditions influence the trajectory of BeReal engagement, particularly, the pathway between the initial adoption and subsequent dropout, has not been uncovered so far.

The current scholarship on BeReal has focused heavily on authenticity as an experience and a performance on the app (Maddox, [2023](#); Pinch et al., [2024](#); Snyder, [2024](#); Vanhoffelen et al., [2023](#)). This has been done through much by relying on app walkthroughs or interpretive methodologies (e.g., autoethnography), which are useful in theorizing platform logics but provide less insight into the lived experiences of platform users and decision-making patterns over time (Martorell et al., [2024](#); Taylor, [2023](#)). Notably, the new literature explicitly suggests further research into (a) the reasons to switch to BeReal, (b) the things that keep the users engaged, and (c) the reasons to stop engagement (Pinch et al., [2024](#); Snyder, [2024](#); Vanhoffelen et al., [2023](#)). These suggestions will be particularly applicable to Asian young adults whose platform selection can be conditioned by specific sets of privacy norms, family visibility, collectivist relational expectations, academic/workload pressures, and platform ecosystems that vary country- and region-by-region.

The current research, *From Curiosity to Fatigue: A Qualitative Inquiry into BeReal Engagement and Dropout Patterns Among Asian Young Adults*, reformulates the future-research agenda proposed in previous BeReal studies (Pinch et al., [2024](#); Snyder, [2024](#); Vanhoffelen et al., [2023](#)) to an Asian one. Theoretically, the research is rooted in the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory that describes the process of media choice by the active process of needs and gratification search

by users in a changing media setting (Katz et al., [1973](#); Sundar and Limperos, [2013](#)). U&G specifically comes in handy since it can include not only the obtained gratifications (what is actually received as a result of the platform) but also failed gratifications, which are the unsatisfied needs and disappointment that may result in diminished interest, nonuse, and dropout (Sundar & Limperos, [2013](#)). Meanwhile, the phenomenon of dropout is also theorized using the social media fatigue and overload research, according to which the stressors (i.e., information, social, and feature overload) may generate exhaustion/fatigue and induce discontinuance intentions (Bright et al., [2015](#); Fu et al., [2020](#); Lee et al., [2016](#)). This literature creates a powerful explanatory conduit as to why a platform originally used as a novelty, authentic, and social connector can subsequently get perceived as a burden of obligation, repetition, or even social weight when the interaction is conditionalized based on a time constraint and social signifier (BeReal, [2023](#)).

In this respect, this qualitative investigation will seek to have the adults who have been using BeReal tell stories of their initial use of the application (curiosity, novelty, authenticity-seeking, social connection), (2) how this engagement may be maintained or diminished with time and (3) how exhaustion, gratification disappointment, or social pressures may lead to dropout trends and post-dropout perceptions. In this way, the research addresses the urgent demands in the further study of engagement and disengagement processes in spontaneous social media and broadens the scope of evidence-based studies to include more non-Western contexts.

Uses and gratifications theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) describes the media use as a deliberate act where audiences choose media based on the need to fulfill specific psychological and social desires (Katz et al., [1973](#)). Even though U&G appeared during the period of predominantly one-way mass media, it is very applicable in regard to interactive platforms because users do not merely consume content; they also create, negotiate and control self-presentation using platform features and social conventions (Sundar & Limperos, [2013](#)). In U&G terms, people select media to use (why they adopt and use it) and find gratifications (what needs are met) but this is not assured- particularly when the platform affordances are changing, or when initial novelty is dissipated.

One of the most significant improvements in the modern U&G work is the difference between gratifications desired and gratifications achieved (Sundar and Limperos, [2013](#)). Users can go to a platform and find that they are in search of connection, entertainment, or authenticity, but find it offers other features (e.g., social checking, comparison pressure, or emotional exhaustion). Unmet expectations that become failed gratifications, particularly those used to explain nonuse, partial use, and discontinuation, occur when desired gratifications are not attained, or when a platform creates costs that exceed benefits (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, [2008](#); Bonds-Raacke and Raacke, [2010](#)). This lens is the focus of our research as dropout is not much of a one-time choice; it is more of a gradually growing process where gratifications fade, frustrations build, and exhaustion turns out to be a way of life.

In the context of BeReal in particular, the recent scholarly research indicates that authenticity is not merely a personal value but also a platformed effect caused by the design constraints, i.e. the timers, limited editing options, dual-camera capture, and the expectation of reciprocity. Design oriented research claims that BeReal interface may actually alleviate certain self-presentation pressures (e.g. showing off) but at a cost to some users of introducing novel constraints that over time some would find restrictive, anxiety producing, or even socially toxic (Kim et al., [2024](#); Pinch et al., [2024](#)). Furthermore, new indications indicate that the initial promise of authenticity does not always hold when users come to understand how to postpone, reduce, or bend the norms- adding to the impact of disappointment and ultimate disconnection (Pinch et al., [2024](#); Thomas and Talbot, [2025](#)).

Since our study focuses on the engagement and dropout trends of the Asian young adults, we also contextualize BeReal in a wide body of discontinuation literature that connects the overuse, overload, and relational strain to social media fatigue and withdrawal. A massive systematic review of the fatigue literature in Telematics and Informatics summarizes the fatigue literature and indicates that fatigue drivers are often concentrated at the individual, relational, and environmental/platform levels and often lead to decreased engagement or discontinuous usage (Zheng and Ling, [2021](#)). Equally, the systematic review of social media discontinuation suggests that fatigue, stress, and adverse consequences are significant push factors of quitting behaviors (Farooq et al., [2023](#)). Within the context of Asian platform, researchers on WeChat have shown that information saturation and excessive consumption can induce fatigue and poorly optimize well-being outcomes, which may provide a good regional example of how to learn about the hypothesis of curiosity - fatigue - dropout (Pang, [2021](#)).

In this vein, the proposed study uses U&G not merely to enumerate the motivations, but to trace the changes of initial sought gratifications (curiosity, authenticity, closeness, novelty) into obtained gratifications (routine checking, social monitoring) and, crucially, into failed gratifications (boredom, pressure, overload, or fatigue) in a qualitative way, which in turn defines the BeReal disengagement among Asian young adults. This aligns with the expanding BeReal research agenda in terms of sustained engagement and disengagement processes, which are now recorded directly in the large-scale qualitative evidence on the rise and fall of BeReal.

Social media and young adult use and gratifications

Among social media ecosystems, young adults tend to report on a repetitive pattern of gratifications related to the social connection, entertainment, identity work and information seeking. But current research is warning that these gratifications may be accompanied by risks to the psyche - especially in circumstances of overload, feelings of missing out, privacy anxiety as well as social comparison, which will ultimately result in fatigue and withdrawal behaviour. The current evidence demonstrates that fatigue is no longer a niche issue: it is now a mainstream consideration when it comes to diminished engagement and discontinuation in platforms and cultural backgrounds, including Asian youth population (Farooq et al., [2023](#); Zheng and Ling, [2021](#)).

Empirical research on youth shows that fatigue tends to arise in the context of increased social expectations and informational demands in the daily digital life, in particular, in the Asian settings. To illustrate, the studies that target the youth of China report fatigue as an epidemic related to the feeling of being overwhelmed at the time of online socialization, which supports the notion that the concept of constant social availability may turn out to be overwhelming instead of satisfying (Liu and He, [2021](#)). This is also supported by platform-based studies: in the case of COVID-19, perceived information overload on WeChat was a leading contributor to fatigue and downstream emotional strain, and is an exemplary stressor - strain pathway that is very pertinent to the disengagement of Asian young adults (Pang, [2021](#)). Recently, configuration evidence demonstrates an ability of fatigue to emanate under varied mixtures of FoMO and various types of overloads (social, communication, information, and feature overload) indicating the possibility of dropout initiating via numerous distinct "fatigue districts," instead of a unique reason (Zhang et al., [2024](#)).

BeReal is a platform which is being promoted as an anti-Instagram scene, i.e., authenticity and spontaneity are being sold as the main value propositions. However, according to the latest BeReal scholarship, things are even more complicated: authenticity is actively received, produced and rated, and the same design limitations that once seem refreshing, can later become restrictive or normatively pressuring (Kim et al., [2024](#); Pinch et al., [2024](#)). Critically to our study of interest, a familiar pattern was also reported in recent qualitative studies where initial enthusiasm turns into

cynicism and disinterest, which makes BeReal an opportune opportunity to explore the pattern of dropouts in terms of curiosity-to-fatigue (Thomas and Talbot, [2025](#)). Moreover, new well-being evidence has already started to investigate the relationship between BeReal use time and well-being metrics, and this more and more encourages culturally-specific qualitative research, which can rationalize the persistence or failure of engagement within specific groups and settings (Kankova et al., [2025](#)).

Although these innovations have been made, much of the research on BeReal has been focused in Western contexts, whereas Asia, where digital practices, privacy standards, visibility of peers, and platform ecosystem vary significantly, is under-researched. As such, our research contributes to the U&G agenda by qualitatively analyzing the narratives of Asian young adults on BeReal adoption, daily use, and ultimate abandonment, with a specific focus on the changing gratification, experience of fatigue, and culturally defined sense of being real.

BeReal (reframed for our Asian qualitative study)

The empirical discussion of the impact of social media on well-being is ambivalent, as it has been demonstrated that the impacts vary depending on the user of social media, their usage, and the design of social media (Appel et al., [2020](#); Sala et al., [2024](#)). A popular strand of this debate is on the topic of authenticity vs. performativity: in situations where platform features promote strategic self-presentation (e.g., editing, filtering, audience management), users can feel augmented social comparison and self-monitoring, which can be detrimental to well-being in some cases and contexts (de Vaate et al., [2020](#); Kreling et al., [2022](#)).

BeReal is presented as a spontaneous social media alternative supposed to oppose polished self-presentation by creating authenticity-by-design limitations (Bulchand-Gidumal, [2023](#); Vaterlaus and Chow, [2024/2025](#)). It has core design characteristics such as a daily, random notification, a two-minute posting window, front- and back-camera capture, and few editing affordances and lightweight interaction tools (e.g., reaction formats). Current studies in the field of human-computer interaction have demonstrated that these limitations can effectively prompt users to engage in less intentional sharing, but also introduce novel pressures and stresses, such as the feeling of being forced to share at the wrong time or disclosing when users would otherwise not (Kim et al., [2024](#)). Together with this, the descriptions of being real by young adults in BeReal indicate that authenticity is mostly partial and negotiated, a teaspoon, but not a complete leaving of the impression management (Reddy & Kumar, [2024](#)).

Notably, new BeReal scholarship refutes the idea of assuming that authenticity is a natural extension of spontaneity. Work in Media, Culture & Society states that BeReal can provide a sense of always-on authenticity that dictates authenticity and shifts it as a personal value to a social one: at times, this is felt as surveillance or an insidious monitoring (Snyder, [2024](#)). Similarly, qualitative studies of the New Media and Society have shown that users actively engage in constructing and maintaining authenticity, where they also police divisibility of others and also devise mechanisms to restore control (e.g., delaying, retaking, timing), which results in diminishing novelty of the platform and leads to a sense of disengagement (Pinch et al., [2024](#)). The more recent work demonstrates how the concept of authenticity is operationalized by design and community standards--making space in which individuals can make adjustments to the system such as BeFake, where users refigure the platform to their benefit of complicating the authenticity promise of the platform (Li et al., [2025](#)).

The relation between BeReal and well-being is also an empirical question that is open. Some recent findings have started to investigate the association between BeReal use time and well-being outcomes, though the results are too sparse to describe why dozens of users can maintain engagement and dozens will get exhausted and leave (Kankova et al., [2025](#)). In particular, it applies

to the fact that disengagement is theorized more widely in the broader literature using fatigue and discontinuation processes, where users minimize the use or discontinue the use due to accumulated stressors, overload, dissatisfaction, or misalignment in values (Farooq et al., [2023](#); Zheng and Ling, [2021](#)).

Although such progress has been made, the studies of BeReal are still so Western-focused, whereas Asian young adults might have a different sense of authenticity, visibility, expectations of others, privacy limits, social assessment because of the culturally specific norms of self-presentation and face. Based on the new scholarship of BeReal and discontinuation, we thus base our research on the curiosity-to-fatigue continuum to not only investigate the motives of adoption, but also examine how BeReal daily habits become boredom, pressure, overload, or value conflict-the ultimate determinant of dropout.

It is based on this framing that our study poses: How do Asian young adults explain (a) their original motivations and gratifications of adopting BeReal, (b) the experiences that maintain or undermine the involvement over time, and (c) the turning points and meanings connected to fatigue and subsequent withdrawal/dropout?

Methods

Participants

The target population this research will use is Asian youth (18-25) who (a) use BeReal, (b) used BeReal but stopped using it or (c) have never used BeReal despite being aware of its existence. The presence of current users, former users and nonusers is not random since it is only through the inclusion of the entire engagement life cycle (initial curiosity/adoption, routine engagement, fatigue and ultimate disengagement) that dropout patterns can be clearly understood. In line with previous BeReal qualitative research that pooled user groups to have both gratifications and failed gratifications, the current study will make sure that there will be diversity in terms of gender, educational levels (university students and early-career professionals), and the national background (South and Southeast Asian backgrounds).

The sampling will be done based on a purposive, maximum-variation reasoning to include various investment trajectories of engagement and discontinuance. The sample size will be informed by the notion of information power, through which sufficiency is contingent on the purpose of study, sample peculiarities, theoretical foundation, quality of conversation and approach to analysis (Malterud et al., [2016](#)). The study will aim at collecting deep enough accounts of fatigue and dropout, so around 30-45 in-depth interviews in the three categories of users will be targeted with the possibility to increase them in case meaningful new information is still discovered.

Procedures

The institutional ethics committee(s) will provide the ethical approval. The participants will be recruited via the university circles, student societies, Internet communities, and snowballing. The fact of voluntary involvement, protection of confidentiality, and the right to withdraw whenever necessary will be explicitly mentioned in recruitment materials. Since patterns of using BeReal are stipulated by routine and notifications on time zones, interviews will be planned on the convenience of the participant and conducted via Zoom/Teams or face-to-face, where possible.

Since the research is Asian-based research involving potential multilingual interviewing, interviews can be held in either the English language or local languages. In the case of non-English interviews, the transcripts will be translated in a transparent and documented way so that the meaning loss is minimal, and culturally specific expressions are not lost. The current methodological advice in cross-cultural qualitative research is to think through and account in case of translation choices and report them in an open manner (e.g., translator role, checking

procedures, and how meaning was retained).

In order to enhance rigor, the interview procedures will be captured in an audit trail and reporting will be in accordance to the qualitative reporting standards including SRQR and (where feasible) COREQ.

Data collection (Development of Interview guide)

The data will be gathered by semi-structured in-depth interviews that will focus on the participant to give a story of their engagement journey with BeReal. Uses and Gratifications as a sensitizing framework will inform the interview guide, although it will be open to emergent ideas, in particular, fatigue, social pressure, privacy issues, perceived inauthenticity over time, and notification burden. Following trusted survey/interview development procedures, the interview guide will be subjected to cognitive pretesting (e.g., testing it on a small sample of BeReal users and former users) to enhance clarity, cultural suitability and question sequence.

Interviews will examine: (a) the point of first adoption (curiosity/ novelty), (b) early gratifications (social connection, authenticity expectations, fun), (c) turning points (pressure, repetitiveness, boredom, irritation), and (d) the dropout decision (fatigue, disengagement, replacement by other platforms, peer decline). This style of life-course questioning assists the participants in narration of transitions, as opposed to enumerating reasons only.

Data analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis will be used in the study to make sense of patterned meanings between the accounts of participants on engagement and dropout. The reason why reflexive thematic analysis is suitable is that, it helps with the inductive development of the themes, whereas it also enables the researcher to arrive at the meaning of how the experiences (e.g., "fatigue") are generated using platform affordances, peer norms, and routines. The thematic analysis will be analyzed according to the traditional stages of the given procedure and modern instructions on conducting reflexive TA in a rigorous manner (Braun and Clarke, [2006](#); Braun and Clarke, [2021](#); Byrne, [2022](#)).

The transcripts will be familiarized by being read through many times and coded line-by-line. The coding will be done according to the meanings regarding engagement triggers, emotional reaction to notifications, authenticity performance, social expectations, and discontinuance reasons. Themes will be created by repeatedly reviewing, refining, and naming themes with the assistance of analytic memos. Although Uses and Gratifications will be informative, themes will not be put in pre-determined categories: instead, U&G will assist in explaining how gratifications turn unstable with time and transform into failed gratifications (e.g., authenticity into pressure or boredom). The data can be organized with the help of NVivo / Atlas.ti, and the interpretation will be researcher-centered.

Trustworthiness and rigor

There will be various tactics that will be used to enhance credibility. To begin with, triangulation will be applied at both a participant and a site level (a variety of categories of users and a variety of Asian settings), which is commonly accepted as a method of enhancing knowledge through comparative convergent and divergent narratives. Second, there will be a short-term member reflection option (e.g., summary of important themes) to confirm that interpretations are in line with their experiences, which was also a strategy of the original BeReal qualitative study design. Third, reflexive journaling will be kept, in order to record the possibility of biases and assumptions of the researcher influencing the interpretation, particularly in cross-cultural work.

Results

The current research examined patterns of engagement and disengagement with BeReal among Asian young adults based on the traditional qualitative content analysis methodology. The sample comprised of current users, former users (dropouts), and nonusers ($n = 158$). Throughout the dataset, three general themes were created: (a) the search of authenticity, (b) attraction of the audience, and (c) social connectivity. Taken as a package, these themes suggest a familiar BeReal adoption process, with initial curiosity and perceived realness inspiring trial and early usage, and continued use requiring the product to feel socially relevant and engaging enough, or become increasingly fatigued (e.g., annoyed, bored, and no longer perceived as valuable), which led to disengagement. Table 1 shows the codes in each theme with the frequency indicators and examples.

Table 1. Conventional qualitative content analysis results: participant ($n = 158$) experiences with BeReal.

Code	Total n	Total %	Users* n	Users* %	Nonusers n	Nonusers %	Representative Quote	Example
Theme 1. The pursuit of Authenticity								
Notification for “Time to BeReal”	74	53.1	75	77.3	02	0.5	“I don’t use BeReal anymore, but the only reason I would use it is because I would get a notification that said you have two minutes left to post your BeReal and I was like, ‘oh shit, okay. Surprise I should probably go post my BeReal if I got two minutes left.’” (Female, 18, past user)	
In the moment pictures	69	49.6	69	75.9	02	0.07	“The purpose is to show and see what others are doing simultaneously.” (Female, 19, current user)	
More authentic than other social media	58	43.3	55	65.0	1	3.0	“[BeReal is] Promoting the realness of people’s lives instead of fairy tales promoted on other social media platforms.” (Male, 21, current user)	
Inauthentic	51	37.0	45	54.2	3	5.0	“I’ve witnessed myself and other friends save their BeReal until they were doing something cool. Which makes an inaccurate portrayal of one’s life.” (Female, 20, past user)	
Camera takes picture of front and back	51	38.9	53	55.3	01	1.0	“[BeReal] uses the front and back camera at the same time to get you and what you’re doing at the same time.”	

Code	Total n	Total %	Users* n	Users* %	Nonusers n	Nonusers %	Representative Quote	Example
							(Female, 19, current user)	
Post within two minutes	32	23.7	32	34.6	2	3.0	“You have two minutes to capture an image before being late [on BeReal].” (Female, 19, current user)	
Posting late	18	15.3	22	23.7	2	3.0	“[BeReal] shows how many times people retake the image or how late they are to posting.” (Male, 21, past user)	
Theme 2.								
Audience								
Captivation								
Entertainment	77	57.5	76	86.8	01	1.0	“I find [BeReal to be] entertaining.” (Female, 19, current user)	
Do not need another social media platform	56	35.9	35	39.0	25	47.1	“I didn’t see a point in getting another social media app [like BeReal]. I already use Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. So, I’m pretty caught up on the lives around me.” (Male, 21, nonuser)	
Less pressure than other social media	43	28.7	43	46.6	02	1.0	“[BeReal] is more relaxed [than other social media] . . . seeing what people are doing at that exact moment.” (Male, 21, past user)	
Not time intensive	34	25.1	35	37.9	01	1.0	“[BeReal] takes up less time and is a unique experience.” (Female, 20, current user)	
Not enough app features	21	23.3	22	23.7	10	18.6	“There really isn’t much to do on the [BeReal] app.” (male, 20, current user)	
Not interested	19	13.2	7	7.5	11	16.6	“[The premise of BeReal] does not spark my interest.” (Female, 20, nonuser)	
Annoying	13	9.0	8	8.78	2	3.0	“I got tired of doing something just because of a notification. [BeReal] isn’t even that fun.” (Female, 18, past user)	
Post first before seeing anything	8	5.2	7	1.0	01	1.0	“You cannot see other people’s BeReals without posting yours first.” (Nonbinary, 20, current user)	

Code	Total n	Total %	Users* n	Users* %	Nonusers n	Nonusers %	Representative Quote	Example
Theme 3. Social Connection								
Keeping in touch with family and friends	83	4.6	82	86.0	01	1.0	“I do use the [BeReal] app to keep in touch with my friends and family.” (Female, 18, current user)	
Popularity of BeReal	36	26.8	29	33.4	7	12.8	“The BeReal trend seems like its dying anyway.” (Male, 21, nonuser)	
Friends’ use and nonuse of BeReal	28	19.3	23	27.9	5	8.8	“The reason I don’t use [BeReal] is because I don’t know any other people who use it, and connecting with my friends would be the only reason I would use it.” (Female, 22, nonuser)	
Reactions	7	8.3	7	1.0	01	1.0	“[After personally posting] You are able to react to your friends BeReals with your selfie.” (Male, 18, current user)	
Not aware/not heard of	8	5.9	1.5	2.0	8	15.7	“I have never heard of the [BeReal] app.” (female, 18, nonuser)	

Note. Percentages exceed 100% because participants contributed to more than one code. Participant gender (male, female, nonbinary), age, and BeReal user status are provided parenthetically after quotes for context. Users include those who are currently using the app and those that have used it in the past.

The pursuit of authenticity

Respondents had conflicting views regarding whether BeReal was able to sell the idea of authenticity. To most people, the essence of BeReal was attributed to capture-of-the-moment and lack of extensive editing. Users explained authenticity by the design logic of the app, the daily summery message of Time to BeReal and the limited amount of time to post, which brought a feeling of impulsivity and responsibility. This can be seen in the participants focusing on the notification trigger (Time to BeReal), two-front/two-back camera capture, and two-minute posting requirement. The notion of authenticity in this framing was not only a moral concept, capable of being real, but a process created by limitations that made staging a perfect post more difficult.

Meanwhile, a significant number of respondents raised the question of whether or not authenticity can be achieved on any social media. With some participants accounting for the features of spontaneity, some participants had seen recreation of familiar social media dynamics like delaying their posts until something more interesting happened or filtering through pleasant conditions. The participants had a tendency to save their BeReal until they were doing something interesting (as one responded), which participants construed as a way of diminishing the supposed authenticity

of the app. These reactions highlight that the authenticity of BeReal is felt as conditional and negotiable: platform guardrails can reinforce it, whereas the users can undermine it (e.g. posting late) or established the rules of the game (i.e. normalizing subtle performance). In general, the experience of authenticity in BeReal was one of a conflict between spontaneous disclosure and social self-presentation, and this conflict was what would determine the continuation and the ultimate deactivation.

Audience captivation

Their interviews showed that the capacity of BeReal to maintain attention was not consistent--in most cases, the participants described that it took the route of both initial interest and subsequent steady light use, or the route of initial interest and eventual tiredness. To a lot of users, BeReal felt like an amusement, a stress reliever and less time consuming, which implied that the minimalism of the platform lessened the cognitive load in comparison to the algorithm-filled platforms. Respondents often referenced BeReal as a no-stress check-in, and not a high-investment platform, and facilitated further usage when the application was still effortless, fast, and socially significant.

Nevertheless, failure to engage in narratives were closely associated with lack of fascination in the long-run. Often participants explained that BeReal was not featured as something to do; they said that there was not much to do except to post a daily post, which diminished the replay value. Some considered BeReal to be unnecessary, which is why they did not require one more social media application as they felt satisfied with the existing ones. The previous users, especially, pointed out the dynamics of fatigue: daily prompt might turn into something new or something new to be obligatory, and regular posting might make the daily life dull or too revelatory. In that sense, curiosity served as a gateway to trial use whereas fatigue came in cases when the interactivity of the platform was too little, the routine was too repeating, or the perception of redundancy in the use triggered the feeling of frustration or uselessness in its further use.

Social connection

Social connection was one of the main sources of maintained engagement, as well as, disengagement. The users of BeReal often placed it as a connection tool to stay in touch with close people and friends - to see what close people were doing and share personal daily experiences. Notably, the significance of BeReal was generally pegged on the relationships that were in place, and not the establishment of new relationships. This implies that BeReal use maintained when the application was used as a collective ritual by existing networks.

Meanwhile, the dependency on the network of BeReal added the possibility of dropping out. The respondents also reported loss of interest when their friends stopped sharing or when the application was seen as a waning trend (the trend appears to be dying anyway). Nonusers tended to stress low levels of adoption among their groups suggesting that low levels of uptake in a local area became a lower incentive to join. Also, other participants referred to interpersonal friction connected to reactions and visibility, which implies that even authentic platforms may cause relationship tensions. Combined, social connection was a strengthening of engagement during the presence of peer networks and a dropout catalyst during experienced decreases in peer participation- strengthening the wider curiosity to fatigue process.

Discussion

The present paper investigated the engagement and dropout rates of Asian young adults on BeReal through the lens of understanding the spontaneity-based design of BeReal by the users, former users, and nonusers. BeReal as a type of unfiltered social media, which puts limits to promote unfiltered posting, provides an effective framework to consider how the concepts of authenticity features are perceived, negotiated, and even discarded.

In order to explain the findings, the discussion uses Uses and Gratifications and the MAIN model that focuses on the role of media affordances in creating gratifications and failures of gratification. In the three themes, the accounts of participants fell mainly on the modality, agency, and interactivity with a progression towards novelty/curiosity to routine and fatigue, especially among former users (dropouts).

MAIN model and BeReal

Modality

The modality-related gratifications present in BeReal in this study were closely connected with the concept of the in-the-moment visual logic and the dual camera format. The timely notification feature and the simultaneous capture of the front and back side of the platform were also frequently viewed to be not similar to other platforms, contributing to the feeling of the newness that can drive the adoption of a trial. Moreover, the fact that the users state BeReal to be more authentic than other social media is in line with the thought that posting content visually anchored but constrained can be perceived as more realistic than the presentation standards that are highly edited in other large-scale social media. This is important since more extensive studies have demonstrated that social media spaces commonly promote an idealistic self-presentation, and authenticity is often linked with improved well-being. Nonetheless, even the modality affordance had early warnings of the new decays. Because of some participants noting strategic time and selective posting behaviors (i.e. waiting to post and do something cool), the perceived realism of BeReal might be undermined. This trend aligns with premises that the promise of BeReal can be repositioned around always-on performance demands- where users need to continuously create moments of content-worthiness- which may be a source of fatigue and attrition.

Agency

The agency affordance of BeReal is achieved by creating user generated content with guard-rails. The short window and apparent clues (e.g., posting late) of BeReal are felt as influencing the manifestation of agency in contrast to platforms where users can refine posts to be made. According to the testimonies of the participants, they can appreciate these limitations as it takes the pressure to be perfect away and as it makes the creation of the content more of a communal daily photo than a performance product. Simultaneously, agency happens to be burdensome as well. The transition to mandatory rather than voluntary posting may be interpreted by the participants of the platform as a requirement to engage in constant self-disclosure. When facing the situation when young adults have to deal with academic, family, and social demands, repeated prompts may be perceived as intrusive, especially when users perceive that their everyday life is not exciting enough to write about. This goes some way to explain why the interest led adoption could shift to exhaustion-induced disengagement particularly among former users.

Interactivity

Interactivity became one of the determiners between sustained users and dropouts/nonusers. The existing users tended to position BeReal as something entertaining and less pressure, implying that the app has managed to provide interaction with minimal effort. However, nonusers and most ex-users pointed to unsuccessful interactivity: functionalities were few, there was little to do except to post and comment, and accessibility was frustrating (such as having to post to see). In case interactivity is perceived as a thin experience, users can go back to platforms that provide more content streams and other forms of engagement. These trends capture the competition of attention among platforms in an oversaturated social media space. In the case where BeReal is perceived as unnecessary (not needed another social media platform), the platform has difficulties maintaining engagement once the initial interest wanes, and burnout is more probable.

Failures to use and dropouts as gratifications.

One of the most significant contributions of this research is that it addresses both nonuse and dropout as it addresses the more comprehensive gap in social media research as to why individuals cease using the platforms or never use them at all. In the current findings, nonuse was frequently an expression of unsuccessful gratifications in the cases of redundancy (my needs are already met elsewhere), poor representation in the social network (friends do not use it), my lack of interest or even awareness. These are in line with traditional U&G expectations that media vie to compete in terms of attention and nonuse can be described by unfilled or exclusionary gratifications. Instead, dropout seemed to be less of an initial fit than of a wear-and-tear, with the course of time. History has seen many users shift towards curiosity, frustration, and boredom when the daily reminder became tiresome, the platform was no longer interesting, or their peers ceased engaging. It is important to note that social connection was a retention force, and a dropout trigger: It is worthwhile when the social networks share the content, and meaningless when social networks cease sharing.

Authenticity and change, ephemerality, and the curiosity-fatigue switch.

Throughout the dataset, authenticity was both the most desirable and the most vulnerable offer of BeReal. In the larger literature, authenticity is frequently theorized concerning the platform affordances of ephemerality and decreased permanence, which may reduce the risks of impression management and facilitate more transparent self-presentation. Nonetheless, the participants of this research still reported inauthentic behaviours- indicating that affordances cannot ensure authenticity since users can adjust platform constraints towards social purposes. There is an additional layer of complexity in the so-called curiosity-to-fatigue pathway: despite the fact that the users might initially feel enthusiastic about the authenticity features, daily usage over time may introduce a different form of performance pressure. Authenticity may produce exhaustion and immersion when it is a repetitive requirement. This tension implies that the issue of whether authenticity is achieved in the future ought to be researched as to how expectations of authenticity change over time--especially in culturally diverse contexts where norms of relations and audience concerns can influence what is considered to be real.

Future research directions (Asian focus)

Based on the existing results, any future study must (a) compare several Asian nations to study culture- and context-specific engagement norms, (b) adopt longitudinal qualitative designs to identify the role of transitions between adoption and fatigue and dropout, and (c) understand how the density of the peer network and trend decline predict disengagement. Also, in future work, it may explicitly address the issue of temporality/ephemerality and its perceived presence or absence as presumed, irrelevant, or the primary element in authenticity ratings.

Implications

Theoretical implications

To begin with, the results provide an extension of U&G and the MAIN model demonstrating that the gratifications of BeReal are not fixed and thus vary in a sequence of curiosity - routine - fatigue. The early adoption (modality) may be dominated by novelty and realism but the continued use will rely on whether interactivity is providing persistent value without increasing psychological costs. Second, the results are in favor of the theorization of failed gratifications as the core of dropout. Entertainment declines, peer activity declines, and post first leads to accumulating and increasing fatigue, when failed gratifications when autonomy is decreased, and this occurs to influence discontinuance decisions. Third, the results indicate the possible new pair of gratification/failure, specific to spontaneous platforms: authenticity gatekeeping (gratification to some users) against

authenticity burden (failure to other users). This is what contributes to the fact that the same guardraids (time window, lateness visibility) may be driving one person and limiting another person.

Practical implications

To platform designers, the findings suggest that engagement might have to be maintained by minimizing repetitive overload and still being authentic. This might involve: (a) customizable notification preferences to minimize annoyingness, (b) optional engagement options that provide the pressure reduction but preserve authenticity indicators and, (c) other low-stakes interaction options that increase meaningful engagement but not reinstatement of heavy curation. Other research on notification and fatigue indicates that over-alerting is one of the causes of disengagement and opt-out behavior, further supporting the importance of considering notification load during use. In the case of universities and digital well-being programs, the result will be that, even with authentic social apps, media literacy is still likely to be necessary: young adults can still be helped with the help of strategies to maintain social media practices, decrease compulsion/overload, and notice when a platform is no longer beneficial or debilitating.

Future research and limitations

This study has limitations. First, the results must be viewed with caution since the system of engagement on BeReal is contextual and peer-driven, with the platform evolving over time. Second, the cross-sectional design does not provide information about how people switch between use, nonuse and re-adoption. Third, the research is based on a single spontaneous platform; the comparison of BeReal-like features of Instagram or TikTok might help to reveal whether the results are motivated by the design or social conventions in general. Future studies also ought to focus on (a) longitudinal research in Asian nations to trace patterns of adoption, fatigue, and dropout; (b) cross-country comparative research (e.g., South Asia vs Southeast Asia vs East Asia) to investigate culture-specific authenticity norms and peer influences; (c) mixed-method designs that combine interviews with digital trace data (e.g., posting regularity, lateness trends); and (d) direct quantification of fatigue-related mechanisms (overload, FoMO, social comparison, stress) that have been demonstrated to predict fatigue and dis

Conclusion

Qualitative research can provide us with the understanding that BeReal activity among Asian young adults should be explained as a dynamic process: the interest in using it is initially supported by the authenticity framing and novelty, whereas further usage is determined by whether the platform still can bring social value without turning out to be repetitive and annoying. The results indicate that the main affordances that BeReal has, including authenticity and pressure, can be used both simultaneously and achieve the desired effect of explaining why a number of young adults become disengaged in the long run. This paper uses U&G and MAIN model to find both achieved and unachieved gratifications that could be used to model further quantitative relationships between BeReal engagement, fatigue, and discontinuance in Asian contexts.

Declaration

Data Availability Statement

All relevant data generated or analysed during this study are included within the article. No additional data is available from the corresponding author.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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