

**THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF *WHATSAPP*  
AMONG THE ADOLESCENTS IN UNIVERSITY  
MALAYSIA SABAH**

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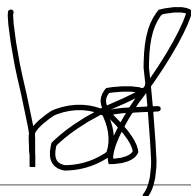
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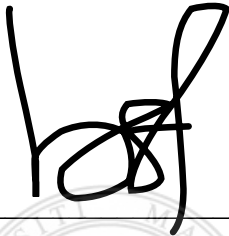
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**THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF *WHATSAPP* AMONG THE  
ADOLESCENTS IN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SABAH**

**BY**

**BRENDA STACY FLORENCE**

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**This thesis is presented to fulfil part of the requirements to obtain a Bachelor's  
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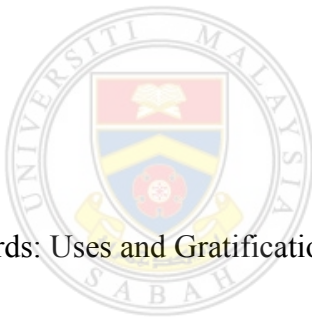
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate the wants and needs of *WhatsApp* instant messaging among adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Identifying the needs of *WhatsApp* usage among the adolescents, identifying the uses of *WhatsApp* by the adolescents and identifying the gratifications obtained by the adolescents in UMS are examined. This study was carried out in UMS with adolescents who used *WhatsApp*. A number of 375 adolescents took part in the survey. Respondents were chosen randomly in UMS. Data was collected using questionnaire adapted from “The Uses and Gratifications of *WhatsApp* among the Adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah”. Results revealed that respondents had various wants and needs in using *WhatsApp*. They possessed positive attitudes towards *WhatsApp* usage. Most of them had great experiences with *WhatsApp*. However, inaccessibility to Internet had slowed down their usage of *WhatsApp*. Finally, recommendations are made about using *WhatsApp* among adolescents in UMS.

Keywords: Uses and Gratifications, *WhatsApp*, Wants and Needs.



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>UMS</b>	<b>: UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SABAH</b>
<b>FSSA</b>	<b>: FAKULTI SAINS DAN SUMBER ALAM</b>
<b>FSSK</b>	<b>: FAKULTI SAINS SOSIAL DAN KEMANUSIAAN</b>
<b>FKI</b>	<b>: FAKULTI KOMPUTER DAN INFORMASI</b>
<b>FKJ</b>	<b>: FAKULTI KEJURUTERAAN</b>
<b>FPEP</b>	<b>: FAKULTI PERAKUNAN, EKONOMI DAN PERNIAGAAN</b>
<b>FPP</b>	<b>: FAKULTI PSIKOLOGI DAN PENDIDIKAN</b>
<b>FSMP</b>	<b>: FAKULTI SAINS MAKANAN DAN PEMAKANAN</b>
<b>ASTIF</b>	<b>: AKADEMI SAINS DAN TEKNOLOGI KREATIF</b>



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	CONTENT	PAGE
	<b>TITLE</b>	I
	<b>THESIS STATUS ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM</b>	II
	<b>DECLARATION</b>	III
	<b>CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY</b>	IV
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	V
	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	VI
	<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	VII
	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	VIII
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>1.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	1
	1.2 Background	2
	1.3 Problem Statement	3
	1.4 Research Questions	4
	1.5 Research Objectives	4
	1.6 Uses and Gratifications Theory	5
	1.7 Scope of Study	6
	1.8 Significant of Study	6
	1.9 Conclusion	7
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
	2.1 Theory Introduction	8
	2.1.1 Background of Uses and Gratifications Theory	10 - 11
	2.2 Literature Review	12
	2.2.1 Needs	13 - 15



	2.2.2 Uses	15 - 17
	2.2.3 Gratifications	17 - 19
	2.2.4 Demographics	20 - 21
	2.3 Theoretical Framework	22
	2.4 Conceptual Framework	23
	2.5 Conclusion	24
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	
	3.1 Introduction	25
	3.2 Research Methods	26
	3.3 Research Design	26
	3.4 Research Location	26
	3.5 Sampling	26
	3.6 Research Population	27
	3.7 Research Instrument	27
	3.7.1 Questionnaires	27
	3.8 Operationalization	27
	3.8.1 Demography	28
	3.8.2 Needs	28
	3.8.3 Uses	29
	3.8.4 Gratifications	29
	3.9 Data Analysis Procedure	29
	3.10 Pilot Testing	29
	3.11 Conclusion	30
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION</b>	
	4.1 Introduction	30
	4.2 Section A - Analysis of Respondent Demographic Information	31
	4.2.1 Distribution of Respondents by Age	31

	4.2.2 Distribution of Respondents by Gender	32
	4.2.3 Distribution of Respondents by Race	33 - 34
	4.2.4 Distribution of Respondents by Faculty	35
	4.2.5 Distribution of Respondents by Year of Study	36 - 37
	4.3 Section B - Respondent Usage Information	38
	4.3.1 Reasons of Using WhatsApp	38
	4.3.2 Importance of Using WhatsApp	39
	4.3.3 Duration of Using WhatsApp	40
	4.3.4 Frequency of Using WhatsApp	41
	4.3.5 Reasons for Choosing WhatsApp	42
	4.3.6 WhatsApp Awareness Factors	43
	4.3.7 Reasons of Continuation of WhatsApp Usage	44 - 45
	4.4 Section C - Analysis of Gratifications Sought from WhatsApp Usage Among Adolescents at University Malaysia Sabah (UMS).	46 - 52
	4.5 Conclusion	53
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY</b>	
	5.1 Introduction	54
	5.2 Discussion of Study Findings	55
	5.3 Limitations of the Study	56 - 58
	5.4 Recommendations	58
	5.5 Conclusion	59
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	60 - 66
	<b>APPENDIX</b>	67 - 72

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

*WhatsApp* is a smartphone-based instant messenger app. It allows users to send and receive photos, videos, audio, and written messages over the internet. *WhatsApp* has established itself as a preferable alternative to SMS texting, which may be costly when used in foreign locations due to roaming fees while *WhatsApp*, on the other hand, relies on an active Wi-Fi network (Barhoumi, 2015).

Even though we have witnessed tremendously big trend changes in the previous several decades, such as rapid, easy, and instant messaging, communication is still continually evolving today. Social applications have really made an enormous impact on our society. Many communication platforms have changed the way people connect and socialize online. Gaming, search engines, and the astonishing social media are just a few of the applications available on the internet (Safko, 2010). Social platforms are now transforming the lifestyle of a society. Thus, the widespread usage of social media such as *WhatsApp* indicates a major change in social media technology among adolescents in University. Over the last several years, there has been a considerable growth in the rate of usage of *WhatsApp*. This has resulted in several studies of these patterns and the impacts they have on all its users. Currently, *WhatsApp* is the most popular instant messaging program on the planet, having surpassed the 1 billion user mark, particularly among young adults (Sutikno et al., 2016).

This study will address the uses and gratifications of *WhatsApp* among adolescents in Kota Kinabalu. The focus is on the variety of wants and needs in using *WhatsApp* such as for communication, entertainment and more. Although several research have been undertaken on the impacts of social media on users, no research have been undertaken on adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah and their extensive usage of *WhatsApp*. The research is based on the uses and gratifications of *WhatsApp* as a means of satisfaction medium.

## 1.2 Background

*WhatsApp* is based on the principle of open communication, which breaks the mold of traditional communication (Pozin & Nawi, 2018). Brian Anton and Jan Koom, both Yahoo employees, designed the app (Barhoumi, 2015). Advances in electronic information and communication technology has become a standard use in global enterprises while simultaneously bringing people's lives closer digitally and further apart physically (Pozin & Nawi, 2018). *WhatsApp* is also one of the technological advancements that is widely used on specific electronic gadgets (Cruz & Harindranath, 2020).

Furthermore, *WhatsApp* has risen to the top of the list of social networking apps as the most popular messaging app for university students (Alqahtani et al., 2018). *WhatsApp* instant messaging makes it simple to gather and exchange information and knowledge (Barhoumi, 2015).

The benefits of using the *WhatsApp* application around practitioners included overcoming communication hurdles across teams and receiving direct input, which resulted in quick technical decision making (Pozin & Nawi, 2018). They have also mentioned instructional benefits such as the provision of learning resources, lecturer availability, and the opportunity to continue learning outside of class hours (Bouhnik, Deshen & Gan, 2014). Therefore, *WhatsApp* has gradually become the “communication portal” for social networking, changing the way people interact (Susilo, 2014).

According to the adolescents, since January 2019 when *WhatsApp* was created and launched, it was largely used to alert them of the availability of new materials, which kept them up to speed (Nawaila & Bicen, 2018). Student interest in academics is highly encouraged because *WhatsApp* promotes information sharing, increases communication in peer support for educational issues, and more (Baguma et al., 2019).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Countless researches has been done on WhatsApp before. *WhatsApp* has the potential to improve the adolescents' thinking skills, knowledge handling abilities, and problem-solving abilities. Thus, adolescents could use *WhatsApp* to produce a class publication and share their work with the rest of the group (Barhoumi, 2015). Although most people use the application, not all people would have the same wants and needs towards it. With that being said, the understanding and patterns of the adolescents using *WhatsApp* and receiving gratifications from it should be studied further. Moreover, the uses and gratifications theory was used in several studies on new media which includes *WhatsApp*.

It is also worth noting that, despite the fact that *WhatsApp* is a popular digital communication medium in the modern era, most studies focus on digital or social media in general, rather than *WhatsApp* in particular. In addition, while studies on *WhatsApp* have been conducted, its impact on institutional communication has yet to be investigated, particularly locally in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Agrawal and Mittal (2019), for example, investigated the key role of *WhatsApp* as *WhatsApp*-customer relationship management for strengthening relationships in the education sector. Furthermore, Cetinkaya (2017) investigates the effects of *WhatsApp* use in education and determines students' attitudes toward the process.

Furthermore, with the increasing penetration of smartphones in Malaysia, as well as the accompanying applications, it is critical to understand how they are used in formal or informal communication to achieve desired outcomes among adolescents and lecturers. This study will concentrate on the uses and gratifications of *WhatsApp*, examining its usage within the University Malaysia Sabah and the needs that it satisfies.

By investigating *WhatsApp* usage at University Malaysia Sabah, the current study sheds light on what motivates people to use *WhatsApp* as a form of new media and what kinds of gratification they get from it.

## 1.4 Research Questions

This study has purpose due to the questions below :

- ( i ) How often do the adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah use *WhatsApp*?
- (ii) What are the reasons that initiated adolescents' interest to use *WhatsApp* and what are their reasons for the continuous use of *WhatsApp*?
- ( iii ) Are the adolescents fulfilled with the usage of *WhatsApp*?

## 1.5 Research Objectives

This study examines the aspects influencing the usage of *WhatsApp* on their wants and needs among the adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah. The following are the targeted objectives of the study :

- ( i ) To identify the needs of *WhatsApp* usage among the adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah.
- ( ii ) To identify the uses of *WhatsApp* by the adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah.
- ( iii ) To identify the gratifications obtained by the adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah.

## 1.6 Uses and Gratifications Theory

This research has selected the Uses and Gratifications theory. A fundamental premise of the U&G theory is that people consistently participate in media use and engage intensely with communication media by constructing profile groupings with similar uses and potentially corresponding gratifications (Musa et al., 2015). This theory explains why users choose a certain medium and what roles the medium does for them.

Those young and very social at their age tend to use the Internet as their desired gratification such as using Facebook or Instagram to communicate with old friends, to post or look at pictures and to also make new friends.

Uses and gratification theory was used in the study to understand and make sense of the adolescents' gratifications in University Malaysia Sabah where their feedbacks would be recorded as they would usually use *WhatsApp* to get the gratification of communicating to exchange information or knowledge amongst each other.

As a result, it is the adolescents' obligation to pick whichever media they want and to determine for themselves what benefits or drawbacks they would experience as a result of doing so. Furthermore, according to U&G theory, the audience has an active part in selecting and using the media they wish to utilise. As a result, it may be concluded that the media's impacts, both good and bad, stay balanced since the public is conscious of their own desires.

## 1.7 Scope of Study

The scope of this study is basically about the uses and gratifications of *WhatsApp* among adolescents in University Malaysia Sabah. There are factors that cause these adolescents to use *WhatsApp* as a medium to satisfy their needs when utilising the application. This research analysis is being undertaken at University Malaysia Sabah in Kota Kinabalu, where social media has been used among adolescents for many years. The adolescents would be given a survey using quantitative technique. The University Malaysia Sabah adolescents will also be the only respondents for the survey study. The supervisor for this research must ensure that the research techniques used are accurate and trustworthy.

## 1.8 Significant of Study

The study has gained relevance as a result of the research findings. This study aims to reveal the uses and gratifications of the adolescents on *WhatsApp*. The usage of *WhatsApp* on fulfilling the gratifications is significant because it helps to achieve adolescents' needs and wants by communicating without requiring face-to-face contact. The new information gained from this study would enable the government of higher education institutions to develop and promote the use of social applications in universities. It is in the best interests of the board of directors in the several universities, policy makers, lecturers, adolescents and even parents, to understand and develop strategies that increase *WhatsApp*'s positive impact on adolescents' knowledge and communication skills. This research could also inspire and empower other e-learning scholars to contribute more educational writings on the practical use of social applications in universities as it may increase the communication amongst the adolescents and even lecturers. The capacity of *WhatsApp* to facilitate ongoing dialogues between lecturers and adolescents at any time and from any location could give both groups a sense of community.



## 1.9 Conclusion

This chapter contains introduction and background of the study, problem statement, objectives, and questions of the study, uses and gratifications theory, scope of study and the significant of study. Next chapter will be based on the review of literature which would be Chapter 2.



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## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Theory Introduction

Every research or study is subject to a theory. A theory is needed to make sense of a research and to understand a certain behaviour from the participant. This research has the opportunity to use the Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G).

The theory was developed by Katz and Blumler (1974) in the early 1940s to explain why individuals use different forms of media, what requirements they must utilize them, and what gratifications they gain from utilising them (Rubin, 2009). While being a theoretical approach rooted from the research of media impacts that analyses the ways in which society interacts with the media, the theory focuses on both the message and the sender, who is considered an active user (McQuail, 2010). The uses and gratifications idea arose from people's coexisting environments, emphasising their usage of media to meet their needs, as offered in response to traditional mass communication studies (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974).

For a long time, the Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT) has been used to explain how people use the media to meet their needs and desires. This theory also looks at the motivations people discover when using media, as well as the different elements that can impact motivations and the outcomes of media-related actions (Outini, 2020).

According to a study, the uses and gratifications of a Facebook music video sharing group are driven by four key motives which consists of contribution, discovery, social engagement, and amusement, demonstrating that the nature of the media shapes the motivations that drive its usage (Karnik et al., 2013). The U&G theory also explains why people consciously pick a mass communication medium to accomplish their objectives and meet their own requirements. To designate a need, it is seen as an instant stimulation, whether internal or external, in order to achieve a condition of balance. To put it another way, if individuals have certain requirements, they will try to meet them (Chen, 2011). Nevertheless, the theory is still being used to this day.

In conclusion, the Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT) will also be used in this research to study the gratifications of the adolescents from University Malaysia Sabah in Kota Kinabalu.



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### **2.1.1 Background of Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) are a way of looking at why and how people actively seek out various media to meet their requirements. UGT (Severin & Tankard, 1997) is an audience-centered method to analysing mass communication. UGT differs from previous media effect theories in that it focuses on what people do with media rather than what media does to them. It assumes that media is a widely available product, and that audiences are the same commodity's users.

According to Blumler (1979), the U&G technique became renowned following frantic attempts in the late 1950s and early 1960s to measure the impact of short-term exposure to mass media campaigns. Others relate Katz's early work in an attempt to explain the U&G strategy in 1959 (O'Donohoe, 1994). Katz wanted to know why individuals are drawn to various media channels to meet certain desires (Mull & Lee, 2014), which meant that research had to shift from focusing on what media do to people to focusing on what people do with media (Reinhard & Dervin, 2009). In the 1960s and early 1970s, the theory was in great demand in research due to Katz's contributions (McQuail, 2000). The research continued to focus on the concept of active audience presence, with a specific focus on the desired gratifications.

This communication theory takes a positivistic approach to communication and is based on the socio-psychological communication tradition. It focuses on mass media communication (West et al., 2010). UGT examines how users purposefully select media to meet certain goals such as information, relaxation, social interactions/companionship, distraction, or escape.

According to West and Turner, UGT was a development of Abraham Maslow's Needs and Motivation Theory, which asserts that people actively seek to meet their needs based on a hierarchy. Maslow's Hierarchy of Demands is a pyramid-shaped list of these needs, with the most basic needs at the bottom and the desire for self-actualization at the top.

Biological/Physical, Security/Safety, Social/Belonging, Ego/Self-Respect, and Self-actualization make up the pyramid from the bottom up (Katz et al., 1973). Furthermore, the creation and refinement of such uses and gratifications typologies has continued in current U&G research. McQuail (2000), for example, offered motivation typologies for television and radio audiences which includes :

- Looking for information (Surveillance)
- Emotions and stress release; escapism of problems or routines (Diversion)
- Self-exploration, reinforcement and actualization (Personal Identity)
- Sense of group belonging, social companionship (Personal Relationships)

Rather from the usual mass media impacts, this example demonstrated an aim to comprehend mass communications' audiences engagement in a more precise link to personal experience and opinion of individuals (Blumler, 1979).



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## 2.2 Literature Review

In the modern digital era, new media has significantly expanded the received interactions that happen through online media content. As younger generations become more reliant on their digital devices and increasingly connected to them, new media is dominating popular culture throughout civilizations and becoming an unheard-of important source of life (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). The scope of media has expanded in the modern era as a result of the incorporation of more advanced communication technologies and a wide range of devices, including smart phones and their application sources, as well as digital implementations, such as social networking sites and home shopping networks, which enable people to receive communication through interacting with others, rather than in a single direction as in the past. The idea of modifying the uses and gratifications approach to match the current digital world has become increasingly significant due to the spread and expansion of all of these new technologies (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Having said that, a number of studies have examined the benefits and uses of *WhatsApp* Messenger, and the findings of their work have revealed how the *WhatsApp* application may satisfy its users' needs.

According to Ansari & Tripathi (2017), the main reason why people use *WhatsApp* is to interact with others. The results of this study show that using *WhatsApp* can be done for a variety of purposes, including communicating, connecting with friends, exchanging educational materials, studying in a group, and just forwarding messages.

According to a different survey, customers choose *WhatsApp* since it has over 500 million downloads worldwide and offers essential features including the ability to send and receive instant messages, images, videos, and voice calls over the Internet (Sharma & Shukla, 2016). It enables simple text or audio message communication between two or more people. In a word, it enables people to keep in touch. *WhatsApp* is more enticing than the standard text messaging feature on mobile devices since, after the programme is installed, sending and receiving messages are free. The free feature of *WhatsApp* has contributed to

its popularity. Additionally, its versatility across a variety of smartphone platforms, including Apple, Android, and others, as well as its global capability, play a significant role in its attractiveness (Montag et al., 2015).

According to Kamboj & Dayal (n.d), the phenomenal growth of internet-based mobile messaging service *WhatsApp*, which Facebook acquired for \$19 billion, not only undermined Facebook and Google's messaging initiatives, but also had a significant negative impact on traditional mobile messaging service SMS. *WhatsApp* currently processes over 10 billion messages per day and is one of the most popular paid apps across all mobile platforms (Church & De Oliveira, 2013). *WhatsApp* Messenger is available for iPhone, Blackberry, Android, and Windows Phone, and these devices can communicate with one another (Aal et al., 2014). It uses the same internet data that you use for email and web browsing, and messages are free. In addition to basic messaging, it allows users to send and receive real-time location information, images, video, audio, and text messages to individuals and groups of friends for free.

### **2.2.1 Needs**

Technology is such an important part of the world we live in. Many occupations that did not previously require the use of technology now do. Adolescents today grow up in a technologically advanced world. Most adolescent use technology on a daily basis, such as texting, social networking, and web surfing. They regard these technologies as both useful and entertaining.

The most crucial tool for assisting in the social, educational, and professional worlds is technology. According to the findings, because modern technology has become a commonplace part of adolescents' lives, it has implications for educational practise. Simuforosa (2013) highlighted that as technology is used more frequently, adolescents are able to construct, research, experiment, acquire knowledge, and model complex phenomena. Additionally, it might facilitate in-depth research, the integration of information, advanced thinking, and significant engagement. Adolescents are so immersed in a world of abundant knowledge.

In addition, technology was seen as a status symbol and a way for users to publicly declare their identities and images, with young people adopting it to stand out from the crowd and impress others (Arruda Filho & Ferreira, 2021). If consumers see advantages or pleasures, they are more likely to purchase and use integrated things. This can be expressed using consumption ideals like hedonism, which is concerned with experiencing consumption, pleasure, and happiness from using technology. To research the U&G in publishing social material, the relationship between gratifications and narcissism, and the impact of age on this relationship and these gratifications, social networking services, personal and subject-based blogs, and online forums were combined. Users are driven by factors including cognitive requirements, affection, social requirements, diversion, and enjoyment (Katz et al., 1973).

#### **2.2.1.1 Cognitive needs**

The satisfaction sought and gratification accomplished parts of the uses and pleasure theory are distinctive. Knowledge, gaining new information, understanding, and other cognitive demands are related. People look to the media for information and to satisfy their intellectual and mental needs. Most people watch news to sate this itch. Examples include quiz shows, educational programmes, children's arts and crafts programmes, documentaries, how-to movies, and more.

#### **2.2.1.2 Affective needs**

Needs that are affected by feelings, aesthetics, emotions, or emotional experiences are referred to as affective needs. All emotions, moods, as well as aesthetically pleasing, delightful, and emotional experiences, fall under this area of criteria. People use media, including television and other forms of expression, to satisfy their emotional needs. The best example would be when people cry or become emotional when watching a sad scene in a movie. In this study, the adolescents rely on *WhatsApp* to express their emotions by messaging with their closest friends.