

Usage of WhatsApp and Interpersonal Communication Skills among Private University Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the usage of WhatsApp and interpersonal communication skills among students in a Malaysia private higher education institution. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1986) was used to guide the study. Purposive and quota sampling was employed in this study, whereby students who have experiences using the WhatsApp were chosen to be the respondents. A survey method was employed in this study, where questionnaires were distributed and generate 125 valid responses. The data were then analyzed using Spearman's rho correlation test through the SPSS version 25.0. Based on the findings, all the variables under TAM model, namely; perceived usefulness and perceived ease-of-use have a positive and a moderate relationship with interpersonal communication skills. Limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and suggestions for future study are also discussed.

Key words: Usage of Social Networking Sites, Technology Acceptance Model, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease-of-Use, Interpersonal Communication Skills, Computer-Mediated Communication

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Introduction

In today's era, social network and instant messaging (IM) application play a pivotal role in most of urban people's life. Generations before managed and sustained their relationships through face-to-face interaction, however, with the development of technology where online communication have complimented and created a new type of interpersonal relationship (Gapsiso & Wilson 2015) through the computer-mediated communication. Today, interpersonal communication has transformed due to the advancement of social media and IM application over the years. This has supported the notion of Gapsiso and Wilson (2015) that the internet has become a powerful medium of communication in the majority of people's life.

With the convenience of the Internet, people use applications like WhatsApp Messenger, WeChat, Line Messenger and many others platforms that are built in IM. In the worldwide, WhatsApp has become one of the most popular in the market, as evidenced from its usage by over 1600 million active users as compared to other messenger applications (Clement, 2019). In the year of 2017, Malaysia was ranked as the world second largest WhatsApp Messenger users with 68% of their market penetration (Iqbal, 2019).

However, online communication through the uses of social networking sites (SNS) may sometimes lead to miscommunications. For instance, Drussell (2012) reported that some prefer the use of IM or social media platforms to communicate and resolve conflicts that may occur in their everyday life. Giffords (2009) argued that Internet usage found that 43% of users who are part of the social media or online communities feel more favour about their online life as compared to their offline communities.

As the world is now experiencing the social media revolution, it is obvious to say that social media is being used greatly for communication (Baruah, 2012). With the constant upgrade of technology, it has become an essential way for people to communicate and slowly it has taken the role of interpersonal communication (Drago, 2015). However, there is also debate whether social media can help to maintain and improve relationships (Yamakanith & Gurusamy, 2014) or vice versa (Mpepo, 2017; Ukwueze & Okafor, 2018).

For instance, the usage of social networking and IM applications during meetings with family and friends will create a distraction during the conversation, thus, decreasing the actual interpersonal communication between one another. The study by Drago (2015) found that children were often the ones complaining about parents' obsession with their smartphones or gadgets to serve on social media. This will increase the chances for parents to neglect their children and reduce their interaction with each other (Chris, 2016; Drago, 2015).

The use of the Internet for online communication is widely prevalent among university students today. Past studies explain that there are at least 80% of students in higher education who are active in social media (Schultz, 2011). Students today also have at least two IM accounts where they can often keep in contact with peers, family members and even their lecturers. The over-development of online communication technology has given people a chance to communicate online conveniently (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013).

However, interpersonal communication skill is still significant to students during discussions with peers and lecturers. By using interpersonal communication, it allows delivery and receiving of message in a clear way compared to virtual communication (Drago, 2015). It is usual for people to read each other's facial expressions and body language to create a clearer picture of the conversation without it leading to misunderstandings. Despite numerous studies that have proven the positive impacts of the use of social networking on interpersonal communication, however, there is also research which showed the negative impacts of social networking on interpersonal communication (Gjybegaj & Jararaa, 2018; Sevük, 2013) by reducing the desire to communicate interpersonally. Hence, the inconsistency of the past studies has urged the researchers to re-examine the study again.

Based on the issues highlighted above, therefore, the current study would like to examine the relationship between the usage of WhatsApp Messenger and interpersonal communication skills among the students in a private higher education institution (HEI).

Literature Review

Technology Acceptance Model

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an influential extension of Ajzen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action (TRA) and was first introduced by Fred Davis and is a widely used model for users' acceptance and usage of technology (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). This theory suggests that if a user is presented with a new system or technology, there are a number of variables that may influence the decision of how and when the user will have an intention to use it. Notably, the variables are perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease-of-use (PEOU).

Perceived usefulness is defined by Davis (1989) that it is when an individual agrees that the system would enhance their performance. While, perceived ease-of-use is defined as when an individual believes that the system can make them easy to using it. The usage of the TAM model has been very much used applied into the multiple types of technologies usage researches, such as email, the world wide web (WWW), e-commerce, and many other technologies (Lu, Zhou, & Wang, 2009). Furthermore, TAM was also applicable to explain the user adoption of IM applications.

Interpersonal Communication

According to Devito (2018), interpersonal (dyadic) communication is the communication that takes place between two individuals who have an established (connected) relationship. Thus, interpersonal communication would take place between employer and employee, among two siblings, a teacher and a student, two couples, two friends. However, with the advancement of the technology, nowadays the conversation between two persons take place online, which includes email, IM, chat groups which involved various SNS, where Kindred and Roper (2004) argued that colleagues' students used IM to maintain the "social connectedness".

Social networking sites and interpersonal communication

In Dubai, Shahkat Ali and Kootbodien (2017) aimed to investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a medium of interpersonal communication among Abu Dhabi University students. The results found out a positive impact of WhatsApp as an effective medium of interpersonal communication. In addition, Sevük (2013) investigate the influence of Facebook on interpersonal communication among students at the Eastern Mediterranean University students. The results indicated that respondents use Facebook and the students do not like to engage in face to face communication. However, face to face communication habits are still not vanished.

In contrast, Gjylbegaj and Jararaa (2018) examined the impact of social media on interpersonal communication of Youth in United Arab Emirates. However, their findings indicated differently as social media bring more negative effects and do not help to improve interpersonal communication. This was consistent with the findings of Chris (2016), who also found that social networking engagement has negative influence on the family interpersonal communication which badly affecting the interrelationship of the family.

In Malaysia context, Bakar, Rashid, and Aziz (2014) examined the mobile instant messaging (MIM) on the interpersonal communication relationship among youth in Klang Valley area. The results indicated that MIM and interpersonal communication and relationship are positively correlated. Whereas, Ndunge (2017) examined the role of social media in interpersonal communication among secondary school students in Machakos Country. The findings showed that extensive use of SNS in communication and entertainment has resulted negative impact on face-to-face communication among the youths. However, the results of a research show that perceived usefulness and perceived ease-of-use affects an individual to use social media significantly (Elkaseh, Kok & Chun, 2016).

This has further support the notion that individuals will only pick up and use the technology or system if it is simple to use, easy to access, and provides great experiences. This shows that there is a positive linkage between perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use because the acceptance of a system or technology. Based on the research by Elkaseh *et al.*, (2016), students are less likely to use the e-learning system if it is just easy to use, but not useful, hence, both elements are crucial for the e-learning. Furthermore, Wan Othman, Mohd Apandi and Ngah (2016) intend to examine the uses of social media and self-concept among TATI University college undergraduate students. The study revealed that social media is prominent among communication between friends and family, which influence the self-concept of the students. In addition, Facebook and WhatsApp were rated as the mostly used SNS site.

Online communication allows the growth of relationships between peers, family and lecturers. Through online communication, individuals can avoid the nervousness and shyness of facing someone in real life. They can solve problems, talk about the issues, confront someone that might have misunderstood them without having communicate with them in real life (Hamat, Embi, & Hassan, 2012). Similarly, before meeting people in real life, people can utilize IM applications where they can start creating some talks to feel less estrange. This has congruent with the findings of Waigumo (2013) that constant conversations online can strengthen existing interpersonal relationships.

Furthermore, lecturers can also reply the message for the students instead of needing them to wait for the next class. A study by Al-Rahmi, Othman, & Musa (2014) showed that the constant interaction between students and lecturers on the online platform can enhance a students' learning skill where students who are shy to ask questions in class can make use of this system to ask questions personally. In Vietnam, Giang (2019) found a significant positive relationship between using SNS with study habits and interpersonal relationships with their families, peers, and lecturers.

Despite all the positive findings been highlighted in the literature, however, there are also past studies which revealed that there is negative effect of social media on student's interpersonal communication skills. For instance, Hill (2015), verified in his study that the dependency of using social networks will decrease students to have face-to-face communication and it will then affect the quality of their relationships. Furthermore, Rauch, Strobel, Bella, Odachowski, & Bloom (2014) discovered that many of Malaysians use Facebook as much as half of the time of their day. The usage of social media or IM applications does not actually improve students' offline relationships with their peer, family and lecturers as most people today, stick to their smartphones instead of interacting with others. Christensen's (2018) results also found a similar findings where an individual who spent more time on social media more likely experienced a negative impact and cause the quality of the relationships decline.

Most of the past studies showed that many students today tend to avoid communicating with people face-to-face, but instead chooses to communicate through the virtual world (Pollet, Dunbar & Roberts, 2011). For example, the use of social media has also affected relationships of children and parents. Today, many children tend to ignore their parents talking to them until they are done using their social media or are done talking to their friends online. Parents are often interrupted by their children's phone notifications and their attention will be diverted to the phone instead of listening to their parents. Therefore, family members who use their spare time to manage and enhance their bond with each other is often disrupted by the Internet world (Abd Jalil, Abdul Jalil, Abdul Latif, 2010). Many households have created family chat groups on instant messaging applications and they spend most of their time communicating through the group chat instead of meeting up and creating conversation face-to-face, where this will affect the relationship between the family members.

Based on the discussion above, therefore, the current study conceptualized and hypothesized that:

Usage of WhatsApp Messenger

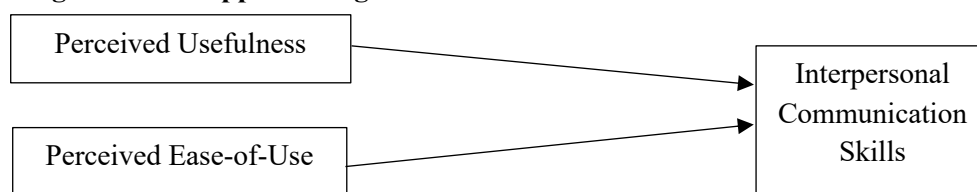


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

H₁: There is a significant relationship between perceived usefulness of Whatsapp and interpersonal communication skills.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between perceived ease-of-use of Whatsapp and interpersonal communication skills.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design used for this research was quantitative (survey) design. Survey design allows the researcher to effectively explain the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviour of respondents about a particular subject from a specific group of people through a structured questionnaire (Babbie, 2015; Chua, 2016). In addition, Babbie (2015), highlighted that survey design as the best method of social science studies as it can help researchers to examine multiple research objectives in one study. Hence, the deductive approach by using the survey is the suitable methods to apply in this study.

Population and Sampling Procedures

Non-probability sampling techniques was applied to select samples from the private university, where purposive sampling and quota sampling were used to identify the sample. Quota sampling is a non-random and non-probability sampling technique that is based on a previously decided number of respondents and subdivides the population in different strata (Sedgwick, 2012). The concept of purposive sampling is the focus on subjects who possess a particular characteristic which could be a more ideal help to the research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

For the current study, it will be targeted to the students who have experiences using the WhatsApp as the IM applications and generated 125 valid responses. This has supported the notion of Sekaran and Bougie (2016) that a sample size range from 30 to 500 would be sufficient and acceptable for the social science studies.

Measurement

For the measurement, there were 22 closed-ended questions and were divided into 4 sections. Section A comprised of demographic background of the respondents, where items on gender, types of students, age, race, and education level were asked. For Section B, it consists of items on perceived usefulness which adopted from Porter and Donthu (2006), where the scholars used this set of questions to explain how Internet usage determines one's attitude.

In addition, For Section C, it consisted items on perceived ease-of-use, which also adopted from Porter and Donthu (2006) and Sevük (2013). Lastly, for Section D, items measured on the interpersonal communication skills were adopted from Drusell (2012). This scholar's set of questions in his study is to identify how social network influence interpersonal communication and conflict resolution among freshmen in college.

The survey items for Section B, C, and D, will be designed as statement measured on five-point Likert-type scale where 1 represents Strongly Disagree; 2 represents Disagree; 3 indicates Somewhat Agree; 4 represents Agree; and 5 indicates as Strongly Agree. An estimated time for the respondents to answer the questionnaire is about 10 to 15 minutes. The data were then analyzed using Spearman's correlation through *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS Version 25) as one of the inferential analysis as the current study employed non-probability sampling techniques.

Pilot Testing

Pilot test was carried out to test the accuracy and consistency of the instrument. 30 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the students at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. Ghazali (2011) suggested that the alpha value of 0.7 is accepted and deemed reliable. In addition, the reliability analysis scale can be accepted if the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is between 0.6 and 1.0. (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2015). The current Cronbach's Alpha values for all the Likert-scale type questions were all above 0.7 which indicates that the internal consistency of the variables were met.

Table 1: Reliability analysis of the variables

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value (n=30)
Perceived Usefulness	6	0.883
Perceived Ease-of-Use	6	0.783
Interpersonal Communication Skills	5	0.716

Results & Discussion

Table 2 shows more than half of the respondents in this study are females (53.6 %), and the rest are males (46.4 %). For the category of students, majority of the respondents are Malaysian (79.2 %). For the race, nearly half of the respondents are Chinese (51.4 %) with ages ranging from 21-23 years old (49.6 %). Out of the total respondents, more than half of the respondents are bachelor degree holders (62.4 %).

Table 2 Demographic profiles of the respondents (n = 125)

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	58	46.4
Female	67	53.6
Student		
Local	99	79.2
International	26	20.8
Race		
Malay	26	20.8
Chinese	64	51.4
Indian	10	8.0
Others	4	3.2
Age		
18 - 20	47	37.6
21 - 23	62	49.6
24 - 26	12	9.6
27 - 29	4	3.2
Education		
STPM/HSC/ Diploma	43	34.4
Bachelor Degree	78	62.4
Master/ Ph.D.	4	2.3

Based on table 3 below, the results revealed that perceived usefulness has a positive and a moderate relationship with interpersonal communication skills ($r_s = 0.485, p = 0.000$). In addition, there is also a positive and a moderate relationship between perceived ease-of-use and interpersonal communication skills ($r_s = 0.483, p = 0.000$). Hence, H_1 and H_2 are accepted. This shows that there is a significant relationship between perceived usefulness, perceived ease-of-use and interpersonal communication skills.

Table 3. The correlation test on the relationship between Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease-of-Use and Interpersonal Communication Skills (n = 125)

Usage of WhatsApp	Interpersonal	Communication
	r_s	p
Perceived Usefulness	0.485**	0.000
Perceived Ease-of-Use	0.483**	0.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings were aligned with the past studies which indicated that WhatsApp Messenger do help or improve on users' daily lives as it has become a useful tool in their job or school. For instance, the findings were congruent with the results of Joo and Teng (2017) which found Facebook as an effective communication tool that able to unite the family members.

Furthermore, the current findings showed that there is a positive relationship between perceived ease-of-use and interpersonal communication skills, which supported the findings of Hamat, Embi and Hassan (2012), where individuals can avoid being nervous and shy when communicate with people face-to-face.

Besides that, the respondents also agreed that WhatsApp Messenger allows people to conveniently chat with others which supports the notion of Sponcil and Gitimu (2013) that WhatsApp Messenger has given people the change of communication where they can conveniently chat online with help to enhance the interpersonal communication skills. Based on the discussion, it has shown that the existence of various IM applications such as WhatsApp Messenger have make the person's life become more convenient and easy to communicate with others which enhance interpersonal communication skills via online.

In addition, there is a positive relationship between perceived ease-of-use and interpersonal communication skills which congruent with the findings of various past studies (Bakar *et al.*, 2014; Elkaseh *et al.*, 2016; Shahkat Ali & Kootbodien, 2017). This can be further explained that WhatsApp Messenger is very easy to access, more users would continue using WhatsApp Messenger as people would prefers technology that are user friendly. Hence, in the long run, it may help to strengthen the interpersonal communication (friendship, family bonding) of people.

However, the current findings was contrasted with the findings of Hill (2015) and Christensen (2018), that when students depend on social networks, they will less communicate face-to-face and this will affect the human relationships, but based on the data collected, there is positive relationship between usefulness of WhatsApp Messenger and interpersonal communication skills as most of respondents actually agreed that WhatsApp Messenger can actually help them in improving their relationships with their peers, family and partners (Giang, 2019). Based on the discussion, people usually tend to talk through WhatsApp Messenger (computer-mediated communication) to lessen the awkwardness especially for those people who are first time meeting face-to face. For the students, with the use of WhatsApp it can allows the students to discuss on their assignments even after the class and serve as the socialization platform. This will surely strengthen the bonds between two parties which showed that WhatsApp Messenger is very useful technology nowadays.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In a nutshell, this research has explained that WhatsApp Messenger indeed contributes and has positively influenced the interpersonal communication skills among the students. Firstly, the students perceived that the usage of WhatsApp is useful and easy. They think that operating WhatsApp Messenger does not need a lot of learning and anyone can use it. Furthermore, the results from the data

analysis showed that the respondents perceived that using the IM applications, they can communicate with others more conveniently and efficiently.

With the positive results of using the IM applications, it showed that students can improve their ability to solve problems and communicate with others as they can tend to be shy when communicating face-to-face. Students can also stay in touch with their friends and family who may not be in the same state or country by using this application. By doing so, it can help them maintain their interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, they can also meet new friends when added into a group chat by a mutual friend which allows students who may be introvert to open up to making new friends and peers. For the academic implications, the current study has explained the suitability of technology acceptance model in explaining the existence of those relationships and provide empirical evidences in the literature.

There are several limitations in this study, firstly it is regarded the number of respondents, hence, more respondents should be included in the future research, so that the sample can be represented. In addition, it will be interesting to look into the other private universities as well as the public universities to check on the students' perceptions to obtain a more diversified results. Future researcher can also consider testing the demographic variables to check the differences between various groups regards how they perceived regards the usage of WhatsApp applications and testing moderating variables such as gender, personality, and emotional related variables (Rollero, Daniele, & Tartaglia, 2019) on the current model.

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Appendix

Perceived usefulness

- WhatsApp Messenger is useful in my work or school.
- WhatsApp Messenger allows me to conveniently communicate with others.
- WhatsApp Messenger improved my efficiency of communication with others.
- WhatsApp Messenger allows me to more easily communicate with others.
- WhatsApp Messenger allows me to communicate with others more quickly.
- WhatsApp Messenger can enhance my effectiveness in communication with others.

Perceived ease-of-use

- Learning how to use WhatsApp Messenger is easy for me.
- WhatsApp Messenger is easy to use.
- I find it easy to get what I need by using WhatsApp Messenger.
- It is easy for me to become skilful at using WhatsApp Messenger.
- I find it easy to use WhatsApp Messenger to chat or obtain entertainment.
- Interaction with WhatsApp Messenger is clear and understandable.

Interpersonal Communication skills

I have improved my ability to work out problems by using WhatsApp Messenger.

I have improved my ability to communicate by using WhatsApp Messenger.

I rely on WhatsApp Messenger to stay in touch with people.

I use WhatsApp Messenger to talk to someone I am mad at instead of talking face-to-face about it.

(Reverse item)

I think WhatsApp Messenger brings more benefit to students' interpersonal communication skills.