



**PREDICTORS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN KLANG VALLEY,
MALAYSIA: GRATIFICATIONS SOUGHT, BELIEFS
AND ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL MEDIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Social media, as an online phenomenon, have developed rapidly and dramatically changing the way people communicate and interact globally. Social media, such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter not only attract users but have caught the attention of scholars and researchers to explore how people use these websites and the gratifications sought and gratifications obtained from them. The main objective of the present study is to investigate how international students (IS) use social media and the gratifications they seek and obtain from using them. This study examines the effect of beliefs, attitudes and gratifications sought (GS) on social media use (SMU). Finally, the study explores the impact of social media use (SMU) on gratifications obtained (GO). The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U>) was used as a theoretical framework to guide this research. The study utilized a cross-sectional design to elicit data from international students (IS) in Klang Valley, Malaysia. From 340 questionnaires administered to international students (IS), the findings indicate that all respondents are social media users who spend around one hour daily on social media. The majority of the respondents were males, Muslims and have more than 100 friends in their profiles. The results of the analysis reveal that international students (IS) use social media for five motives: education, religious information, entertainment, social interaction and communication motives and these motives were identified as the most salient factors of gratifications obtained (GO). The findings of the study show strong relationship between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO). The results indicate that all respondents were satisfied with their usage of social media. The results of the analysis reveal that belief had a direct effect on attitude and gratifications sought (GS) and indirect influence on social media use (SMU) and gratifications obtained (GO) through attitude factor. While attitude had a direct significant impact on social media use (SMU), gratifications sought (GS) did not. Finally, social media use (SMU) had direct influence on gratifications obtained (GO) and mediated the relationship between attitudes and gratifications obtained (GO) on one side and mediated the relationship between beliefs and gratifications obtained (GO) on the other.

خلاصة البحث

إن وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية (SMU) كظاهرة على الانترنت قد تطورت بسرعة فائقة وساهمت بشكل كبير في تغيير طريقة تواصل الناس والتفاعل فيما بينهم على الصعيد العالمي. ولم تنجح وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية مثل: الفيسبوك، وماي سبيس، وتويتر في جذب المستخدمين فقط ، ولكن قد جذبت أيضاً اهتمام العلماء والباحثين لاستكشاف كيفية استخدام الناس لهذه المواقع ودوافع الاستخدام والفوائد التي يحصلون عليها من ذلك. حاولت هذه الدراسة معرفة كيفية استخدام الطلاب الأجانب (FS) لوسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية والإشباعات الإعلامية التي يرغبون فيها والفوائد التي يحصلون عليها من استخدامها لها. وباستخدام نظرية الاستخدامات والإشباعات الإعلامية (U>) حاولت الدراسة أيضاً البحث عن تأثير المعتقدات والمواقف والدوافع في استخدام وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية (SMU) كما حاولت الدراسة بحث أثر استخدام وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية (SMU) في الإشباعات الإعلامية التي تم الحصول عليها (GO). وبعد توزيع 340 استبياناً لانتزاع المعلومات من الطلاب الاجانب (FS) في كلانج فالي ، ماليزيا كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن جميع المشاركين هم من مستخدمي وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية ويقضون حوالي ساعة يومياً في وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية. كما بينت نتائج التحليل أن الطلاب الأجانب يستخدمون وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية لخمسة أسباب وهي: التعليم ، والمعلومات الدينية ، والترفيه، والتفاعل الاجتماعي ، والاتصالات ، ونفس هذه الدوافع أثبتت نتائج التحليل أنها هي الفوائد التي تم الحصول عليها. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة وجود علاقة بين دوافع الاستخدام والإشباعات التي تم الحصول عليها. كما أشارت النتائج إلى أن جميع المشاركين كانوا راضين عن استخدامهم لوسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية (SMU). وكشفت نتائج التحليل أن المعتقدات ذات تأثير مباشر في المواقف ودوافع الاستخدام (GS) وذات تأثير غير مباشر في استخدام وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية (SMU) والفوائد التي تم الحصول عليها (GO) عن طريق عامل المواقف. بينما أثبتت النتائج أن المواقف ذات تأثير كبير ومباشر في استخدام وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية إلا إن دوافع الاستخدام ليس لها أي تأثير مباشر في وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية (SMU). أخيراً أن وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية ذات تأثير مباشر في الفوائد التي تم الحصول عليها كما تقوم وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية بدور الوسيط في العلاقة بين المواقف والفوائد التي تم الحصول عليها من جانب وبين المعتقدات والفوائد التي تم الحصول عليها من جانب آخر.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Abdalla Ibrahim Yousif Higazi

Signature

Date

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of
My father
Ibrahim Yousif Higazi;
&
My mother
Hawwa Jibreel Mohammed Ibrahim;
&
My wife
Omshuyom Musa Ismail Yousif Higazi;
&
My children
Mohammed, Ahmed and Alfatih;
&
To my
Brothers and sisters
For their help, support, and encouragement during the whole period of the study

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GS:	Gratifications sought.
GO:	Gratifications obtained.
SMU:	Social media use.
SMP:	Social media phenomenon
SNS:	Social networking sites
ME:	Media exposure
NM:	New media
OM:	Old media
TV:	Television
U>:	Uses and gratifications theory
U&GA:	Uses and gratifications approach
U&GR:	Uses and gratifications research
U&GM:	Uses and gratification model
U&GF:	Uses and gratification framework
U&GP:	Uses and gratifications perspective
U&GS:	Uses and gratifications studies
U&GP:	Uses and gratifications paradigm
MM:	Mass media
EVT:	Expectancy value theory
TRA:	Theory of reasoned action
IS:	International students
FS	Foreign students
SEM:	Structural equation modelling
AMOS:	Analysis of Moment Structures
SPSS:	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
IIUM:	International Islamic University Malaysia.
UM:	University of Malaya.
UPM:	University Putra Malaysia.
USA:	United States of America
MOHE:	Ministry of Higher Education.
EFA:	Exploratory factor analysis.
CFA:	Confirmatory factor analysis.
KMO:	Kaiser-Meyer Oklin
BTS:	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.
PC:	Pearson correlation.
MI:	Modification Indices.
df:	Degree of freedom.
CFI:	Comparative fit index.
GFI:	Goodness-of-fit index
AGFI:	Adjusted goodness-of-fit index.
TLI:	Tucker Lewis Index
NFI:	Normed fit index
RMSEA:	Root means square error of approximation

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the study on media use has attracted numerous researchers and scholars to investigate in a scientific way, how and why people use the media and what gratifications they obtain from using the media. With the rapid development of mass media, there is growing interest among researchers to understand the reasons for using different media.

Previous studies regarding media usage have produced considerable results which have added scientific perspectives to the existing body of knowledge. However, the rapid development of communication in the Internet age, such as the social media, has raised curiosity and this call for more academic investigation into this phenomenon to understand why and how websites are being used.

There is no doubt that social media such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have developed rapidly and dramatically, changing the way people communicate and how they interact globally. For example, within less than a decade, social media have become the most visited websites on the Internet (ComScore, 2012), especially among students (Hargittai, 2008; Jones & Fox, 2009; Matney & Borland, 2009).

In addition, research show that anywhere between 85% to 99% of students use social media such as Facebook and MySpace (Hargittai, 2008; Jones & Fox, 2009; Matney & Borland, 2009). According to Nielsen (2013), nearly 50% of Internet users are social media users of Facebook. Consumers spend more time on social media than any other sites on the Internet (Nielsen, 2012).

In light of these facts, what we know about social media have spread and permeated all societies around the world until they have become part of every day life. Most of the studies on social media have been conducted in the West (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Few studies have been carried out to investigate how and why people use social media in Malaysia, but none of them has examined the case of foreign students (IS) in Malaysia.

This study addresses these limitations by exploring the role of social media among international students (IS) in order to demonstrate how they use social media, what gratifications they seek and obtain from using social media. This study also examines the effects of beliefs, attitudes and gratifications sought (GS) on social media use (SMU) and finally, it investigates the impact of social media use (SMU) on gratifications obtained (GO).

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Internet is considered one of the most revolutionary, technological advances of communication in the 20th century (KO, 2008). The Internet offers several tools through which individuals, groups and institutions can communicate and interact globally. These tools include e-mails, instant messages, chat rooms, bulletin board system, blogs and finally, social media.

Since its inception, social media such as Facebook, YouTube and MySpace attract billion of users from all over the world. Within less than a decade social media have become one of the most visited websites on the Internet (ComScore, 2012). Today, social media have become part of a person's daily routine. According to Boyd and Ellison (2008, p.211), social media are:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd and Ellison, (2008, p.211).

Social networking sites (SNSs) are websites that allow users to present themselves, articulate their social networks and establish or maintain connections with users in the same system (Ellison et al., 2006).

Social media can be understood as platforms on which a range of activities take place, as well as locations for interaction among individuals, groups and communities (Uwem et al., 2007). The majority of social networking websites do a lot more than just allow users to have a profile and friends list; they build upon and integrate many communication tools and technologies such as e-mails, messaging, video sharing and photo-sharing (Uwem et al., 2007).

Social media have become part of daily users' activities. However, several research have found that students are the most frequent users of social media. For example, 90% of college students use social networking sites (SNSs) every day and spending an average of 19-25 hours a week online (Smith et al., 2009).

As documented in the above research, students are using these emerging technologies and platforms in all facets of their daily lives, specifically social media (Browning et al., 2011; Chen & Bryer, 2012). Questions concerned with why student use social media and how and what benefits they get from it can be raised here.

The current study attempts to identify how international students (IS) use social media, why and what benefits they get from such usage. In addition, this study intends to examine the effect of variables such as beliefs, attitudes and gratifications sought (GS) on social media use (SMU). Finally, this study seeks to assess the influence of social media use (SMU) on gratifications obtained (GO).

Several studies have been conducted on media use based on uses and gratifications approach (U&GA) since the theory genesis up to date. Early studies investigated the motives for using mass media and how in the context of television news, radio, books, and newspapers. Studies by Lazarsfeld and Stanton, (1942), (1944), and Suchman (1942) examined gratifications derived from watching soap operas and listening to music over the radio. Herzog (1944) studied gratifications for using media as early as the 1940s; he created the term “uses and gratifications” to explain the specific dimensions of satisfaction of the audiences, particularly in radio usage as cited in (Mc Quail, 1994).

Herzog (1942) conducted research on quiz programing and the gratifications derived from listening to soap operas. Wolfe and Fiske (1949) conducted research on the development of children's interest in comic books. Berelson (1949) investigated the effects of the 1945 strike by eight major newspapers in New York to know what the audiences missed when they were deprived of their favourite newspapers and found that the papers served more diversionary purposes.

Katz et al. (1974) summarized the early studies under four points: first, a basically similar methodological approach was used whereby statements about media functions were elicited from the respondents in an essentially open ended way; second, they shared a qualitative approach in their attempt to group gratification statements into labeled categories, largely ignoring the distribution of their frequency in the population; third, they did not attempt to explore the links between the gratifications and fourth, they failed to search for the interrelationships among the various media functions, either quantitatively or conceptually, in a manner that might have led to the detection of the latent structure of media gratifications (Katz et al., 1974).

However, a few years later many studies were done to test the relationship between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO). Early research that investigated this link was conducted by Palmgreen et al. (1980) where they tested how gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) were related by studying television news programmes. Both their gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) included 12 statements encompassing four categories of gratifications based on previous motivation research on television including surveillance, entertainment, interpersonal utility and social interaction (Palmgreen et al., 1980). They concluded that individual gratifications sought (GS) are moderately to strongly related to corresponding gratifications obtained (GO), while the correlation between each gratifications sought (GS) and non-corresponding gratifications obtained (GO) is much lower (Palmgreen et al., 1980).

Levy and Windahl's (1984) study on TV news confirms that corresponding gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) categories are strongly but not perfectly correlated. Similarly, Palmgreen and his colleagues (1982) conducted early research on relations between beliefs, evaluation, gratifications sought (GS) and media use (frequency of watching) in the context of a TV news programme. The study shows evidence those audiences' beliefs and evaluations of TV news can predict their gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GS) which are related to frequency of watching TV (Palmgreen et al., 1982).

Several studies have examined the relationship between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) and media use in the context of new media such as the Internet. One of the earlier studies that applied uses and gratifications theory (U>) in the Internet context was conducted by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000; their study sought to determine predictors of Internet use. The authors recognized that the

Internet consisted of traditional interpersonal and mass communication components, so existing uses and gratification items needed to be updated to reflect this convergence (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The five motivations for Internet use that emerged reflect both interpersonal and traditional mass communication motives and included “interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment” (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000, p.185).

Kargaonkar and Wolin (1999) applied Uses and Gratifications Theory (U>) to improve the understanding of web usage by exploring web users’ motivations and concerns. They found several motives for using the Internet including escapism, transactional security and privacy, information, interactive control, socialization and economic motivation (Kargaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Parker and Plank (2000) sought to determine through factor analysis the gratifications obtained (GO) from online sources and found three motivations for using the Internet; companionship/social interaction, surveillance/entertainment, and relaxation/escape.

In a similar way, Hanjun (2000) applied Uses and Gratifications Theory (U>) to investigate Internet users’ motivations and their relationship with attitudes towards the Internet as well as types of websites visited by users. The author identified four motivation factors including social escapism, pass time, interactive control and information.

However, few research have been conducted to examine the relationship between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) and media use within the social media context. The few that have been conducted were done in the West. For example, Sheldon, (2008) sought to examine what motivates students to use Facebook specifically, and if they were satisfied with the gratifications they received from that use. He found that relationship maintenance and passing time strongly

predicted how many hours students spent on Facebook, entertainment and “coolness” factor, in addition to relationship maintenance and passing time also predicted how often students logged on to Facebook. In this study, students who used Facebook to maintain relationships, to be entertained and to pass time were those who were most satisfied with Facebook (Sheldon, 2008).

Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) from Michigan State University conducted an online survey to study the association between the use of Facebook and social capital’s development and maintenance. The sample of the study was 800 undergraduate students from Michigan State University. Findings reveal that 94% of the respondents are Facebook users who reported average time spent on Facebook as between 10 and 30 minutes each day (Ellison et al., 2007).

Urista et al. (2008) implemented Uses and Gratifications (U&G) to determine to what extent students use social networking sites to fulfil wants and needs (p. 9) through focus group interviews with college students, but only with students who were members of Facebook and/or MySpace. Five themes emerged in the interviews as to why the students fulfilled needs through Facebook and MySpace: “efficient communication, convenient communication, curiosity about others, popularity, and relationship formation/reinforcement” (Urista et al. p.12).

Similarly, Clark et al. (2008) found information seeking and convenience to be the most significant motives for college students using social networking sites. Students are dependent on the Internet to find information, yet using Facebook to find information was found to be more purposeful than simply using a search engine or browsing web pages to find what they are looking for (Clark et al., 2008).

Stern and Taylor (2007) surveyed a convenience sample of 364 college students about their Facebook use and found that the most common motives for using

Facebook are sending and receiving messages from friends, viewing photos, keeping in touch with old friends, making plans, checking out people, checking up on their current boyfriend/girlfriend, entertainment and distraction/procrastination.

According to a descriptive study of social networking sites (SNSs) by Boyd and Ellison, (2008) scholars still have limited knowledge of how and why people use social media especially in the Third World including Malaysia. In addition, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) point out that there is a compelling need for research in the field of social media because of the following reasons: (1) to investigate the prevalence of social media, (2) to examine the characteristics of a typical social media user and (3) to explicate the personal and social needs obtained by users from social media.

Building on scholars' call that research is needed to examine how social media are being used and why, the present study hopes to fill this gap by exploring how international students use social media and what they seek and obtain from using social media in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Most of the studies that have been conducted in Malaysia on new media such as the Internet and social media are focused on two dimensions; how people use the new media and why. The dimension of satisfaction which is gratifications obtained (GO) among social media users is mostly ignored. Therefore, this study plans to find out to what extent international students are satisfied by their usage of social media in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Palmgreen (1984), summarized Uses and Gratifications Research in six main areas that specifically relate to the scope of U&G research: gratifications and media consumption, social and psychological origins of gratifications, gratifications and media effects, gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, expectancy value

approaches to uses and gratifications and audience activity. This research studies the area of gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) because this area has not been tested in Malaysia.

Thus the present research considers testing how social media are being used by international students, why and what they get from it. The results of this study will be informative to scholars, researchers, policy makers, the general public and managers of social media websites in understanding their subscribers' reasons for using social media and their gratifications obtained (GO) from their usage.

Uses and Gratification Approach (U&GA) is used as a theoretical framework to support and guide this research because this theory has effectively provided one of the most relevant perspectives to explain the psychological and behavioural dimensions involving mediated communication (Lin, 1996; Ruggiero, 2000).

According to Severin and Tankard (1992), the notion of Uses and Gratifications approach (U&GA) was first introduced in an article written by American sociologist Elihu Katz (1959) in which he responded to a claim by Berelson (1959) who insisted that communication research seemed to be dead. Katz pointed out that most communication up to that time had aimed at answering the question, "What do the media do to people?" and he suggested that communication research might save itself by turning the question to "What do people do with the media?" (Severin & Tankard, 1992).

Thus, Katz (1959) established a new direction in mass communication research. Katz shifted the central research theme from the study of mass persuasion to the study of media usage by an active audience. In other words, Uses and Gratifications Theory (U>) shifted the focus of media effects from what media do to people" to "what people do with the media (Katz, 1959). Although both media-