

## **Pakistani University Students Perspective on Whatsapp Usage: From the Lens of Uses & Gratification Constructs**

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### **ABSTRACT**

WhatsApp has greatly become popular text messaging technology among youth. It allows free exchange of text, pictures, videos and documents. From the lens of Uses and gratification perspective, this research study examined the Pakistani youth needs gratification through Whatsapp application. Survey technique was adopted and 400 respondents belong to Pakistani universities took part in this study by fulfilling the questionnaire. Research results exposed that people used Whatsapp to gratify their social cognitive needs following with cognitive needs while tension release and affective needs are not much imperative for youth as they did not use Whatsapp more to gratification of their tension release and affective needs.

### **KEYWORDS**

WhatsApp, Uses gratification theory, Social integrative needs, Cognitive

needs, Tension release needs and Affective needs

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Incredible developments and rapid changes in the information communication technologies have significantly affected all field of life [1]. All of us depended on these technologies and now it befits the part of our lives. It is progressing at very high speed and converts to such reality that no one can deny. WhatsApp is one of such consequence of technology that people are using on specific mobile phones [2]. Former employees of Yahoo! Brian Acton and Jan Koum formed “WhatsApp” in 2009 [3]. WhatsApp is the smartphone instant messaging application [4]. Such messenger communication through mobile phones enables faster, easier and cheaper communication possible. It is an

interesting practical communication tool, which addresses users' needs cheaply and effectively [5]. Other utility of Whatsapp includes sending, receiving of text messages and video audio files sending function [6].

WhatsApp has different features that make it unique from other social interaction sites. This application is different in a way that it connects you to another contact automatically by providing technical supports that checks one's phone contact to see if any contact is using WhatsApp [3]. WhatsApp provides closed platform where the individual contact only with those who are present in their contact list and you can also check whether the other person is online and check your message or not. In other words, WhatsApp provides new form of interaction platform for their users [7] and it is free service to use [8].

In 2014, 500 million people were actively used WhatsApp with 100 million videos and 700 million photos shared each day [9]. Similarly, in 2015, Wall Street journal [10] published that 800 million people were actively used WhatsApp. According to the news published on BBC news website Mobile messaging service WhatsApp were used by billions of

people every month [11]. Due to 1 billion active user's base, WhatsApp is the most popular messaging application and by framing and improvising their policies, they can able to attract more users [12]. In 2017, according to Whatsapp officials, one billion people are now using chat and photo sharing application daily [8]. Users are sending 55 billion messages per day, 4.5 billion photos and 1 billion videos, and it is now at 1.3 billion monthly active users [13].

Research scholars focused on the studies that deal with WhatsApp usage among the users. People used WhatsApp for maintaining contact with friend and family, entertainment purposes as well as for information sharing [14]. By comparing SMS and WhatsApp, [15] research showed that people used WhatsApp messages because they are more conversational, exchanged more often than SMS and more used to communicate with social circles.

### **1.1 Statement of Problem**

WhatsApp is new phenomenon that needs to explore more and because of its proliferation of its usage among youth in Pakistan, the question arises that what needs are satisfied through using the

WhatsApp texting application. This question is important because now more and more youth in Pakistan are using WhatsApp for their purposes. Hence, the problem of this research study is to determine the needs influencing the consumption of Whatsapp among Pakistani youth and with the focus on constructs from Uses and Gratification theory.

### 1.2 Objectives

The main objectives for conducting this research are as follows:

- To examine which needs are more important for youth that influences them to use Whatsapp application.
- To inspect whether Pakistani youth use of Whatsapp because of their cognitive needs.
- To observe out either young people in Pakistan use Whatsapp application as a source of entertainment and fun.
- To investigate young people use Whatsapp because of their social status and gratification of social cognitive needs.
- To check people use Whatsapp to get freedom from their daily routine tensions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework of this article is moored on the Uses and Gratification (U & G) theory. Uses and Gratification theory is widely used media theory that explicates media usage behavior among users [16]. Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch purposed uses gratification theory in 1974. This theory focused on why people use media and use of such media how it affected them. The basic assumption this theory is that people are highly interact with the communication media by edifying profile grouping of related uses and theoretically associated gratifications and people are actively involved in media usage [17]. Researchers [18] improved the assumption of Uses and Gratification theory to examine why people used certain media and enjoy gratification. They argued that people actively seek out and involved with specific media to satisfy their some specific needs. They categorized five needs as cognitive needs (strengthening knowledge, information and understanding), affective needs (strengthening pleasurable, aesthetic and pleasurable experience), integrative needs (strengthening confidence, credibility, status and stability), social integrative needs (strengthening contact with friends, family and world) and tension

release needs or escape needs released tensions from self and society [19].

Uses and gratification theory suggested that firstly, individuals are active; secondly, media use is goal oriented, thirdly media consumption fulfilled different needs, fourth people know and express their view of using media and fifth gratifications have their origin in media content [20]. Researchers investigated youth use of social networking sites from uses gratification perspective. Their research found that youth are active users of social networking sites and they used for getting the latest information(cognitive needs) as well as communicating with old and new friends(affective needs) [16]. Similarly, in another research found that people used social media for different purposes which included entertainment, information sharing, social interaction, surveillance, knowledge about others and communicatory utility [21].

WhatsApp is seen as a comparatively new tool in education that included characteristics of previously technological tools. However, WhatsApp contained up-to-dated features that embolden students to use it for enhancing their understanding [22]. WhatsApp

platform is different as compared to other social networking sites however; student's usage and attitude towards WhatsApp remained same like the way they used other social networking sites [7]. WhatsApp are most popular and preferred used social network among the students [23].

Students used WhatsApp for gratify their cognitive, social integrative (building social network ties, meeting with new people, keep in touch and chatting with friends and family), tension release and affective needs [3]. Similarly, another research found that students used WhatsApp to share information and building social interaction. The level of student's enjoyment with WhatsApp is the determined their time on WhatsApp usage. More the students enjoyed while using this application more they spend time on WhatsApp [7]. Students used social media for satisfying their cognitive needs (educative information), affective needs (discussed national issues) and entertainment purposes [24]. Students also used WhatsApp for entertainment purposes such as sharing jokes or funny messages with each other [25].

Likewise, research showed that people used WhatsApp for socializing with friends and family,

acquiring important information and seeking entertainment [14]. [26] Research found that WhatsApp were used for information sharing and academic communication. Other researchers examined WhatsApp usage among young individuals and found that WhatsApp messaging was chiefly used to dwell with significant others in the virtual space [27].

Another research showed that people did not gratify their needs through WhatsApp however; this text messages technology affected them greatly. Those people who depended and frequently used WhatsApp feel social anxiety [14].

Previous research studies showed that individuals used WhatsApp for different purposes. However, very few research studies focused on student's usage of WhatsApp from uses and gratification perspective. Additionally in Pakistan as well as internationally there is no such study that attempted to examine the Pakistan young people usage of WhatsApp and gratification needs satisfaction by using of WhatsApp. This article will fulfill this knowledge gap and let the world know about how the Pakistani youth used WhatsApp and gratify their needs.

### **3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Following research questions are formulated.

RQ1: Do people use Whatsapp to satisfy their cognitive needs?

RQ2: Do people use Whatsapp to gratify their social cognitive needs?

RQ3: Do people use Whatsapp to release their tensions?

RQ4: Do people use Whatsapp because it provides fun to them?

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

The idea behind this specific section is to divulge the rationale for research methodology, methods and strategies adopted in gathering the data for this research study [28]. This particular part also revealed the operationalization of variables data that seeks to investigate the Whatsapp usage and needs gratification among youth in Pakistan.

#### **4.1 Research Design**

The study was quantitative in nature and involved a survey from the educated youth of universities in an urban center, as they are the biggest user of Whatsapp application. According to Aliaga and Gunderson, quantitative research method is explaining phenomenon by collecting numerical data that are analyzed

using mathematically based methods [29]. Survey research is one of the best research techniques for describing such population that are too large to observe it directly [30].

## **4.2 Sample**

Undergraduate and graduate students from each of four Pakistani universities (International Islamic University Islamabad, Bahria University Islamabad, Comsat University Islamabad and Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad) were the sample of this research study. This research article employed purposive sampling method. Undergraduate and graduate students of the selected universities were approached and ask to fulfill out the questionnaires. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed.

## **4.3 Operationalization of Variables**

### **4.3.1 Cognitive Needs**

Needs regarding acquire information and knowledge about surroundings as well as educational information material that helps in education sector.

### **4.3.2 Tension Release Needs**

Tension release needs means to release tension and get freedom from daily bored routine.

### **4.3.3 Affective Needs**

Affective needs concerning about sharing of pictures, messages and videos for fun with friends and family. Also needs regarding receiving pictures, messages and videos for entertainment purposes.

### **4.3.4 Social Integrative Needs**

Needs regarding maintain social status and in touch with friend and family socially.

## **4.4 Data Collection**

The researcher after selected the four major universities in Islamabad went to campuses of these universities approached the students and asked them to fill the questionnaire. The response rate was 100% and the respondents of these universities filled the entire 400 questionnaire.

## **4.5 Data Analysis**

Four hundred questionnaires were distributed and all found valid and completed. Data tabulated by using SPSS to find out the answers of research questions.

## 5 RESULTS

This particular part analyzes the respondent's response through administration of structured questionnaire.

Total 400 questionnaires were distributed and response rate was 100%. All response rates were included in final analysis. The data was thus compiled and revealed that 50% of the respondents were female and 50% were male. The respondent ranged in age from 18 to 24 years old. Out of these, 20% were aged 24 years old, 28% were aged 23 years old, 16% were aged 22, 19% were aged 21, 12% were aged 18 and 5% were aged 19 years old.

Some general questions were asked from the respondents. In order to know which social platform they preferred to use for social interaction. The result showed that 98% people used Whatsapp while only 2% used Facebook for social interaction. This means that Whatsapp is stronger medium for social interaction among youth in Pakistan.

Another question was asked from people that how frequently they used WhatsApp. The response clearly indicated that 91% people daily used Whatsapp, 4% used often, 2% used sometimes and 3%

used occasionally used Whatsapp in their life routine.

The question was asked from the respondents about the amount of time they spend on Whatsapp. The response from the respondents clearly showed that 94% young people used 8-10 hours daily, 3% used 5-7 hours daily while 2% used 2-4 hours daily and only 1% said that they used WhatsApp for 1 hour.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked do they think Whatsapp is an effective tool for communication. The result showed that 93% strongly agreed the statement, 4% agreed while 1% remained neutral, 1% said they disagreed while 1% said that they strongly disagreed that Whatsapp is an effective tool. Another question was asked do they think Whatsapp make their life easy. In response, 87% of the respondents strongly agreed that Whatsapp make their life easy, 5% agreed the statement, 2% strongly disagreed while 6% said they disagreed.

### **RQI: Do people use Whatsapp to satisfy their cognitive needs?**

To determine this, respondents were asked that do they share educative materials/lecturer information through Whatsapp. Results revealed that majority of students (86%) agreed that they

regularly and often shared educative materials/lecturer on Whatsapp (Table 1). Only few students 2% said that they never shared, 5% said that they occasionally shared informative material. Whereas 6% respondents replied that sometimes, they used Whatsapp for sharing of their informative lectures of university (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Sharing of educative materials/lecturer information through Whatsapp.

Option	N%
Never	8 (2)
Occasionally	21 (5.2)
Sometimes	25 (6.2)
Often	83 (20.7)
Regularly	263 (65.7)

Second question was asked from the respondents that do they gain knowledge about surroundings from chatting on Whatsapp. As indicated in table 2, majority of respondents agreed that they regularly gained information about the surroundings by using Whatsapp application. Only 2% of respondents said that they never gained information regarding surrounding via chatting on Whatsapp.

**Table 2:** Knowledge gaining through Whatsapp.

Option	N%
Never	9 (2.2)
Occasionally	16 (4)
Sometimes	39 (9.7)
Often	95 (23.7)
Regularly	241 (60.2)

**RQ2: Do people use Whatsapp to gratify their social cognitive needs?**

To check students gratify their social cognitive need through whatsapp. To determine this, respondents were asked do they use Whatsapp to keep connect with family and friends lived abroad. The respondent's responses amazed the researcher. Results clearly indicated that 81% people used Whatsapp to chat with their social circus of friends and family who lived abroad. However, 8% responded often, 5% said sometimes, 1 said occasionally and only 3% replied that they never get connected with abroad friends and family through use of Whatsapp (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Whatsapp connection in touch with social circus of friends and family.

Option	N%	
Never	14	(3.5)
Occasionally	5	(1.2)
Sometimes	21	(5.2)
Often	35	(8.7)
Regularly	325	(81.2)

Another question was asked from the respondents about the usage of Whatsapp to update their social status. As indicated in the result (table 4) 71% youth said that they regularly updated their social status on Whatsapp. While 13% replied often, 9% said sometimes, 4% said occasionally while only 1% young people replied that they did not used Whatsapp application to update their social circle.

**Table 4:** Maintenance of social status on Whatsapp.

Option	N%	
Never	6	(1.5)
Occasionally	18	(4.5)
Sometimes	39	(9.7)
Often	52	(13)
Regularly	285	(71.2)

**RQ3: Do people use Whatsapp to release their tensions?**

To check Whatsapp helped users to release their tension the question was asked from the youngsters that do they used Whatsapp to stay away from their university worries. Results clearly indicated that 27% people said that they regularly used Whatsapp to gratify their tension needs, 41% said they never used Whatsapp for releasing tension (Table 5). However, 10% replied occasionally and 21% said that they used Whatsapp to stay away from university tensions and worries.

**Table 5:** Whatsapp usage in eliminating university worries.

Option	N%	
Never	165	(41.2)
Occasionally	41	(10.2)
Sometimes	1	(0.2)
Often	85	(21.2)
Regularly	108	(27)

Moreover, another related question was asked from the students do they used Whatsapp to relax yourself and pass your time. The respondents give mixture of responses and 48% said that they never used Whatsapp application as a source of relaxing themselves. However, 28 % people agreed that

they used Whatsapp for relaxing purposes, 8% replied sometimes, 6% said occasionally while 8% said that often they used Whatsapp for relaxing themselves and passed their time (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Whatsapp as a source of relaxing yourself.

Option	N%	
Never	195	(48.7)
Occasionally	25	(6.2)
Sometimes	33	(8.2)
Often	35	(8.7)
Regularly	112	(28)

**RQ4: Do people use Whatsapp because it provides fun to them?**

To find this, respondents were asked do Whatsapp provide fun to them. Result indicated in table 7 showed different responses from youth. Some agreed 21%, others did not agree 31% and said they never used Whatsapp to catch fun with friends and family. While 20% said occasionally, 18% replied often and only 8% people said that sometimes they used Whatsapp for catching fun with friends and family.

**Table 7:** Whatsapp usage to catch fun

Option	N%	
Never	125	(31.2)
Occasionally	82	(20.5)
Sometimes	35	(8.7)
Often	73	(18.2)
Regularly	85	(21.2)

Furthermore, in order to check that Whatsapp gratify young people affective needs another question was asked from the respondents. The question was do they shared pictures with friends and family and get entertainment from that. Results revealed that 27 % respondents replied that they never use Whatsapp for this purpose, 23% said regularly, 24% answered occasionally while 4% said that they often used Whatsapp for entertainment purposes (Table 8).

**Table 8:** Sharing of videos and pictures with friends and family.

Option	N%	
Never	108	(27)
Occasionally	96	(24)
Sometimes	87	(21.7)
Often	17	(4.2)
Regularly	92	(23)

## 6 DISCUSSION

Whatsapp emergence greatly influences the social interaction among Pakistani youth. They are using Whatsapp because of its effectiveness and diverse features that make their life easy. Whatsapp become the part of youth especially students studying in Pakistan. They are the bigger user of this application and increase the social interaction with friends and family. They prefer to use it as compared to social networks like Facebook. WhatsApp is most popular and preferred use social network among the students [23]. People spend much time with Whatsapp and enjoy this social internet commodity application. As youth in Pakistan used and enjoyed Whatsapp application, it was vital to examine what sort of gratification they get from this mobile texting application. Uses and gratification constructs were taken to inspect about Whatsapp successful in fulfilling the needs of students in Pakistan. As students, use WhatsApp for personal and social purposes on a daily basis [31]

Survey results exposed that people used Whatsapp to gratify their social integrative needs. They agreed that Whatsapp helps them to connect with friends and family that live outside Pakistan. As

Whatsapp is, free of cost so they easily call and chat with family who lived abroad. They regularly used Whatsapp to stay in connected with family members and loved to talk to them. When the respondents asked about the updating of social status on Whatsapp then majority of youngsters strongly agreed that they regularly updated their status on Whatsapp. Few percentages of youngsters did not agree that that they used Whatsapp for maintain of social status in the society. This showed that young people especially students they are curious about their social status and they want to connect with social circle of friends and family. Whatsapp provided such features that helped them gratify their social cognitive needs. This in accordance with research [3] who found that students used WhatsApp for gratifies their social integrative (building social network ties, meeting with new people, keep in touch and chatting with friends and family). Likewise, people also used Whatsapp to connect with friends and family living abroad [32].

Results further revealed that Whatsapp application is helpful for sharing of educative and lecture materials. As the respondents are students so they supported and strongly agreed that through Whatsapp, they shared their informative material with their

university fellows. Sending and receiving messages is not time bound and it is quick to use so students easily send their lecturer material via Whatsapp network. People chat with each other through Whatsapp as they think that it is an effective medium for communication so they also shared surrounding news stories with each other. Whatsapp get to update them as they frequently shared and received messages from surrounding. This is in line with research conducted by researchers who found that today; Whatsapp is highly helping university students in order to receive and deliver any information effectively and quickly [33]. That means that Whatsapp gratify the cognitive needs of students in Pakistan. Similarly, another research found that students used WhatsApp to share information and building social interaction [7].

Another research question deals with the tension release needs. The question was asked about Whatsapp helps them to get freedom from university worries. Tension release needs did not get support from majority of university youngsters. Whatsapp application is not get much success in eliminating the tensions. As majority of people did not agree that, they used Whatsapp to gratify their tension release needs. This

showed that Pakistani students used Whatsapp to gratify their social integrative needs more as compared to tension release needs. In order to examine either Whatsapp gratify their attention needs, the question was asked. The respondents give mixture of responses. Some supported that they used Whatsapp to catch fun and get entertainment while other did not support that Whatsapp provide them fun element.

Uses and gratification theory focus on how people used media and gratify their certain needs (cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative needs and tension release needs). The results clearly exposed that youngsters used media to gratify their certain needs more than other needs. They used Whatsapp to gratify their social cognitive need following with cognitive needs while tension release and affective needs are not able to influenced youngsters to used Whatsapp social internet commodity. This is in line with research conducted by researcher who found that students used WhatsApp for gratifying their cognitive, social integrative (building social network ties, meeting with new people, keep in touch and chatting with friends and family) [3].

## 7 CONCLUSION

Social internet commodity application Whatsapp is fast growing messaging platform across the globe. It has greatly changed the shape of social interaction. The aim of this research study was to examine the need gratification role of Whatsapp from the perspective of uses and gratification theory constructs. Survey technique was used to gather data from 400 respondents studied at university level. Results clearly disclosed that youngsters in Pakistan used Whatsapp to gratify their social cognitive needs. They regularly update their social status on Whatsapp and stay connected with friends and family lived abroad. Following social integrative needs is cognitive needs. Students share informative materials and get to know about surrounding news via Whatsapp. While, Whatsapp is not able to gratify the other two needs (tension release and affective needs) as youngsters in Pakistan did not use Whatsapp to gratify their tension release needs and affective needs more as compare to social integrative needs and cognitive needs.

## 8 RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Researcher recommended following recommendation for

future research in this area of field. Survey technique was adopted for gathering data; however, researchers can use focus group and interviews or mixture of both techniques. In this research, uses and gratification theory was used as a base while other researchers can use variety of mass communication theories like play theory, media dependency theory etc. Researchers can compare international students with Pakistani students to look at how in different cultures students used Whatsapp to gratify their needs. Evaluation between Whatsapp and Facebook can research on what social network people used more to gratify their needs. The future research can focus on Whatsapp usage among students and teacher by focusing on how Whatsapp helps them to gratify their cognitive needs. Whatsapp usage can observe among journalists and determine how Whatsapp helpful in gratification of journalists live.

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