

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' USAGE OF INSTANT MESSAGING APPLICATIONS IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Now a days, the youth, with the coming of the internet in the past decade, consumes different instant messaging applications for many different purposes. Thus, the objective of this study was to find out if students use such applications for initiating, maintaining and ending a relationship. Using random sampling technique, 413 representative sample was taken only out of 2300 social science and humanities students at the University of Gondar, Ethiopia. The data was collected through a structured questionnaire in which 376 were collected back. The result indicates that students use instant messaging applications to initiate, maintain and end a relationship and to socialize with others.

Keywords: *relationship; instant messaging applications; initiating; maintaining; ending; socialize*

INTRODUCTION

People around the world are rapidly integrating virtual form of communication in their everyday lives (Haythornthwaite and Kendall, 2010). Current trends in Internet accessibility and use show that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are becoming increasingly integrated with everyday life (Gackenbach, 2006; Howard & Jones, 2003; Joinson, McKenna, Reips & Postmes, 2007; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002) as cited in (Haythornthwaite and Kendall, 2010). Specifically, instant messaging users consistently log online to communicate and interact with other users. The convenience of the networks is technology-mediated unlike the social communities found in the physical world that requires face-to-face contact. Digital social networking site are operated and confines with the internet (Boase and Wellman, 2006).

Communicating over the internet using different applications enables individuals to meet new friends, to connect with old ones, or even to break off with one by freely expressing themselves as they do in real life. In using different instant messaging applications with like-minded users, individuals have the freedom to showcase and share their ideas, feelings, attitudes, experiences and knowledge among

their contacts. This attribute of instant messaging applications opens an opportunity for users to socialize with other people. Thus, the purpose of this study is to find out if university students use instant messaging applications in interpersonal relationships and socializing.

In building an interactive networking of like-minded users, individuals are free to demonstrate and share their feeling, experience and knowledge among the online members. This attribute of social networking site opens up opportunity for users to socialize with people and enlarge their network profile (Jin, 2009). It therefore becomes necessary to understand the agents of socializations that facilitate online interactions among various users.

In everyday life people are becoming increasingly integrated with information and communication technologies (ICTs) This template provides authors with most of the formatting specifications needed for preparing electronic versions of their papers. Margins, column widths, line spacing, and type styles are built-in; examples of the type styles are provided throughout this document and are identified in italic type, within parentheses, following the example. PLEASE DO NOT RE-ADJUST THESE MARGINS. Some components, such as multi-leveled equations and graphics, are not

prescribed, although the various table text styles are provided. The formatter will need to create these components, incorporating the applicable criteria that follow.

OBJECTIVE

The study aimed to find out students use of instant messaging application in initiating a relationship, maintaining a relationship, ending a relationship and socializing.

METHODS

This study was mainly quantitative. The target population for this study were undergraduate students of college of social science and humanities at the University of Gondar in the age group of 18 to 25. This age group was chosen on the basis of observation in that almost all undergraduate students belong to the age group. In order to collect data close ended questionnaire was developed and distributed to 413 respondents (with 80% response rate) who were selected using simple random sampling from all the batches of the 17 departments in the college. The representative sample with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error is 330. And 376 questionnaires were collected back. In the questionnaire of Study, constructs are defined in order to investigate people's usage of instant messaging apps. Descriptive data analyses were done with the help of SPSS 23.0.

INSTANT MESSAGING

Instant messaging (IM) is a type of very popular and commonly seen communication services via the internet to enable people to create a private or group chat space (Ramirez, Dimmick, Feaster, & Lin, 2008). In terms of its nature, IM should be positioned somewhere between synchronous communication (e.g. face-to-face, phone call) and asynchronous communication (e.g. email, blog, private message, bulletin boards), which enables geographically distributed parties to engage in nearly "real-time" interactions. It can be seen as a hybrid of SMS, email, chat room, telephone, etc. Webcam, voice chat, video conferencing can also be used in IM communication. Transferring files in various formats like video, voice, office documents is very easy because there is usually no limit on the file size. Animated emoticons are provided as substitutes of facial expressions, which is more vivid and entertaining than texting. What's more, IM not only offers multi-media functions but also multitasking interactivity where user can communicate with more than one person at a time (Zhou, 2005; Avrahami & Hudson, 2006a; Lo, 2006; Chung & Nam,

2007; Lin, Sun, Lee, & Wu, 2007; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009; Schwarz, 2011).

"The recent convergence of communication and information technologies has created possibilities unthinkable only a few years ago" Venkatesh(1998). "Mobile phones, email, SMS (Short Message Service) and Instant Messenger are new communication technologies, which all contribute to the "death of distance" Cairncross (2001). Instant Messenger is a proprietary, simplified version of Internet Relay Chat, which allows two or more people to carry on a conversation, in real-time, using text-based messages with context awareness. Instant Messenger is used to avoid boredom, to socialize, Lai et. al. (2002) and to maintain contact with casual acquaintances, Lee et. al. (2002). Leung (2001) found seven motives for messenger use among college students: affection, inclusion, sociability, entertainment, relaxation, escape and fashion. Mathieson (1991) found people use these mediums to sustain a sense of connection.

A lot of portals are available which provide messengers free of charge. Since they are free of charge, they are the preferred services by millions of people around the world. Some of the Mobile Messaging Applications those are generally used are (in an alphabetical manner):

1. BBM
2. Chat On
3. Chat Plus
4. E-buddy messenger
5. Facebook Messenger
6. G Talk
7. Go SMS Pro
8. Hike
9. Kik
10. Line
11. Message Me
12. Nimbuzz
13. Skype
14. Tango
15. Text Plus
16. Twoo
17. Viber
18. We Chat
19. WhatsApp
20. Yahoo Messenger

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics of respondents

The researcher distributed 400 questionnaires to undergraduate students at the college of social sciences and humanities at the university of Gondar, Gondar, Ethiopia, but only 376 questionnaires were collected which is a response rate of 94%. According to Richardson (2005), 'Response rates of 60% or more are desirable and achievable. Also, for 2500 number of populations, 330 respondents are needed with the 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. Therefore, the

collected questionnaires are way above the expected number of respondents and enough to conduct the research.

This section gives an overview of the demographic characteristic results of the respondents from the sample of 376 respondents. Their results were presented using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage)

Table 1. Gender

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Female | 176 | 46.8 | 46.8 | 46.8 |
| Male | 200 | 53.2 | 53.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

As indicated in the above table, 46.8% of the respondents were female while 53.2% are male. Hence, all the respondents are undergraduate students and their age is between 18 and 25.

Interpersonal Relationship

As most of the instant messaging application are presumed to be used for social networking, this part presents if these instant messaging applications are used in interpersonal relationship. The respondents were presented with close ended question to verify whether they and/or others (as doer or receiver) use these applications to start, maintain and end a relationship say it friendly or romantic one.

Table 2. Have you ever initiated a relationship (friends or romantic relationship) with someone over these instant messaging applications?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 232 | 61.7 | 61.7 | 61.7 |
| No | 144 | 38.3 | 38.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Table 2 indicates that 232 (61.7%) of the respondents use instant messaging application to start a relationship with someone else. Also, Table 3 shows that 264 (70.2%) of the respondents said others have used these applications to start a relationship with them.

Table 3. Has someone ever initiated a relationship with you over these instant messaging applications?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 264 | 70.2 | 70.2 | 70.2 |
| No | 112 | 29.8 | 29.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Table 4. Have you ever maintained a relationship with someone over these instant messaging applications?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 336 | 89.4 | 89.4 | 89.4 |
| No | 40 | 10.6 | 10.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Moreover, table 4 and 5 result confirm that the respondents and others (their counterparts) use instant messaging application to keep their relationships going with 336 (89.4%) and 321 (83%) respectively.

Table 5. Has someone ever maintained a relationship with you over these instant messaging applications

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 312 | 83.0 | 83.0 | 83.0 |
| No | 64 | 17.0 | 17.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Table 6. Have you ever ended a relationship with someone over these instant messaging applications?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 216 | 57.4 | 57.4 | 57.4 |
| No | 160 | 42.6 | 42.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

When it comes to using instant messaging application to end relationship, the respondents were torn apart almost equally between yes and no as indicated in table 6 and 7. 216 (57.4%) of the respondents said they have used these applications to end their relationships with others (their counterparts) while 192 (51.1%) of the respondents said others (their counterparts) used these applications to break of their relationships with them. However, 160 (42.6%) and 184 (48.9%) of the respondents reported that they or others (their counterparts) have not used these applications to end relationships.

Table 7. Has someone ever ended a relationship with you over these instant messaging applications

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 192 | 51.1 | 51.1 | 51.1 |
| No | 184 | 48.9 | 48.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Table 8 below indicates the response if respondents think using instant messaging application have helped them to stay in touch with friends that they can't meet or see on a regular basis. And it turns out that 296 (78.7%) of the respondents said yes. Whereas 80 (21.3%) of the respondents did not think so.

Table 8. Do you think that instant messaging applications have helped you keep in touch with friends you can't see regularly?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 296 | 78.7 | 78.7 | 78.7 |
| No | 80 | 21.3 | 21.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Also, Table 9 below show that these instant messaging applications have helped respondents 288(76.6%) to know more about others. Nonetheless, 88 (23.4%) respondents do not think these applications have not helped them at all.

Table 9. Do you think that instant messaging applications have helped you to get to know others better?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 288 | 76.6 | 76.6 | 76.6 |
| No | 88 | 23.4 | 23.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Table 10. Do you think that instant messaging applications have helped you connect with people whom you share a common interest?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 328 | 87.2 | 87.2 | 87.2 |
| No | 48 | 12.8 | 12.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

Almost all the respondents, as indicated in table 10 and 11, 328 (87.2%) and 320 (85.1%) respectively thinks instant messaging applications have helped them connect with people whom they have something in common with and helped them socialize with people they would not have been able to communicate with. In contrast, 48 (12.8%) and 56 (14.9%) of the respondents did not think so.

Table 11. Do you think that instant messaging applications have helped you socialize with people you would not have been able to communicate with?

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 320 | 85.1 | 85.1 | 85.1 |
| No | 56 | 14.9 | 14.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 376 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

[Source: Survey, 2019]

CONCLUSION

The finding of the study indicates that majority of the respondents (61.7%, 89.4% and 57.4%) said they use instant messaging application to initiate, maintain and end a relationship respectively. Majority of the respondents (70.2%, 83%, and 51.1%) also said others have used these applications to initiate, maintain and end a relationship with them. Moreover, Majority of the respondents (78.7%, 76.6%, 87.2%, and 85.1%) of the respondents thinks instant messaging applications have helped them to get to know others better, to connect with people they share common interest and to socialize with people they would have been able to communicate. Therefore, based on the results, its fair to conclude that instant messaging application are used by students in interpersonal relationship and in socializing.

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