Predictors of WhatsAPP 'Consumption' among Undergraduate Students of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

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Abstract

This paper examined cognitive, affective social-integrative and tension-release needs as predictors of WhatsApp 'consumption' among undergraduate students of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. The population covered all the 808 undergraduate students in the Department of Economics from 100 to 400level in the 2014/2015 academic session. Proportionate sampling technique was used to draw. Out of 404 distributed questionnaires, 382 copies were duly filled and used for the analysis. The bi-variate correlation technique was used to establish the relationship between the variables on a correlation matrix table. Result showed that the correlation coefficient on the relationship between WhatsApp usage and the variables: cognitive (r=0.287); affective (r=0.751); socio-integrative (r=0.743); and tension-release needs (r=0.291) are all statistically significant (p <0.01). The magnitude of the correlation coefficient for affective (r =0.751) and socio-integrative (r=0.743) needs showed that respondents mostly used WhatsApp for meeting their affective needs (chatting and keeping in touch with friends loved ones) and socio-integrative needs (building social network ties). It

was recommended that students of the institution should harness WhatsApp as a communication platform for more educative purposes as against meeting their affective and social-integrative needs.

Key Words: Cognitive needs, Affective needs, Social-integrative needs, Tension-release needs

Introduction

Communication and social relations among people, is as old as man. In the Scriptures, it is written that God at the beginning of creation said that all of His creative works -the light and firmaments, birds and beast, vegetations, water and planetary bodies were all good except for man's loneliness on which He recounted: "….it is not good for man to be alone…." (Genesis 2:18). This assertion from the creator goes a long way in attesting to the old saying "no man is an island." This is because humans are not created to live a solitary life but communicate and relate with others. Interestingly, communication and social integrations among people has been taken to another level with the advent of the internet.

Before the advent of the internet, the avenue for social life discussions, information, consultation and communication in creating and maintaining friendship with loved ones, has been strictly restricted to family ceremonies, parties, club meetings, and even the much older age group meetings, cultural festivals and late night rendezvous kept by 'secret' lovers around the village stream, market and at designated meeting points. In contemporary times, information and communication technology (ICT) facilities has made it possible for a lot of people of similar interest on water, rail, air and on land, to be online at the same time without physical or direct contact; through the help of the internet and the 'new online commodity' called social network media.

Social network media are sites or mobile applications that enable people of common interest and purpose to interact through an electronic and internet-enabled medium such as: personal computers, smartphones or an equivalent device. Kaplan and Halein (2010) defined it as a group of internet– based application that build on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content. On the other hand, social networking as defined by Adomi and Ejirefe (2012) refers to activities, practices and behaviour among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinion using interactive media. It is in the course of engaging oneself in these practices and behaviour that users share activities, events, ideas and interest within their individual network. These practices are carried out primarily on the internet, through social web applications such as: Facebook, Howfar, Instagram, BlackBerry Messenger, Twitter, and WhatsApp among others.

WhatsApp is an instant messaging and call app (application) for smartphones that affords users the access to send text, video or audio media messages and even share images with other users through the internet. It is one of the social interactive media that makes it possible to chat with friends, create a group and transmit content in forms of text, pictures, videos and audios. On like Facebook, BlackBerry Messenger, Instagram and other social media that first require users to search, suggest and send friend request to their loved one; WhatsApp, provides technical support that checks one's phone contact to see if any one contact is already using WhatsApp to connect one automatically. Consequently, youths that use iOS, BlackBerry OS, BlackBerry 10, Windows Phone, Nokia Series 40, Symbian, Android smartphones, tablets and other internet-enabled devices, consider it to be just another 'interactive commodity' that should be 'consumed' daily in satisfying their ever increasing appetite for 'internet diet'.

WhatsApp Incorporation (the producer company) was founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum who were both former employees of Yahoo! As at 22 April 2014, Forbes (2014) claimed that WhatsApp had over 500 million monthly active users with 700 million photos, 100 million videos shared each day. Also, the messaging system handled more than 10 billion messages each day. By early January 2015, WhatsApp reached a new milestone of 700 million monthly active users with over 30 billion messages being sent every day (Business Insider, 2015) while at the later part of the same month, The Wall Street Journal (2015) published that WhatsApp had over 800 million active users. Hence, it has also become a popular social network site among youths, especially university undergraduates in Edo State, Nigeria because of its user friendly features.

There are several models/theories that have been applied to study use of social media usage. Some of these theories as used by scholars include: Play theory and Entertainment theory (Shehu, & Shehu, 2014), Critical Theory of Technology (Rambe, 2011) and Use and Gratification Theory (Karimi, Khodabandelou, Ehsani & Ahmad, 2014; Uwem, Enobong & Nsikan, 2013). According to Uwem *et al*. (2013), the use and gratification theory (UGT) is a widely used theory that explains media usage behaviour among prospective users. It is a theory that focuses on why people use certain media and how the use of such media affects them. UGT (also called Needs and Gratification theory) was propounded by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974. Katz, et al (1974) identified five (5) basic need that can be met using media resources. These needs include: cognitive; affective; integrative; social-integrative and tension-release needs.

Statement of the Problem

The use of the 'online interactive media commodity' called WhatsApp could be seen as consumption of social media in economic terms. From Economics' perspective, consumption presupposes that: every user or consumer of a given

commodity has a need or set of needs that is expected to be met or satisfied in event of consuming or using the commodity. Also, to ensure continuity of usage; such commodity must satisfy the need(s) of its prospective users. Hence, the problem of this study is to determine the need(s) influencing the 'consumption' of WhatsApp among undergraduate students of Economics in Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Edo State with focus on the constructs from Use and Gratification Theory (UGT).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the factors influencing the use of WhatsApp among undergraduates of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. However, the specific objectives are to: determine whether cognitive, affective, social-integrative and tension-release needs are the factors influencing use of WhatsApp among undergraduates of Economics in the institution. The study also investigates the extent to which the aforementioned needs, predict students' use of the social network media.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis formulated for the study is given below:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between cognitive, affective, social-integrative, tension-release needs and use of WhatsApp among undergraduate students of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

H_1:   There is a significant relationship between cognitive, affective, social-integrative, tension-release needs and use of WhatsApp among undergraduate students of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

Empirical Issues

Three research literatures are germane in this study. These literatures include studies by Karimi, Khodabandelou, Ehsani & Ahmad (2014); Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor (2013); Uwem, Enobong & Nsikan (2013). Karimi *et al.,* (2014) drawing from the Uses and Gratifications Theory, examined the gratification sought and the gratification obtained from using social networking sites among Iranian, Malaysian, British, and South African higher education students. This comparison allowed to drawing conclusions about how social networking sites fulfill users' needs with different cultures. Data were collected through a quantitative study applying online and paper- based questionnaire carried out in 2013, using a representative sample (n =320). Findings showed differences in students' motivation to join and use social network sites in each country. Interestingly, the researchers found that cultural differences may determine the uses and gratifications of social networking sites. Though the use and gratification theory was used in this study, they were unable to explain in precise terms, the extent to which the tenets of the theory, predict media users' intention on usage.

Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor (2013) investigated the use of social media among students of selected universities in South-East Nigeria. The study was conducted using survey research method with 300 as sample. Multi-stage sampling technique was applied to draw the samples and questionnaire was the measuring instrument. Tables, mean, pie chart and standard deviations were used for data presentation and analyses. The study found that students use social media for purposes of getting entertainment and educative information (cognitive needs). They also use social media to discuss national issues (affective needs), engage in cyber-crimes and expose themselves to pornography. In this study, the authors only gave an expository review on the use and gratification theory without statistically applying the theory to explain use of social media among university students in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria.

Uwem, Enobong & Nsikan (2013) examined the uses and gratifications of social networking websites among youths in Uyo, Nigeria. The population of the study was 86,662 with a sample of 381 respondents derived from the multi-stage sampling procedure. The study used the survey method as the research technique while the measuring instrument was the questionnaire which contained 13 items–eight close-ended and five open-ended questions. The data for the study were analysed through the use of tables and were expressed in simple percentages. The study found out that youths in Uyo registered in at least 46 social networking websites. It also found that the youths were active users of social networking websites and accessed the websites for various purposes and gratifications among which include: connecting and communicating with old/new friends and getting the latest information. In this study likewise, there was no statistically testing to examine the predictive power of the U & G theory in explaining social media 'consumption' among youths in the capital city of Akwa-Ibom (Uyo), Nigeria. Hence, this study was undertaken to fill this gap.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of this study is anchored on the use and gratification (U & G) theory (also called needs and gratification theory). The theory originated from the functionalist perspective on mass media communication, in the initial stages of communication medium: newspaper, radio, television, and now the internet. The theory was first developed in a research on the effectiveness of the radio in the 1940s (Ruggerio, 2000). A basic assumption of the U&G theory is that people are actively involved in media usage and interact highly with the communication media by building profile groupings of related uses and theoretically associated gratifications (Luo, 2002). Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass (1973) improved on the assumptions of UGT to determine why people make use of some media and enjoy so much gratification by arguing that people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs.

Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass (1973) clarified these specific needs into five (5) basic categories: cognitive; affective; integrative; social-integrative; and escape or tension

release needs. The cognitive needs are related to "strengthening information, knowledge, and understanding" (p. 167); (b) affective needs are related to "strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience" (p. 167); (c) integrative needs are for "strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status" (p. 167); (d) social-integrative needs relate to "strengthening contact with family, friends, and the world" (p. 167); and (e) escape or tension release needs helps to escape or release tension from society and self (Karimi, Khodabandelou, Ehsani & Ahmad, 2014). The five aforementioned needs that influence media usage and gratification from U & G theory as proposed by Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass (1973) have been considered relevant for explaining the factors influencing use of Whatsapp among undergraduates of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. This was further used to build the conceptual framework. However, the third users' need (integrative) was excluded in the framework because of inability of most students in the pilot study (pre-test study) to distinguish between their affective and integrative needs. Hence, the conceptual framework is clearly illustrated in Figure 1 below:
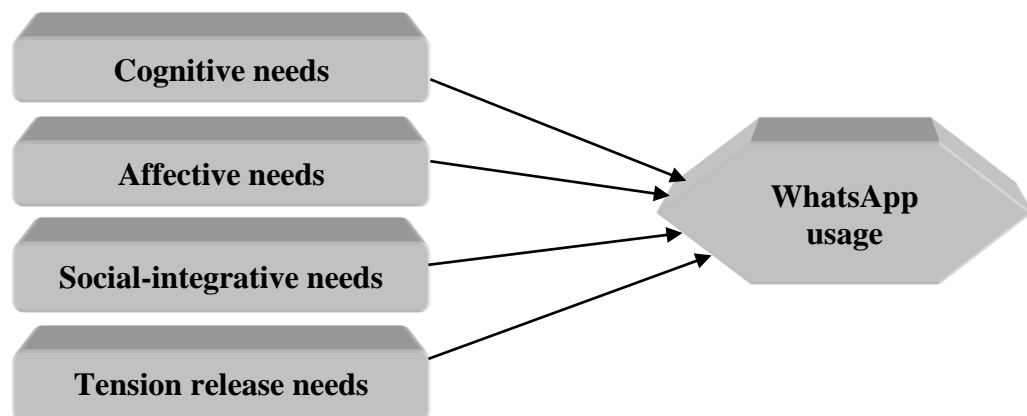

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author

Method

This study adopted the ex-post facto research design to examine predictor of WhatsApp usage among undergraduate students of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. The ex-post facto research design was considered appropriate because the study was concerned with determining the relationship between a set of predictor variables (cognitive, affective, socio-integrative, tension-release needs) and students' use of WhatsApp (dependent variable). The population of the study covered all the 808 undergraduate students in the Department of Economics on full-time study programme from 100 to 400level in the 2014/2015 academic session. Proportionate to

size sampling was used to draw a sample of 50% of the students from 100 to 400level; thereby making the sample size a total of 404 participants.

The instrument used for the collection of data was a self-developed questionnaire titled: Students' WhatsApp Usage Questionnaire-SWUQ. The questionnaire was divided into Sections A and B only. Section A contains questions relating to the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as: gender, age, and study level while Section B contains 20 items. 4 items were raised each to collect data on WhatsApp usage among undergraduates and the set of predictor from the UGT construct. All the items from Section B were rated on a four point Likert scale: Strongly Agreed (SA)_4, Agreed (A)_3, Disagreed (D)_2 and Strongly Disagreed (SD)_1.

The content and construct validity of the instrument was carried out by two experts in the Department of Library and Information Science (Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma). After that, the test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument with 30 regular students in other departments within the Faculty of Social Sciences in the same institution. The instrument was administered to them and re-administered after a few days to the same students. Their responses in the first and second test were correlated using the Spearman Brown rank correlation technique. A reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained; depicting that the instrument is reliable. The bi-variate correlation technique was used to establish the relationships between the dependent and independent variables on a correlation matrix table at 0.05 level of significance. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 20) was employed to carry out the test.

Results

The result of the analysis and discussion are presented in table 1 below: The result from the table shows that the correlation coefficient on the relationship between WhatsApp usage and the variables: cognitive ($r=0.287$); affective ($r=0.751$); socio-integrative ($r=0.743$); and tension-release needs ($r=0.291$), are all statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Hence, the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between cognitive, affective, social-integrative, tension-release needs and use of WhatsApp among undergraduates of Economics in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma is accepted. This means that students' use of WhatsApp is influenced by the desire to satisfy their cognitive, affective, socio-integrative and tension-release needs.

Discussion

The magnitude of the correlation coefficient for cognitive ($r=0.287$), affective ($r = 0.751$), socio-integrative ($r=0.743$) and tension-release needs ($r=0.291$), showed that respondents mostly used WhatsApp to meet their affective and socio-integrative needs. The result showed that cognitive (information seeking) needs was the least

purpose for which respondents used WhatsApp. This concurs with the findings of Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor (2013) and Uwem, Enobong & Nsikan (2013). Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor (2013) found out that students from selected universities in South-East Nigeria, use social media for purposes of getting entertainment and educative information (cognitive needs); discuss national issues (socio-integrative needs), engage in cyber-crimes and expose themselves to pornography. Uwem, Enobong & Nsikan (2013) found that youths in Uyo registered in at least 46 social networking websites; indicating that youths in the capital city of Akwa-Ibom, Nigeria have a voracious appetite for social network consumption. They also found that the youths were active users of social networking websites and accessed the websites for connecting and communicating with old/new friend (affective needs) and getting the latest information (cognitive needs).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 'social-internet commodity' called WhatsApp is mostly consumed by Economics students of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma for fun sharing among friends, meeting new people and chatting with peers. Many of them consider it a communication tool of escape into a 'wonderland' of fun and pleasure; consequently, many of them do not seem to realize that WhatsApp could be an important platform for getting themselves acquainted with educative information about their discipline. Hence, it is recommended for it is recommended that students of the institution should harness WhatsApp as a communication platform for more educative purposes as against focusing their attention on their affective and social-integrative needs.

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Table 1: Summary Result on the Relationship Between Students' Use of WhatsApp and Predictors on Correlation Matrix Table

Correlations

			WhatsApp.usage	Cognitive.needs	Affective.needs	Socio.integrative.needs	Tension.release.needs
Spearman's rho	WhatsApp.usage	Correlation Coefficient	1.000				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.				
		N	382				
	Cognitive.needs	Correlation Coefficient	$.287^{**}$	1.000			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.			
		N	382	382			
	Affective.needs	Correlation Coefficient	$.751^{**}$	$.305^{**}$	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.		
		N	382	382	382		
	Socio.integrative.needs	Correlation Coefficient	$.743^{**}$	$.311^{**}$	$.980^{**}$	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	
		N	382	382	382	382	
	Tension.release.needs	Correlation Coefficient	$.291^{**}$	$.984^{**}$	$.304^{**}$	$.311^{**}$	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	382	382	382	382	382

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

Questionnaire: Survey Items

This questionnaire is designed for undergraduate students of Economics in Ambrose Alli University (A.A.U), Ekpoma. Respondents are required to fill both Section A and Section B parts of this questionnaire.

SECTION A: [Demographics]

Gender: Male   [   ]   Female   [   ]

Study level: 100 level [   ]   200level [   ]   300level [   ]

400 level [   ]

SECTION B:

Instruction: Below are personal statements about the use of WhatsApp and benefits you could have enjoyed or are still enjoying from using it. We are only interested in knowing your opinion about each statement. Please, indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by ticking on ONLY ONE of the four scales provided below

S/N	ITEMS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	WhatsApp usage				
1	I communicate with friends on my phone contact through WhatsApp				
2	I update my status on WhatsApp regularly				
3	I share picture/video messages with others on WhatsApp				
4	I chat with my course mates on WhatsApp				
	Cognitive needs				
5	WhatsApp helps me to gain knowledge of economic problems in the society				
6	I share educative materials with friends on WhatsApp				
7	I learn new things while chatting with my friends on WhatsApp				
8	My friends send me images/videos of lecture materials on WhatsApp				
	Affective needs				
9	WhatsApp helps me to stay online with loved ones				
10	With WhatsApp, I don't get bored even when am alone				
11	WhatsApp helps me to catch fun with friends				
12	Using WhatsApp, makes me feel important among my colleagues				
	Social-integrative needs				
13	I use WhatsApp to keep in touch with my friends				
14	I spend time with new friends on WhatsApp				
15	While the school is on holidays, I connect with my course mates on WhatsApp				

16	I join various social groups on WhatsApp to meet students of like interest				
	Tension-release needs				
17	I use WhatsApp to stay out of school worries				
18	Using WhatsApp, helps me to pass the time				
19	I use WhatsApp, whenever I want to relax myself				
20	Whenever I am unhappy, I use WhatsApp, to stay happy again				