

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WHATSAPP AND TELEGRAM AS DIGITAL COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS BASED ON THEIR USAGE AND FUNCTIONS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT - The development of information and communication technology in the digital era has encouraged the increased use of instant messaging applications as the primary means of communication. WhatsApp and Telegram are two of the most widely used digital communication platforms, each with different characteristics, functions, and usage patterns. This study aims to analyse the differences in the use and functions of WhatsApp and Telegram as digital communication platforms based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory perspective. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a literature study of various scientific journals, books, and relevant academic sources. The results of the analysis show that WhatsApp is more dominant in interpersonal and small group communication due to its ease of use, simple interface, and default end-to-end encryption security system. Meanwhile, Telegram is more widely used for information dissemination and digital community management through its channel, bot, large-capacity group, and cloud-based storage features. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, WhatsApp users tend to seek gratification in the form of social closeness and ease of communication, while Telegram users are more interested in the efficiency of information distribution, flexibility of message management, and wide audience reach. This study concludes that the differences in the use and functions of WhatsApp and Telegram reflect differences in user needs and satisfaction in digital communication. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for individuals, educational institutions, and organisations in selecting the digital communication platform that best suits their needs.

Keywords: WhatsApp, Telegram, digital communication, Uses and Gratifications Theory.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has fundamentally changed the way humans interact in the digital age. Advances in internet networks have led to the emergence of instant messaging applications that enable communication to take place quickly, efficiently, and beyond geographical boundaries. In this context, WhatsApp and Telegram have emerged as digital communication platforms that play an important role in

facilitating the real-time exchange of text, audio, visual, and video messages. The use of these two applications is not limited to personal communication, but also extends to the education sector, business, and social and government organisations (Laudon & Laudon, 2020; Shahrul & Wibawa, 2021).

WhatsApp is known as one of the instant messaging applications with the highest usage rates in the world. The high adoption of WhatsApp is influenced by its ease of use, simple interface, and the implementation of an end-to-end encryption security system that protects the confidentiality of user messages. In terms of functionality, WhatsApp provides various communication features such as individual and group conversations, voice messages, and audio and video call services that support daily communication needs. These characteristics make WhatsApp a dominant and easily accessible digital communication platform for a wide range of users (Montag et al., 2015; Shahrul & Wibawa, 2021).

Unlike WhatsApp, Telegram was developed as an instant messaging application that emphasises flexibility of use and more complex functions. Telegram offers features such as channels for disseminating information, bots for automating services, and groups with large numbers of members. Additionally, its cloud-based storage system allows users to access messages from multiple devices simultaneously. However, in terms of security, Telegram's end-to-end encryption feature is only applied to secret chats, so its data protection mechanism differs from WhatsApp's (Baimuratov & Ziyat, 2017; Karpisek et al., 2015).

The differences in characteristics in terms of usage and functionality between WhatsApp and Telegram show that the two platforms have different orientations and roles in supporting digital communication. Although both are used as instant messaging applications, differences in features, security mechanisms, and user patterns often result in variations in the effectiveness of communication. To date, most studies still tend to discuss one application separately, while comprehensive studies comparing WhatsApp and Telegram based on usage and functionality aspects are still relatively limited, especially in the context of communication needs in the digital era. Therefore, this research is important to provide a deeper understanding of the differences in the use and functions of the two platforms, as well as to serve as a basis for consideration for users, educational institutions, and organisations in choosing the digital communication platform that best suits their needs (Church & de Oliveira, 2013; Shahrul & Wibawa, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses Uses and Gratifications Theory as its main theoretical basis. This theory was proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), who emphasised that media users are active in choosing media based on their needs and desired satisfaction. From the Uses and Gratifications perspective, individuals use media to fulfil specific needs, such as interpersonal communication, information, social interaction, and efficiency of use. Therefore, differences in media characteristics will influence users' motives for use and their level of satisfaction.

In the context of digital communication, Uses and Gratifications Theory is relevant for analysing the use of instant messaging applications. Users are faced with a variety of platform options with diverse features and functions, so their choice of media reflects their communication needs and objectives. WhatsApp and Telegram, as popular instant messaging

applications, are used differently by users according to the gratification they seek, whether for personal communication or group communication and information dissemination.

A number of previous studies have applied Uses and Gratifications Theory in the study of WhatsApp usage. Suparmo (2017) found in his study that the use of WhatsApp is driven by the need for social communication, group interaction, and ease of sharing information. The study shows that users choose WhatsApp because it provides satisfaction in building social relationships and personal communication.

Another study conducted by Putri, Suhaimi, and Abdullah shows that user satisfaction levels in utilising WhatsApp groups are closely related to communication needs, information exchange, and activity coordination. This study confirms that Uses and Gratifications Theory is effective in understanding the relationship between media usage motives and user satisfaction with WhatsApp in the context of group communication.

In addition, a survey study on social media usage among university students published through DOAJ also shows that WhatsApp is one of the most widely used instant messaging applications for communication and information needs. The study uses the Uses and Gratifications approach to explain why users choose certain media based on the benefits and satisfaction they obtain.

Based on the theoretical review and previous research, it can be concluded that Uses and Gratifications Theory is a relevant and robust theoretical framework for analysing differences in the use and function of instant messaging applications. In this study, the theory is used to understand how user needs and gratifications influence the selection and use of WhatsApp and Telegram as digital communication platforms in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Instant Messaging Applications

Instant messaging applications are a form of digital communication media that allow users to exchange messages in real time via the internet. According to Church and de Oliveira (2013), instant messaging applications are designed to support fast, interactive, and personal or group communication. WhatsApp and Telegram are included in the category of instant messaging applications that provide text, voice, image, and video messaging services, as well as other communication support features.

WhatsApp is defined as a cross-platform instant messaging application that focuses on ease of interpersonal communication with a simple interface and default end-to-end encryption security system (Montag et al., 2015). Meanwhile, Telegram is a cloud-based instant messaging application that emphasises flexibility of use, large storage capacity, and support for advanced features such as channels and bots (Baimuratov & Ziyat, 2017).

The use of WhatsApp and Telegram

In practice, WhatsApp is widely used for daily communication, both personal and in small groups. Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) explain that WhatsApp is often used in the context of family, friendship, education, and organisations due to its ease of access and high user

adoption rate. The use of WhatsApp is driven by the need for interpersonal communication, coordination of activities, and maintenance of social relationships.

Unlike WhatsApp, Telegram tends to be more dominant in the context of information dissemination and digital community management. Telegram is often used by organisations, online communities, and educational institutions to distribute information unilaterally through its channel and large-capacity group features. Barhoumi (2015) states that Telegram is effective for learning and informative communication because it can reach large audiences efficiently.

Functions of WhatsApp and Telegram

In terms of function, WhatsApp acts as a medium for interpersonal communication that emphasises intense two-way interaction. Features such as instant messaging, voice and video calls, and small discussion groups support personalised and responsive communication. The end-to-end encryption security system also increases user confidence in private communication.

Meanwhile, Telegram has more diverse and complex functions. In addition to supporting interpersonal communication, Telegram serves as a medium for information distribution and digital community management. The channel feature allows messages to be delivered to a wide audience without direct interaction, while bots support service automation and information management. Cloud-based storage also allows users to access data from multiple devices simultaneously.

Based on these definitions, uses, and functions, it can be concluded that WhatsApp and Telegram have different communication orientations. WhatsApp focuses more on interpersonal and social communication, while Telegram is more prominent in its informative functions and large-scale communication management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of WhatsApp

The results of the analysis show that WhatsApp is more dominant in interpersonal and small group communication. This is due to its ease of use, simple interface, and high user adoption rate. From the perspective of *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, WhatsApp provides gratification in the form of ease of communication, social closeness, and efficiency in daily interactions (Suparmo, 2017).

Use of Telegram

Unlike WhatsApp, Telegram is more widely used for disseminating information and managing digital communities. The *channel* feature enables one-way communication to large audiences, while *bots* support service automation and information management. In addition, the *cloud-based* storage system provides users with the flexibility to access data across devices.

Within the framework of *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, Telegram users seek gratification in the form of efficient information distribution, flexible message management, and a wide audience reach. This aligns with Barhoumi's (2015) research, which states that Telegram is effective in the context of learning and information dissemination.

Table 1
Comparison Table of WhatsApp and Telegram

Aspects	WhatsApp	Telegram
Focus of Use	Interpersonal and small group communication	Information dissemination and large communities
Security	End-to-end encryption (default)	End-to-end encryption (secret chat)
Group capacity	Limited	Very large
Key Features	Chat, voice notes, video calls	Channels, bots, cloud storage
User Gratification	Social proximity and convenience	Efficiency and information reach

Table source: Author's compilation

The differences in the use and functions of WhatsApp and Telegram as digital communication platforms can be explained through the Uses and Gratifications Theory approach. In the context of digital communication, the choice of instant messaging applications is not only determined by the availability of technology, but also by the suitability of features to users' communication needs.

The results of the study indicate that WhatsApp is more predominantly used for interpersonal and small group communication. This is due to WhatsApp's simple, easy-to-use characteristics and its high adoption rate across various segments of society. These findings are in line with Suparmo's (2017) research, which states that WhatsApp users utilise the application to fulfil their social communication needs, maintain interpersonal relationships, and facilitate coordination within groups. From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, WhatsApp provides gratification in the form of ease of communication and social closeness that users need in their daily lives.

Furthermore, research by Putri Suhaimi and Abdullah (2020) shows that the level of user satisfaction with WhatsApp in groups is influenced by the effectiveness of communication and the ease of information exchange. This reinforces the assumption that user satisfaction is not always determined by the complexity of features, but rather by the media's ability to meet communication needs practically and efficiently. Thus, the dominance of WhatsApp usage reflects its success in meeting interpersonal communication needs as described in Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Conversely, Telegram shows a more specific and structured usage pattern. Telegram is more widely used for information dissemination, one-way communication, and digital community management through its channel, bot, and large-capacity group features. From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, Telegram users seek gratification in the form of efficient information delivery, flexible message management, and the ability to reach a large audience. These findings are in line with Barhoumi's (2015) research, which states that instant messaging platforms with mass communication features are more effective for learning and information dissemination than interpersonal communication.

The difference in the use of WhatsApp and Telegram also reflects the varying communication needs of users in the digital age. A survey study on social media usage among

university students published through DOAJ shows that the choice of digital communication platform is influenced by the benefits and satisfaction users derive from the media (DOAJ, 2019). Users tend to choose the media that best suits their communication goals, rather than simply the media with the most complete features. This explains why WhatsApp remains the dominant platform, while Telegram is developing as an alternative platform with specific functions.

Thus, the results of this study confirm that the differences in the use and functions of WhatsApp and Telegram reflect differences in user needs and satisfaction, as explained in *Uses and Gratifications Theory*. WhatsApp is more effective in meeting interpersonal and social communication needs, while Telegram is more effective in meeting informative communication and community management needs. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of digital communication platforms is contextual and highly dependent on user goals and needs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that WhatsApp and Telegram have significant differences in their use and function as digital communication platforms. WhatsApp is more effective for personal and small group communication, while Telegram excels in information dissemination and digital community management.

These differences indicate that the choice of communication platform is highly dependent on the needs and objectives of the user. This research reinforces the relevance of *Uses and Gratifications Theory* in explaining digital media user behaviour and provides practical contributions for individuals and institutions in selecting the appropriate communication platform.

These differences show that the effectiveness of digital communication platforms is greatly influenced by the purpose of use and user needs. WhatsApp is more suitable for personal, interactive, and intense communication, while Telegram is more appropriate for one-way communication, digital community management, and broad and structured information distribution. Thus, the selection of digital communication platforms cannot be standardised, but must be tailored to the context and desired communication function.

The implications of this study provide practical contributions for individuals, educational institutions, organisations, and digital communities in determining the most effective communication platforms. In addition, this study also provides theoretical contributions in enriching the study of digital communication, particularly in the application of the *Uses and Gratifications theory*, which explains how users actively choose media to meet their communication needs.

As a recommendation, further research is advised to develop this study by adding other variables such as motivation for use, user satisfaction levels, and the influence of digital culture on the choice of communication platforms. The use of mixed research methods can also provide a more comprehensive understanding of user experiences and preferences in utilising instant messaging applications in the digital age.

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