

## **Facebook and Its Uses and Gratifications: A Study of Palestinian Students at a Public University in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the uses and gratifications theory on the use of Facebook among Palestinian students at a public university in Malaysia. The theory posits that individuals actively choose media channels or media content to satisfy their needs. In-depth interviews were conducted among 12 heavy users of facebook. These participants comprise Palestinian students of a public university in Malaysia. As it is, Facebook is a convenient platform to express ideas and opinions on the Palestine crisis making it popular amongst Palestinian users particularly with the Palestine-Israel conflict that is taking place now in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. The findings of the study identify the needs gratified by Facebook: connecting, source of news and information, freedom of expression, entertainment and academic purposes. The reasons why Facebook gratifies the public university's Palestinian students' needs is because Facebook is perceived as a convenient platform, is a famous social networking site (SNS), provides entertainment and allows the freedom of expression. The participants pointed out three improvements that are required from Facebook: improving the privacy of users, cutting advertisements and allowing more freedom of expression.*

**Keywords:** Facebook, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Palestinian Students, Public University, Malaysia

## **Kegunaan dan Kepuasan Facebook: Kajian terhadap Pelajar Palestin di Universiti Awam Malaysia**

### **Abstrak**

*Kajian ini cuba meninjau teori kegunaan dan kepuasan di kalangan pelajar Palestin di sebuah universiti awam di Malaysia yang menggunakan Facebook. Teori ini menyatakan bahawa individu secara aktif akan memilih saluran media atau kandungan media untuk memenuhi keperluan mereka. Temubual mendalam telah dijalankan di kalangan 12 penuntut universiti warga Palestin di Malaysia yang tergolong dalam kategori pengguna tegar Facebook. Laman sosial itu adalah platform yang paling sesuai untuk menyatakan idea dan pendapat tentang krisis Palestin sehingga menjadikannya begitu popular di kalangan pengguna Palestin terutamanya dalam konflik Palestin-Israel yang masih berlaku di Tebing Barat, Gaza dan Jerusalem. Kajian ini telah mengenal pasti keperluan yang dipenuhi oleh Facebook iaitu sebagai penghubung, sumber berita dan maklumat, arena kebebasan bersuara, hiburan dan memenuhi fungsi akademik. Facebook juga memberi kemudahan kepada informan kerana ianya dilihat sebagai platform yang sesuai, laman rangkaian sosial yang terkenal, menyediakan hiburan dan memberi kebebasan bersuara kepada pengguna. Para informan juga mencadangkan tiga penambahbaikan yang diperlukan dari Facebook iaitu meningkatkan tahap privasi pengguna, menghapuskan iklan dan memberi lebih ruang untuk kebebasan bersuara.*

**Kata Kunci:** Facebook, Teori Kegunaan dan Kepuasan, Pelajar Palestin, Universiti Awam, Malaysia

### **Introduction**

The popularity of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in the world is obvious with the expected number of users to reach 2.95 billion by 2020 (Yelina, 2016). Google, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Skype and LinkedIn are among the world's prominent sites (Baruah,

2012; Steckman & Andrews, 2017). As of 2016, Facebook is regarded as the most popular SNS in the world with over one billion active users worldwide (Protalinski, 2016). The popularity of Facebook in Malaysia is also evident. Of the 80% of Internet users who visit social media sites, 96.5% claimed that they own a Facebook account with 50% of them accessing their accounts on a daily basis (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission 2016). Against this backdrop, the article's foci rests on the amalgamation of uses and gratifications theory by Palestinian public university students in Malaysia and Facebook.

Facebook is also popularly used by young Palestinians. Mourtada and Salem (2011) mention that the usage of Facebook among youths aged from 15 to 19 years old in the West Bank and Gaza has reached 1.5 million users. Similarly, another study indicates that 46% of Palestinians aged from 18 to 24 years old use Facebook as the main source of news and information (Younis & Mufle, 2010). Facebook is the first source of news among Palestinian youths (Estrin, 2015) making this study on public university students using Facebook significant.

## **Research Questions**

1. What needs of Palestinian students studying at a public university in Malaysia are gratified by Facebook?
2. Why does Facebook gratify the needs of Palestinian students of a public university in Malaysia?
3. How could Facebook improve its policies to gratify the needs of Palestinian public university students in Malaysia?

## **Literature Review**

SNSs are online services platforms that help to build social network relations among people regardless of demographic attributes (Omekwu, Eke & Odoh, 2014). They are websites that allow users to create their own personal accounts to communicate and interact with others (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013). For Boyd and Ellison (2007), the SNS is a web-based service that enables individuals to construct public profiles within an organised system. SNSs provide a platform for individuals to share,

exchange and discuss information through texts, pictures, audios and videos that are connected 24 hours on the Internet (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). One of the SNSs is Facebook, that is an online website that has witnessed millions of users around the world participate in a virtual communication environment (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011).

Facebook plays a significant role as an online platform that allows individuals or its users to create personal and/or business content pages (Chan, 2009). In the last decade, Facebook has been regarded as the application that opens doors for people and organisations to communicate to get some kind of news (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman & Witty, 2010). The popularity of Facebook in Malaysia is reported by Mahadi (2013) who mentions that approximately 13.3 million individuals, representing 45.5% of the Malaysian population, have an account on Facebook.

### **The Policies of Facebook**

According to Facebook (2017), it has policies that firstly, help us feel safe by reviewing and removing content that are direct threats, promotes self-injury or suicide, terror, bullying, attacks on public figures, criminal activity, sexual violence and any endeavours by dealers that are unauthorised who purchase, sells or trade prescription drugs, marijuana, firearms or ammunition. Secondly, Facebook encourages respectful behaviour by restricting nudity, removing hate content, removing content that is for sadistic pleasure or glorifying violence. Thirdly, they keep the account and personal information secure by prohibiting multiple profiles, investigating breach of security and memorialising the account of a person who has passed away.

However, it seems that Facebook has been cooperating with the Israeli government to remove content the latter finds objectionable, including briefly shutting down Palestinian pages on Facebook and the accounts of Palestinian journalists and activists (Nashif, 2017). At the same time, Israelis, including government officials, routinely post inflammatory contents about Palestinians without censure from Facebook or other media companies (McKernan, 2016). Furthermore, the concern is that

Facebook is adopting Israeli policy and terminology when it comes to defining what incitement is (Gostoli, 2016; Ingram, 2016). This is unfair treatment by Facebook for Palestinians who would like their side of the story to be expressed on social media.

As a result of these problems, activists have used the hashtag #FBCensorsPalestine to accuse Facebook of siding with the Israeli occupation against Palestinians (Catron, 2016). Some Facebook users have changed their profile pictures to an upside down Facebook logo to reflect their protest and to demand that the Facebook management not side with the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians (Fatfata, 2017). It is also reported that the Palestinians need to be able to express themselves freely on Facebook without restrictions and Facebook needs to respect the charters, international conventions and standards on freedom of expression.

## **Uses and Gratifications and Facebook**

The popularity of Facebook and its rapid growth worldwide have encouraged researchers to conduct studies by using the uses and gratifications theory to identify the motivations of users and the effects of Facebook on individuals and the society (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012; Basilisco & Cha, 2015). The usage of Facebook has recently increased among university students worldwide (Khan, Adnan, Hussain, Afrzal & Gilani, 2015). Facebook forms a learning community by creating a network that indirectly connects students with other students (Eteokleous, Ktoridou, Stavrides & Michaelidis, 2012). Palestinians have the highest rate of Facebook users amongst university students in the Middle East at 890, 000 students (Donia Al-Watan, 2015). The writer reports that their ages range from 18 to 34 years old and they visit Facebook daily for about three to six hours per day.

Facebook is used to meet other forms of needs by students. The uses and gratifications theory was applied by Foregger (2008) to examine the usage of Facebook and the gratifications gained among undergraduate students in the United States. The results indicate that there are numerous motivation factors for students to use Facebook as a medium

of connection, networking, social comparison and to establish and/or maintain old ties. Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley (2009) conducted a study using an online survey on first year students of a British university. The findings show that 213 students focused on Facebook and used it for social reasons that helped them to settle into their university life and use it for learning purposes. Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) surveyed 1,715 college students who examined their involvement in Facebook groups and the gratifications derived. The results reveal three basic motives for using Facebook as: information seeking, socialising and entertainment. Similarly, a study by Quan-Haase and Young (2010), examining gratifications obtained from Facebook by undergraduate students in Canada, discovered six significant gratifications derived from using Facebook: for pastime, affection, fashion, sharing problems, sociability and social information.

A study by Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2010) applied the uses and gratifications theory to investigate the usage of Facebook among college students in the United States and found that most of the students used Facebook as a medium of connection with new friends and keeping in touch with old friends. According to Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn (2011), their study on undergraduates' use of Facebook reveals that students' motivations for using Facebook are influenced by the need for social acceptance when informing life updates and to retrieve personal information of other students. According to Magogwe and Ntereke (2013), students mainly use Facebook for socialising and other purposes such as networking, seeking information, entertainment, communication and shopping. Another study by Kim (2014) shows that international students at Hawaii University used Facebook for communication, professional reasons such as academic environment and personal reason of self-expression.

In Malaysia, the majority of Malaysian university students (64.5%) have signed up for Facebook accounts to help them in strengthen their relationships with old friends and with family members who live across the globe (Phua & Wong, 2015; Shahnaz & Wok, 2011). To further explore the Facebook usage pattern, motivations and behavioural issues among students in Malaysia, a study shows that they use Facebook actively for

social networking due to its psychological benefits, entertainment, self-presentation and skill enhancement (Balakrishnan & Shamim, 2013). Jafarkarimi, Sim, Saadatdoost and Hee (2016) selected a sample of 441 students in Malaysia as informants and the findings show that 47% of the participants were addicted to Facebook.

Hence, Facebook is well used by university students and would be excellent to include as a learning resource in university courses.

### **Facebook and Palestinian Users**

Palestinians use Facebook and SNSs in general for several reasons. Firstly, according to Abu Amer (2015), the number of Palestinian users on SNSs such as Facebook has increased significantly since 2014 due to the conflicts that happen in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. Information on social media provides an alternative view compared to mainstream media that is regarded as biased to Israel and tends to hide the truth behind the Israeli occupation (Ahren, 2014). The usage of SNSs among Palestinians is popular because of the unjust coverage of Palestinians on mainstream media (Husain, 2012), making social media news more truthful. The success of news dissemination on Palestine through Facebook is apparent when the Israelis started to defend their actions through Facebook newsfeeds (Mason, 2014).

Secondly, Facebook also provides a platform of communication that gives freedom of expression to Palestinians (Najjar, 2010). With the conflict that is happening in Palestine, it is important that Palestinians have a platform to express their feelings. For Palestinians who have no journalistic or political experience, Facebook is the most convenient site to express ideas and opinions on the crisis of Palestine (Abu Zayyad, 2015).

Thirdly, protests are also mobilised through Facebook. Since the tragic 2014 war, Palestinians have used Facebook as a main channel to gain millions of followers in protesting against the Israeli occupation in Gaza (Rosenberg, 2016). According to Nassar (2002), the Palestinian people use SNSs, specifically Facebook, as a means to disseminate accurate news on Palestine. Palestinians have witnessed raising international support for the cause of Palestine in the United Nations through SNSs

(Abu Zayyad, 2015). Facebook also helps to inform others of the truth of what is happening in Palestine and allows for discussions to take place. Several studies have found motivating factors that encourage Palestinians youths to use Facebook. Abbas and Mesch (2015) finds maintaining and expanding social ties as factors for Facebook use and Jarad (2009) identifies two motivation factors on the usage of Facebook that are personal identity and entertainment and three gratifications gained by users. These are in order to express the self freely, to find reassurance of values and to gain insight into individuals' personality.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The uses and gratifications theory is used to evaluate “what people do with the media” rather than “what do the media do to the people” (Katz 1959, p.2). The uses and gratifications theory has evolved over the years. Blumler and McQuail (1969) studied the 1964 elections in the United Kingdom by examining people's motives for watching certain political programmes on television. By categorising the audiences' motives for viewing a certain programme, they aimed to classify viewers according to their needs in order to understand any potential mass-media effects (Blumler, 1979). The result shows that the audiences' motivations were as follows: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance. They were able to identify the motivations that helped establish the groundwork for their research in 1972 and eventually developed the uses and gratifications theory.

According to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973), the uses and gratifications theory asserts that people are active users of the media and select how they use it to fulfil their needs. The theory is argued as an individualistic concept as the audience is defined as a group of individuals who engage directly with the media (Livingstone, 1998). The essential point of this theory is that it focuses on the active audience in the selection of content and messages from the platform of SNSs (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). Active audience means that media audiences do not solely receive information but are cognitively and emotionally involved in their selection (Livingstone, 2007). They are aware of the media and the media content choices they make.



Scholars have begun to consider some gratifications from online media such as online conversations, relationship maintenance, problem solving and persuasive purposes like negotiating or bargaining, as more unique than those of traditional mass media (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004). Some studies have also applied the Uses and Gratifications theory on SNSs to investigate if they satisfy a variety of needs. The most dominant theme that has emerged from these studies is that SNSs are efficient ways to communicate with friends (Ellison, Lampe & Steinfield, 2007; Urista, Dong & Day, 2009; Valentine, 2011).

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to provide a more in-depth understanding of the use of Facebook by Palestinian public university students living abroad. The qualitative research is grounded on the importance of understanding the rationale and justification behind people's attitudes (Curry, Nembhard & Bradley, 2009). This study employed the purposive sampling technique. For Pacho (2015), purposive sampling units or informants are chosen because they are able to give the researcher detailed exploration and understanding on the central themes and questions regarding the scope of study. In-depth interviews are conversations with a purpose between two or more parties (Brenner, 2006; Creswell, 2009). An interview guide is developed for this study to ensure that the interview is focused on the research scope (Jamshed, 2014). The guide had questions focusing on the research questions. There were 12 in-depth interviews conducted as the saturation point was identified at the first 12 interviews with informants of a study (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The criteria used in the selection of the sample were: 1) public university students in Malaysia 2) Palestinian citizens and 3) active Facebook users.

The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. Selective transcription was carried out on aspects of the interview relevant to the research objectives and research questions. Duranti (2006) explains, "A more useful transcript is a more selective one, as extraneous information makes a transcript difficult to read and might obscure the research purpose" (p. 304).

The thematic analysis process in this study was adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006) who described the phases of thematic analysis of transcripts as familiarising yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes and defining and naming themes. Finally, to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research data, researchers have been advised to undertake the audit-trail procedure (Carcary, 2009). An audit trail is carried out by providing clear documentation to professional persons such as experts, doctors or senior PhD students who were experienced in qualitative studies to examine the process and procedures of the research in order to determine the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Anney, 2014). The interview records and their transcriptions were presented to an expert who specialises in the English language and qualitative research studies to get them examined for accuracy by comparing the audio recordings and transcriptions and reviewing the codes and themes.

## **Findings and Discussions**

All participants in this study comprise Palestinian students attending a public university in Malaysia. Nine of the 12 students were postgraduate students and three were undergraduate students from various faculties. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 32 years old. They have one account on Facebook, have been using Facebook for five to 10 years and have been visiting Facebook at least once daily. The studies depict Facebook users as students, active users, who often spend between 10 to 60 minutes on Facebook daily.

### *Needs of Palestinian Public University Students Gratified by Facebook*

According to Table 1, there are five dominant themes that represent the needs of Palestinian students of a public university that are gratified by Facebook. The themes are: connecting, source of news and information, freedom of expression, entertainment and academic purposes. The themes are explained in more detail by the codes.

*Table 1: Needs gratified by Facebook*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
What needs of Palestinian students studying at a public university in Malaysia are gratified by Facebook?	significant communication tool, making friends	connecting
	following Palestinian news, multiple news and information sources	source of news and information
	a free platform to express opinions, extend the discussion on Palestinian issues and share it with a large number of friends	freedom of expression
	source of entertainment, watching football, playing games for relaxation	entertainment
	using Facebook for group study	academic purposes

### *Connecting*

Connecting is one of the themes generated from the data and is one of the most agreed upon needs gratified by Facebook found in the study. The codes under this theme are: significant communication tool and making friends.

The first code conveys that Facebook is a significant communication tool. The participants claim they use Facebook as a communication tool with their family and friends. This finding is supported by previous literature that Facebook is an online website that has millions of users around the world that participate in a virtual communication environment (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011).

Informant C (personal communication, 12/3/2017) said that most of his or her needs are gratified especially through video and voice calls to connect with family and friends, and the voice and the video quality is very clear. Informant B (personal communication, 4/3/2017) mentioned that he or she uses Facebook to keep in touch with his or her family and friends. Additionally, Informant I (personal communication, 2/3/2017) mentioned the need gratified by Facebook as, "Keep in touch with my friends overseas. Facebook allows all my friends and family to communicate with me." Palestinian students believe that using Facebook allows them to improve their communication as they connect with family and friends and it is a very important gratification among Palestinian students in Malaysia as proven by the large number of responses on this theme.

The second code is that Facebook is used to make friends and this also falls under the theme of connecting. Many other studies have identified the needs gratified by Facebook as socialising with friends, making new friends and maintaining relationships through online contacts (Lewis & West, 2009). According to Informant E (personal communication, 5/3/2017), he or she uses Facebook to make friends from different backgrounds of study and cultures and helps him or her to keep in touch with friends even after leaving Malaysia.

#### *Source of News and Information*

Facebook as a source of news and information outside of Palestine is the second theme and it has two codes which are: following Palestinian news and multiple news sources. This theme is supported by previous literature. Facebook has a significant role in the distribution of online news and information (Mis, 2016). It is the main source of news and information among Palestinian youths (Younis & Mufle, 2010; Estrin, 2015). It is also the key source of news and information that promotes the end of the Palestine-Israeli conflict (Mor, Ron & Maoz, 2016).

Some informants from this study affirmed that Facebook is largely helpful in getting news and information about Palestine. Informant C (personal communication, 12/3/2017) said that a gratification of Facebook is reading news of Palestine. Informant D (personal communication, 6/3/2017),

Informant F (personal communication, 11/3/2017) and Informant H (personal communication, 8/3/2017) have also affirmed this code.

Other informants mentioned the second code, that Facebook gratifies the need to obtain news and information from multiple sources on one platform (Informant F, personal communication, 11/3/2017). It is important to note how the informants use Facebook as a channel of news and information to gratify the need of being updated all the time on the latest news and information around the world, particularly on Palestine. They also use Facebook because it allows user access to combined sources on a single platform.

### *Freedom of Expression*

Freedom of expression on Facebook is the ability to openly display or communicate one's ideas about the world to other people (Balkin, 2004). The third theme generated from the data is freedom of expression and its codes are that Facebook serves as: a free platform to express opinions, and, a platform to extend the discussion on the Palestinian issue with a large number of friends.

The emergence of social media has dramatically refashioned the ways in which we are able to express our ideas. However, with the technological evolution that allows free expression, anyone can easily set up an online account and start communicating with over two billion people (Cerf, 2012). Facebook has played a significant role in the social life of users who have the opportunity to express their thoughts in politics with their friends, serving as an open and free forum for speech (Jackson, 2014). Previous studies have shown that some people feel more comfortable in expressing their ideas and true selves online (Jarad, 2009; Najjar, 2010; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Jarad (2009) states that Facebook allows people to express themselves in a way that can be difficult when using other means of communication.

This phenomenon is evident in this research study. A few informants in this study affirmed that the need for freedom of expression is gratified by using Facebook, especially on the Palestine issue. The allowance

for freedom of expression within certain parameters on Facebook has allowed users to publish and post topics he or she would like to express regarding Palestine. Informant H (personal communication, 8/3/2017) said, that Facebook allows him or her to express opinions to the public and raise his or her voice against any public issue related to Palestine. Informant K (personal communication, 10/3/2017) mentioned comparably, "It allows you to share everything you want. You can even share and discuss the Palestinian issue with others." Another informant mentioned that Facebook allows him or her to:

Express my opinions and ideas towards the Palestinian issue and other thoughtful directions. Freedom of opinion and expression is the most need gratified by Facebook because most of my posts on Facebook about Palestine are available to all my friends. Facebook allows me to write articles and it has multi-tools to help express opinions like sharing videos and pictures, and it is easy to use and available to all my friend (Informant I, personal communication, 2/3/2017).

From these responses, we deduce that the participants use Facebook as a platform to express their opinions and extend the discussion about the Palestinian cause with friends in the study. The responses are consistent with studies by Quan-Haase and Young (2010), Younis and Mufle (2010) and Estrin (2015). Given the present state of turmoil in Palestine, Palestinian students staying outside Palestine need to keep abreast of the happenings back home for comfort.

### *Entertainment*

A few participants in this study mentioned Facebook as the main source of entertainment for them. Entertainment is an activity designed to give pleasure or relaxation to an audience (Nam, 2014). The codes for the theme of entertainment are: source of entertainment, watching football and playing games for relaxation. In general, people are motivated to use Facebook for online activities and as a source of entertainment because

it provides channels for entertainment (Valentine, 2011). Based on the literature, some studies explored the use of social networking sites for fulfilling the need for entertainment (Sheldon, 2008; Cronin, 2009; Jarad, 2009; Omekwu, Eke & Odoh, 2014).

The informants in this study mentioned that Facebook can gratify their need for entertainment. Two informants mentioned Facebook as a source of entertainment: Informant B (personal communication, 4/3/2017) and Informant H (personal communication, 8/3/2017). Social media is becoming an increasingly important sports and entertainment venue, but there is the need for more resources to be dedicated to these digital efforts (Rothschild, 2011). This provides opportunities for users to better connect and gratify their needs for sports (Wysocki, 2012). In this study, only one participant mentioned watching football as an important gratification. Informant C (personal communication, 12/3/2017) said, "Sometimes I use Facebook to watch sports like football matches. The live video quality is very clear on Facebook I can football match in full HD."

Another informant similarly subscribed to using Facebook for entertainment, but in a different way. Informant D (personal communication, 6/3/2017) said, "I can play some games on Facebook during breaks such as Clash of Clans and Chess Classic, because it is a way to relax and rest from work or study." The informants in this study reported that they engage in some Facebook activities occasionally to pass the time, relax, rest and entertain themselves. These activities include watching football matches live and playing online games. The above responses affirmed the need for entertainment as one of the gratifications that come with using Facebook.

This result is consistent with a study by Valentine (2011), which finds that Facebook provides channels for entertainment. Additionally, Hew and Cheung (2012) mention that Facebook is a social networking site or a tool to get away or to take a break from study and seeking entertainment attractions.

### *Academic Purposes*

Some participants in this study mention another gratification that is fulfilled by using Facebook is for academic purposes. Facebook helps students keep in touch with their classmates and for group study. The academic purpose of Facebook is mentioned as creating and promoting online connections between students and the faculty within an academic community (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007).

A large number of studies conclude that undergraduate students generally consider Facebook as a tool that can help them in college life and improve their academic performance (Roblyer et al., 2010; Eteokleous et al. 2012). However, only two informants of this study expressed this gratification, Informant G (personal communication, 9/3/2017) and D:

University groups in Facebook allow me to discuss with my classmates about subjects we are taking and share some documents and past papers of final exams. The group option which can be used for studying, helps us to have discussion about projects and assignments with my classmates if we can't meet in the university (Informant D, personal communication, 6/3/2017).

It could be concluded from the few responses that Facebook is less perceived as an educational tool among Palestinian public university students interviewed to enhance their learning experience, to share educational materials and to communicate with their classmates. This differs with other studies (Buzetto-More, 2012; Khan & Bakhsh, 2015) that mention Facebook as students' favourite SNS for education because it has the potential to promote collaborative and cooperative learning. These findings do not wholeheartedly support studies by Roblyer et al. (2010) and Eteokleous et al. (2012) that reveal Facebook as a tool that can help students in their college life and improve their academic performance.

It is apparent that the study reveals that Facebook serves as a convenient platform, is a famous SNS, provides entertainment and allows for freedom of expression.



## Reasons Why Facebook Gratifies the Needs of Palestinian Public University Students in Malaysia

The themes that explain the second research question in terms of the reasons why Facebook gratifies the needs of Palestinian public university students are: convenient platform, famous SNS, entertainment and freedom of expression (see Table 2). The finding that Facebook is used for convenience is consistent with other studies which provide the reasons why users use Facebook as it is the latest and most convenient platform among students to participate in the feedback process (Kio, 2015). Students mainly use Facebook to socialise and other purposes such as to network, seek information, find entertainment and express themselves freely (Magogwe & Ntereke, 2013; Shklar, 2013).

Table 2: Reasons Why Facebook Gratifies Palestinian Public University Students' Needs

Research Question	Codes	Themes
Why does Facebook gratify the needs of Palestinian students from a public university in Malaysia?	a simple platform,	convenient platform
	multiple features,	
	free of charge	
	widely used	famous SNS
	more entertainment	entertainment
	write articles,	freedom of expression
	express opinions	

### *Convenient Platform*

The first reason why Palestinian students choose to use Facebook is because it is perceived as a convenient platform. The three codes that detail its convenience are: Facebook is a simple platform, has multiple features and is free of charge. Informant A (personal communication, 7/3/2017) said that Facebook is a simple platform and Informant C (personal communication, 12/3/2017) said that he or she could find everything on Facebook and that it is easy to use.

One of the reasons for using Facebook among Palestinian students is due to the multiple features found on Facebook, making it convenient. Informant D (personal communication, 6/3/2017) sees Facebook as a way to relax from work or study, chat and browse postings. Some of the participants in this study mentioned that one of the reasons they use Facebook is because it is free of charge and this serves as an attractive feature.

Facebook is perceived by students of a study as less cumbersome than learning management systems as they have academic information that could be incorporated to a platform that students can access frequently and could be accessed through tablets and smartphones (Irwin, et al. 2012). Another study found that 66% of students perceive Facebook as convenient for communication with fellow students but 49% view it as a convenient platform for communicating with professors or teaching assistants (Miron & Ravid 2015). The difference could not be explained by the researchers.

### *Famous SNS*

The second theme for the second research question is that it is perceived as a famous SNS and thus, attractive for Palestinian students to use. The theme ascribed one code that is widely used. In view of this, Informant E (personal communication, 5/3/2017) said, "Facebook is the most famous social networking site in the world. Most of the people around the globe have accounts on Facebook. This helps me to build a network for myself." Informant F (personal communication, 11/3/2017) said, "Facebook is the most common social application between people, and everyone nowadays has an account on Facebook." And Informant M (personal communication, 1/3/2017) said, "Facebook is widely used all over the world and in Malaysia it is considered as the most active social media site among Malaysians." Facebook is mentioned as easy to use by students from 18 to 23 years old with their experience described by 16 words that could be categorised as "easier", "convenient", "accessible", "efficient", "faster" and "24/7" (Hoe, 2012). These responses prove that Facebook is widely used and it is particularly important for university students to build networks all over the world.

### *Entertainment*

Entertainment is the third theme that explains why Facebook is used to gratify the needs of Palestinian students in the study. Informant H (personal communication, 8/3/2017) of the study mentioned that Facebook provides more entertainment compared to other media making it attractive to him or her. The codes for the theme are: write articles and express opinions. This is a similar finding to a study by Adnan and Mavi (2015), where the following were found to be the needs gratified by using Facebook among undergraduates of two public universities in Malaysia: entertainment, social attention, communication, information seeking, participation and social investigation. Another study among students 19 to 23 years old finds that "...among the five values, social related factors (maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity and social enhancement) and entertainment value are found to be significant" (Cheung, Chiu et al. 2011, p. 1340).

### *Freedom of Expression*

Freedom of expression is the last theme for the second research question with two codes: writing articles and expressing opinion. One participant in this study mentioned that the reason to use Facebook is to write articles upholding the availability of the social networking site to allow freedom of expression to a certain extent. Informant I (personal communication, 2/3/2017) said that Facebook allows him or her to write articles for friends to read and it allows the sharing of videos and pictures. Another code under the freedom of expression theme is the opportunity to express their opinions. In this study, one participant mentioned that the reason to use Facebook is that it allows one to express his or her opinions. Informant H (personal communication, 8/3/2017) said that he or she uses Facebook to express his or her opinions to the public and raise his or her voice against any public issue related to their country. A study finds that undergraduates use Facebook to express themselves and interact with others as part of public communication (Pempek, et al. 2009).

Overall, the reasons why Facebook is used to gratify Palestinian students are that it is a convenient platform, a famous SNS, provides more entertainment and is used as a platform for freedom of expression.

## Recommendations on How Facebook Could Improve Its Policies in Gratifying the Needs of Palestinian Students

Nowadays, almost no one could imagine his or her personal life or professional life without Facebook. Despite the development and success of Facebook, there is still room for improvement.

*Table 3: Improvements to Facebook Recommended by Palestinian Students*

Research Question	Codes	Themes
How could Facebook improve its policies to gratify the needs of Palestinian public university students?	problems in privacy settings, protecting us from hackers, improving content privacy	improving the privacy of users
	reducing advertisements on Facebook, permission marketing	reducing advertisements
	banning some Palestinian activist users and pages	allowing more freedom of expression

This study found three dominant themes to determine how Facebook could improve its policy is in gratifying the needs of Palestinian public university students. The themes are: improving the privacy of users, reducing advertisements and giving more freedom of expression to users (see Table 3).

### *Improving the Privacy of Users*

Improving the privacy of users could be explained further in terms of the problems in the privacy settings, protection us from hackers and content privacy improvement. Online social networking communities expose a large amount of personal information with increased participation. Therefore, Facebook has expanded its privacy policy among users by offering a variety of options in the settings to improve the privacy settings of users (Gates, 2010). In order to better manage one's privacy on Facebook, a user has to choose from several options to deal with it and build up his/her privacy settings (Bilton, 2010). However, some

students do not bother making their personal information more private because the privacy settings on Facebook are complicated for them. This encourages them to decrease profile information visibility by restricting access to only known friends (Hew & Cheung, 2012). The proliferation of personal data, presents individuals with a variety of risks involving identify theft, stalking, embarrassment and blackmail because of the flexible privacy mechanisms (Lipford et al. 2008).

In this study, the greatest concerns among students are security and privacy as they interact with other people online. Based on the literature, Facebook should work on their security settings in order to prevent privacy breach and various cyber-attacks (Jabee & Alam, 2016). The participants interviewed in this study have asked Facebook to improve the privacy of users and security system.

Facebook has problems with the privacy. In some cases, people can see my personal information and sometime they can hack my account. Moreover, Facebook has all my information and it can be used for some purposes. Facebook could improve its features in gratifying more needs by protecting privacy (Informant A, personal communication, 7/3/2017).

Informant B (personal communication, 4/3/2017) said that the privacy settings are too complicated for him or her and thus, they should be made simpler. The fear of hackers who steal the users' personal information is another concern brought up by some informants. Informant C (personal communication, 12/3/2017) said, "Facebook should improve the security system to protect our accounts from hackers." Informant E (personal communication, 5/3/2017) said, "I think Facebook is capable of overcoming people's social life. Therefore, Facebook must improve its privacy to protect us from hackers."

Facebook needs to improve is content security and this falls under its policy to keep user accounts and personal information secure. The privacy setting and security system, which if resolved, would make people more interested in using Facebook to gratify their needs:

Facebook should go back as before because friends can now see the posts of others if I reply or like as one who made the post makes his privacy settings public. Before no one can see the comments or likes because it used to follow the settings we choose and not settings of our contacts (Informant D, personal communication, 6/3/2017).

It was suggested by Informant K (personal communication, 10/3/2017) that Facebook could get some ideas from Google Drive and Drop Box regarding the privacy of uploading files.

### *Reducing Advertisements*

Reducing advertisements on Facebook is recommended by Informants B (personal communication, 4/3/2017) and F (personal communication, 11/3/2017) and supported by some literature (Pikas & Sorrentino, 2014; Bosworth, 2016). Facebook was named as the most effective social media platform for advertising after allowing video advertising to target users and advertising investments (Connelly, 2015). The abundance of advertisements has encouraged most users to see social media sites as advertising channels and this is annoying for them (Hudson, 2016). The biggest reason people dislike online advertisements is because they can make the content less clear and more difficult to see (Levy, 2017). Advertisements are important as they bring buyers and sellers together at the marketplace but they should not be distracting people's attention in unacceptable ways.

The participants in this study suggest that Facebook should notify users before advertising any products so as to get their consent before receiving advertising messages. The importance of getting the permission of users before advertising was raised by Informant D (personal communication, 6/3/2017) and Informant H (personal communication, 8/3/2017). Another study by Bosworth (2016) finds that Facebook users do not want to stop seeing advertisements from businesses or organisations. However, they should be reduced.

### *Allowing More Freedom*

One of the recommendations made to Facebook was to allow more freedom with the site's banning of some Palestinian activist users and pages. Social media is a fantastic way for people to express themselves and to express their opinions by writing on walls and through the audio-visual content they share. It helps portray people's interests, their views and helps to show their opinions on some issues for others to see (Peters, 2011). However, some effective views online about the Palestinian cause in terms of attacking and criticising the Israeli occupation, can cause stress and discomfort and can be taken as an offense and prompt some SNSs such as Facebook to impose censorship on the content (Gostoli, 2016). Based on the literature, the Facebook administration is seen to have a political agenda or follows the Israeli policy system which is against the Palestinian people (Ingram, 2016; Fatfata, 2017). Informant H (personal communication, 8/3/2017) expressed the importance of providing more freedom to users including journalists and activists:

Facebook is controlled by certain elite which it does not allow certain issue to rise, such as Palestinian boycott campaign against Israeli products and to rise Palestinian voice to the world. For instance, Facebook has banned Palestinian news pages and users accounts such as journalists and activist, because of posting pictures and content against Israeli violence. Moreover, Facebook should give its users more freedom in what to share such as the Palestinian issues.

It is claimed that Facebook is adopting the Israeli policy against the Palestinian people (Gostoli, 2016; Ingram, 2016). Catron (2016) mentions that Facebook activists have accused Facebook of siding with the Israeli occupation against Palestinians by closing the accounts of a number of Palestinian activists who use them to support the Palestinian cause. In the current study, Palestinian Facebook users have demanded for more freedom to express their opinions and thoughts and to support their cause. This result is similar to earlier studies that have found that Facebook users have demanded that the Facebook management give its users more freedom of expression, e.g., Catron (2016), Fatfata (2017), Gostoli (2016) and Ingram (2016).

## Conclusion

The amalgamation of Palestinian students of a public university in Malaysia, Facebook and the uses and gratifications theory makes an interesting study and recommendations for Facebook to improve its policy. The themes for the research question, which are the identification of needs gratified by Facebook are connecting, source of news and information, freedom of expression, entertainment and academic purposes. The research question pertaining to the reasons why Facebook is used to gratify the needs of Palestinian students is answered by the themes of convenient platform, famous SNS, entertainment and freedom of expression. The third research question is answered by the themes of improving the privacy of users, reducing advertisements and giving more freedom of expression to users. The research study provides recommendations to Facebook from the perspective of Palestinian university students living abroad in the hope that there is betterment with regard to its policies.

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