

A STUDY TO FIND OUT THE MOST PREFERRED FREE MESSENGER SERVICE USED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the messenger usage of students in the technology departments of the Near East University (Cyprus), and also to learn which messenger service the participants prefer. The volunteer participants in this study consisted of 150 undergraduate students attending the technology departments of the Near East University in Northern Cyprus. 50 students from Department of Computer Information Systems (CIS), 50 students from Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (CEIT), and 50 students from Department of Computer Engineering (COM.ENG) participated in this study. Data were collected using a carefully prepared questionnaire. The results were then analysed and interpreted using the SPSS 16.0 software package. The results of this study indicate that the Live Messenger free service is the most preferred messenger by the participating students.

Keywords

messenger, ICT, communication, technology, free messenger services

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a learned skill. Most people are born with the physical ability to talk, but human must learn to speak well and communicate effectively. Speaking, listening, and human's ability to understand verbal and nonverbal meanings are skills we develop in various ways. We learn basic communication skills by observing other people and modeling our behaviors based on what we see. We also are taught some communication skills directly through education, and by practicing those skills and having them evaluated [1]. The communication between the students is another point for their motivation. Team work gives more successful results when the group is not more than 12-15 people as there is a better communication and cooperation between the students [2]. Individual learning is sometimes almost impossible when there is not a good communication between the student and the lecturer [3].

Extremely fast development of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in recent decades presents both opportunities and dangers for education. On one hand access to information is better than ever in history of mankind, and on the other hand the speed of change makes it more difficult for people to follow this progress and remain active members of society [4]. ICT is an indispensable part of the contemporary world. In fact, culture and society have to be adjusted to meet the challenges of the knowledge age. The pervasiveness of ICT has brought about rapid technological, social, political, and economic transformation, which has eventuated in a network society organized around ICT [5]. Also, Information and communication technology can make the school more efficient and productive, thereby engendering a variety of tools to enhance and facilitate teachers' professional activities [6].

Venkatesh [7] writes "the recent convergence of communication and information technologies has created possibilities unthinkable only a few years ago". Mobile phones, email, SMS (Short Message Service) messages and IM (Instant Messenger) are new communication technologies, which all contribute to the "death of distance" [8]. IM 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. In the U.S. 40% of Internet users use messenger [9]. IM is used to avoid boredom, to socialise [10, 11] and to maintain contact with casual acquaintances [12]. Leung [11] found seven motives for messenger use among college students: affection, inclusion, sociability, entertainment, relaxation, escape and fashion. Nardi, Whittaker and Bradner [13] found that in the inactive state IM participants sometimes monitor the presence of others, and use the medium to sustain a sense of connection.

Google Talk, Yahoo Messenger, Skype, and Live Messenger are portal which provide messenger free of charge. Since they are free of charge, they are the preferred services by millions of people around the world.

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this study was to investigate the messenger usage of students in the technology departments of the Near East University (Departments CIS, CEIT and COM.ENG), and also to learn which free messenger service the participants preferred. The study attempted to find answers to the following questions:

- 1-What are the messenger usage habits of students?
- 2-What are the messenger preferences of students?
- 3-Are there differences of messenger usage between different departments?
- 4-Are there any differences in opinions of students about messenger preferences between different departments?
- 5-Are there any differences in messenger preferences between classes?
- 6-Are there any differences in messenger preferences between different genders?
- 7-Are there any differences in messenger preferences between different nations?

METHOD

Participants

The volunteer participants in this study consisted of 150 undergraduate students attending the Near East University in Northern Cyprus. 50 students from Department of Computer Information Systems (CIS), 50 students from Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (CEIT), and 50 students from Department of Computer Engineering (COM.ENG) participated in the study. The study was conducted during the 2008-2009 Fall term.

As total, students of these three departments are 70% male and 30% female, 24% first class, 25.3% second class, 34.7% third class, and 16% fourth classes and 40% TRNC, 45.3% TR, and 14.7% other nationalities.

Instruments

In addition to the information gathered via the questionnaire to find out the opinions of students about the preferred free messenger service, literature survey was also used to gather general information about background of the study. The questionnaire prepared by the authors included 10 questions for the technical properties of each type of messenger. The questions were prepared with the aim of collecting data and finding out the preferences of students for using a free messenger service.

Data Analysis

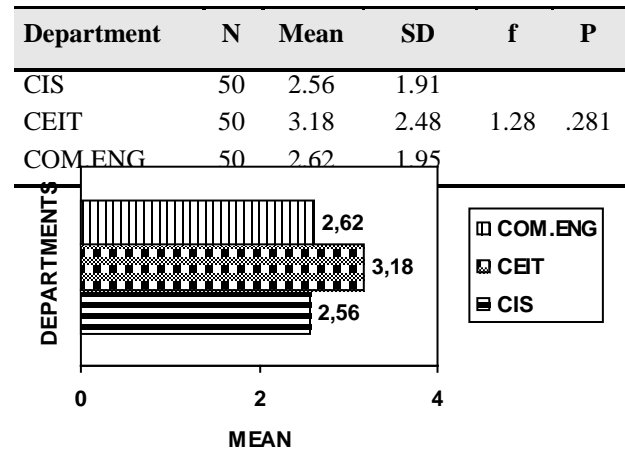
Data were collected using questionnaire. After that SPSS 16.0 was used to analyzed and interpret the collected data. Anova, frequency and percentage methods were used during the analysis process. The data obtained by the survey was commented upon using the SPSS program with the percentage, frequency, and Anova statistical analysis techniques.

RESULTS

Departments

According to Table 1, there is not statistically significant difference between departments ($p>.05$). The reason why there was no significant difference between the three departments could be because all the departments considered are technology based. We can say that students from the CEIT department prefer to use the Messenger services more than the others. Students from the CIS and COM ENG departments on the other hand seem to prefer the Messenger services at the same level. This could be as a result of the similarities in the course syllabuses of the two departments.

Table 1. Differences between departments



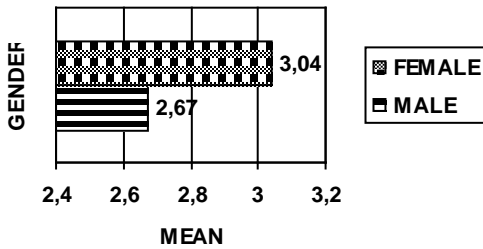
Gender

As indicated in Table 2, is not statistically significant difference between genders ($p>.05$). It can easily be seen that the technology has a great importance and impact in our daily lives in the present era. When looked from this point of view it is not surprising that there are no significant differences between different

genders on the preference and usage of a Messenger service.

Table 2. Differences between genders

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	P
Male	105	2.67	2.14	0.43	.836
Female	45	3.04	2.13		

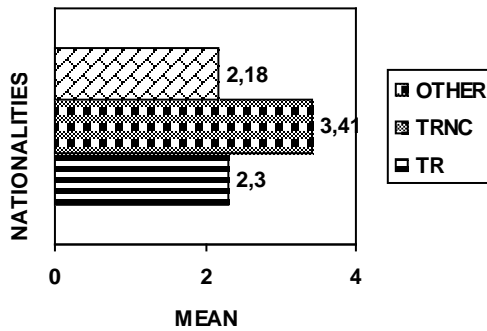


Nationality

According to the Table 3, there is statistically significant difference between nationalities in the study ($p < .05$). The study showed that students from Turkey (TR) and students with other nationalities had very similar preferences for the usage of Messenger services. The reason for this could be because humans always feel and need to establish communication with people in their environments.

Table 3. Differences between nationalities

Department	N	Mean	SD	t	p
TR	60	2.30	1.99		
TRNC	68	3.41	2.20	5.658	.004
OTHER	22	2.18	1.89		



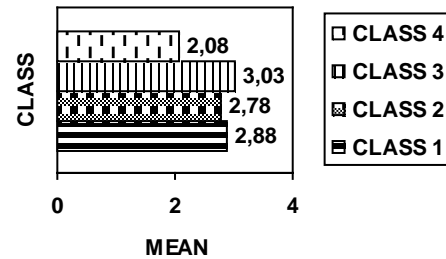
Grade Level (class)

Table 4 shows there is not statistically significant difference between grade levels (classes) in the study ($p > .05$). No significant differences were observed between different classes. The reason why the average

of the final year students was low could be because of the excessive time they spend for their final year projects.

Table 4. Differences between grades level (class)

Grade Level (Class)	N	Mean	SD	t	p
1	36	2.88	2.06		
2	38	2.78	2.00	1.133	.338
3	52	3.03	2.36		
4	24	2.08	1.90		

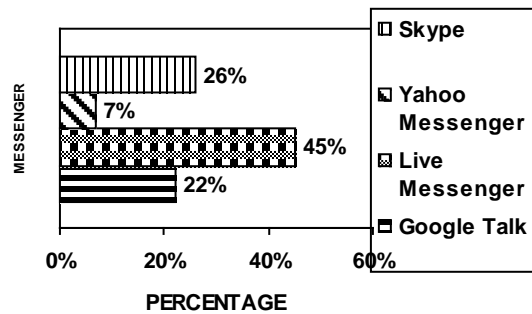


Preferred Free Messenger Service

According to the Table 5, all students who attend this research used Live Messenger free service mostly. The other services used frequently were Skype, Google Talk, and Yahoo Messenger. Cavus and Bicen [14] report that CEIT, CIS and COM ENG students use the Hotmail free e-mail services the most. Based on these findings, the results of the Live Messenger usage are obvious.

Table 5. Preferred free messenger services

Free messenger services	TOTAL	
	F	%
Google Talk	60	22
Live Messenger	123	45
Yahoo Messenger	19	7
Skype	70	26



CONCLUSION

In our global world, the distance between the countries is becoming shorter as a result of the technological communications tools. The cost of communicating to other parts of the world is also becoming much cheaper as a result of the Internet technology. For example, voice, pictures, video and similar media can easily and very cheaply can be sent from one country to another one in a very short time. Communication tools such as the Messenger, e-mail, and forums are becoming very attractive means of establishing low-cost and reliable communication across the Globe. The results of this study indicate that the Live Messenger free service is the most preferred messenger by the participating students.

Also, it was found that there is not statistically significant difference between departments and grade levels (classes) in the study. However, statistically significant difference was found between different nationalities in the study. It would therefore be correct to say that cultural differences between different nations could affect people's decisions, choices and their preferences.

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