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USES AND GRATIFICATIONS MEDIA AMONG PEOPLE IN SABAH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract:

This paper aimed to explore the use of media usage among people in Sabah while facing the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Questionnaires were distributed among Sabahan audiences that was directly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (N=404). Research findings revealed that the principal needs that drove the audiences to use media were needs involving cognitive aspects, escapism, affective factors, and social integration. The data also shows that the Sabahan audiences also frequently employed media to search for information, due to habit, escapism, and information sharing. Meanwhile the highest levels of gratifications were derived from factors of convenience, interpersonal discussion, and surveillance. This study concludes that media plays a crucial role among people in Sabah during confronting the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords:

Needs, Uses, Gratifications, Media, Sabah & Covid 19

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in December 2019 and was brought on by the SARS-coV2 virus, terrified the entire world since it might paralyze human respiratory systems and bring death (Zhu et al., 2020). Sabah was one of the states in Malaysia that had to deal with the Covid-19 menace. The spread of Covid-19 to Malaysia was discovered on January 24, 2020, among visitors who had come back to Malaysia from earlier-infected countries, according to the World Health Organization (2020). The Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented by the government on March 18, 2020 (Kaur, 2020), in response to the rising infection rate in Malaysian society. This action was done to break the chain of Covid-19 infection, which was frighteningly on the rise among Malaysians (Yassin, 2020).

WHO (2020) claims that the spread of this pandemic influenced the emotional and psychological health of the Malaysian population in addition to impeding many other sectors, particularly the economic ones. People in Sabah are automatically affected as well. When a crisis occurs, audiences could previously only rely on conventional media for information, but now they have a variety of options. This is mostly due to the development of technology involving the internet and information and communication technology (ICT). As the globe struggles with the Covid-19 pandemic, the rapid expansion of the media environment utilizing technology like the internet and social media is considered as being essential to information searching. As Malaysians prepare for the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020, the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported that media usage has increased drastically among Malaysians. Therefore, the topic that demands our attention is: How are Sabah audiences using the media as they deal with the Covid-19 situation? By using U&G theory as the main research framework, this study aims to investigate how audiences in Sabah utilize and enjoy social media.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

   i.   Identify the needs that encourage people in Sabah to use media during the Covid-19 pandemic.
   ii. Identify the uses of media among people in Sabah during the Covid-19 pandemic.
   iii. Identify the media gratifications among people in Sabah during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Methodology

This article resulted from a quantitative study of 404 respondents from several districts in Sabah namely Kota Kinabalu, Kota Belud, Tuaran, Sandakan, Tawau, Lahad Datu and Papar. The study was carried out between July and August of 2021, and the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. This approach was picked for practical and legitimate reasons. Previous studies used the survey method as a theoretical framework for audience's research, conducting uses and gratifications (Wu et al., 2010; Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Wang, 2021; Meri et al., 2022). The study was done using purposive sampling, whereby only the audience members who used media were chosen for the study to track their media usage patterns. With all assessed items recording a reading of 0.90 (Cronbach Alpha), all tested items in this study demonstrated a high level of reliability.

Literature Review

Use and gratification (U&G) theory is frequently used in media usage studies among audiences to provide an accurate depiction of media usage patterns (Rubin, 2009). This theory presupposes that audiences actively engage in media consumption and that audiences use the same media to satisfy a variety of needs, uses, and gratifications (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggeiro, 2000; Lee et al., 2016; Meri et al., 2022). This theory is frequently applied to view both traditional media usage and new media, concurrent with developments in the new mediascape (Ruggeiro, 2000). Prior research has emphasized the needs that motivate audiences to use media. When it comes to media consumption, for example, Katz et al. (1973) suggested that audiences have common needs that can be divided into five categories: cognitive needs, affective needs, self-integration needs, social integration needs, and escapism needs. Furthermore, it is noted that audiences frequently use both traditional and modern media to satiate their needs for cognition and emotion (Akmar Hayati & Siti Zobidah, 2015; Lopez et al., 2019).

Previous research using the Use and Gratification perspectives was successful in identifying various motive typologies for using traditional and new media (Foregger, 2009; Cortese & Rubin, 2010; Ku et al., 2013; Ambika; Uthirasamy, 2018; Kircaburun et al., 2020 & Meri, 2022). When a crisis occurs, the Use and Gratification perspective is frequently used as a theoretical framework to examine how audiences use social media (Maxwell, 2012; Tengku Siti Aisha et al., 2015; Wang, 2021; Meri et al., 2022). For instance, social media is frequently used as one of the platforms to find and share information during crises like natural disasters (Liu et al., 2015). When social media use during the pandemic crisis was examined, it was discovered that audiences in Malaysia significantly increased their use of social media compared to the prior year, and their use of the internet also increased at a similar rate (MCMC, 2020). The audiences were observed to be eager readers of news articles and to use social media to research current events in their area (Liana Mat Nayan, 2016; Lin et al., 2016). This demonstrates unequivocally that they are in dire need of information whenever a crisis arises. In addition, Meri et al. (2022) discovered that audiences in Malaysia prioritized information searching and convenience gratifications when dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Findings

Based on three main objectives, the results of the research are provided in three sections. Firstly, research findings present the demographics of respondents, the details of which are queried in the Google Form that appears at the beginning of the questionnaire form.

Demographic Factors	Percentage Statistics
Ethnicity	
Bajau	25.5
Kadazandusun	30.7
Melayu	21.5
Murut	2.5
Chinese	4.5
Others	15.3
Gender	
Male	36.4
Female	63.6
Age	

17 to 22 years	25.2
23 to 28 years	17.8
29 to 34 years	6.2
35 to 49 years	9.2
49 years and above.	14.6

N=404

Table 1: Demography of Respondents

According to Table 1 above, 404 respondents in total participated in this study, and the questionnaires were distributed between July and August 2021. Kadazandusun made up most respondents (30.7%), followed by Bajau (25.5%), Melayu (21.5%), Murut (2.5%), Chinese (4.5%), and other ethnic groups (15.3 percent). In this study, female respondents made up 63.6 percent of the total respondents, outnumbering male respondents, who made up 36.4 percent. According to respondents' ages, respondents between the ages of 17 and 22 made up the majority (25.2%), followed by those between the ages of 23 and 28 (17.8), and respondents aged 49 and older (14.6%). Finally, respondents between the ages of 29 and 34 and 35 and 49 registered 6.2 percent and 9.2 percent, respectively.

Media	M μ	SD σ
Television	3.28	1.249
Radio	2.53	1.242
Newspaper	1.80	1.103
Social Media	4.54	0.812
News Portal	3.76	1.29

N = 404

Table 2: Most Popular Media During Pandemic

Table 2 above illustrates the most popular media used among respondents during the pandemic. Social media had the highest usage (μ=4.54, σ =0.81), followed by news portal (μ=3.76, σ =1.29), television (μ=3.28, σ =1.24), radio (μ=2.53, σ =1.24) while newspaper had the lowest usage (μ=1.80, σ =1.10).

Media Needs	M μ	SD σ
Cognitive	4.32	.831
Need to stay up to date on Covid-19 problems	4.56	.820
Need to know what people are saying about the Covid-19 problem	4.17	1.083
Need to know how people are feeling and thinking during pandemic	4.24	.968
Affective	4.07	.854
Need to be constantly entertained during Movement Control Order (MCO)	3.78	1.155
Need to feel always calm during the Movement Control Order (MCO)	4.41	.865
Need for entertainment when under Movement Control Order (MCO)	4.03	1.026

Escapism	4.29	.829
Avoiding boredom while following a Movement Control Order (MCO)	4.23	.983
Need to avoid feeling lonely during Movement Control Order (MCO)	4.16	1.016
Need to decompress when following a Movement Control Order (MCO)	4.41	.851
Social Integrative	3.99	.875
Needs to be the primary subject of conversation with family and friends.	3.96	1.023
Need to discuss something with friends on social media	3.70	1.150
Need to find friends to talk about Covid-19 issue	4.25	.942

N = 404

Table 3: Needs for Media Usage During Covid-19 Pandemic

Table 3 above shows the needs that motivate respondents used media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Generally, this study found that the main need that motivate the media usage among people in Sabah was cognitive needs (μ=4.32, σ =0.83), followed by escapism needs (μ=4.29, σ =0.82), affective needs (μ=4.07, σ =0.85) and social integrative needs (μ=3.99, σ =0.87). Cognitive needs reflected by the audiences as need to stay up to date on Covid-19 problems (μ=4.56, σ =0.82), need to know how people are feeling and thinking during pandemic (μ=4.24, σ =0.96) and need to know what people are saying about the Covid-19 problem (μ=4.17, σ =1.08). For escapism needs, majority of the respondents believed that they need to decompress when following a MCO (μ=4.41, σ =0.85), avoiding boredom while following a MCO (μ=4.23, σ =0.98) and need to avoid feeling lonely during MCO (μ=4.16, σ =1.01). For affective needs, media during the pandemic enable audiences obtained calmness during MCO (μ=4.41, σ =0.86) at the same time giving more pleasure (μ=4.03, σ =1.02) and they to be constantly entertained during MCO as well (μ=3.78, σ =1.15). Social integrative needs refer to need to find friends to talk about Covid-19 issue pandemic (μ=4.25, σ =.94) and they need this topic to be discussed within their friends and family (μ=3.96, σ =1.02) so that they can discuss something with friends on social media (μ=3.70, σ =1.15).

Media Uses	*M* μ	*SD* σ
Information Sharing	4.04	.887
Information exchange with relatives and friends regarding the Covid-19 issue	3.87	1.106
Social media is used to share information	3.92	1.122
Information Searching	4.33	.789
Increasing awareness of the Covid-19 issue	4.36	.844
Seeking data on the overall number of Covid-19 infections	4.30	.934
Using social media to look for trustworthy sources on Covid-19	4.33	.880
Habit	4.16	.903
Social media usage is something I must do every day	4.16	.980
Utilizing media during the Covid-19 outbreak has become customary	4.15	.982
During the Movement Control Order, I enjoy using social media (MCO)	4.18	.974

Diversion	4.12	.807
Using social media during Movement Control Order to relieve tension (MCO)	4.14	1.000
Using social media to pass the time while the Movement Control Order is in effect (MCO)	4.21	.938
During the Movement Control Order, I'm using social media to relax (MCO)	4.00	1.054

N = 404

Table 4: Media Usage Factors During Covid-19 Pandemic

Table 4 above presents media uses among audiences in Sabah during the Covid-19 pandemic. Analysis found that information searching uses was the dominant factor (μ=4.33, σ =0.78), this was followed by habit (μ=4.16, σ =0.90), diversion (μ=4.12, σ =0.80) and information sharing (μ=4.04, σ =0.88). The factor of information searching was the most critical in which media was used to increase awareness of the Covid-19 issue (μ=4.36, σ =0.78), followed by using social media to look for trustworthy sources on Covid-19 (μ=4.33, σ =0.88) and seeking data on the overall number of Covid-19 infections (μ=4.30, σ =.93). The uses for habit were listed as the second factor and can be translated to find leisure activity during the implementation of MCO in these states (μ=4.18, σ =.97), social media usage is something must do every day (μ=4.16, σ =.98) and utilizing media during the Covid-19 outbreak has become customary (μ=4.15, σ =.98). For the diversion factor, we found that audiences used media to pass the time while the MCO is in effect (μ=4.21, σ =.93), used media to relieve tension (MCO) (μ=4.14, σ =1.00) and to get peace and calmness during the MCO (μ=4.00, σ =1.05). As for the information sharing, media is used to share information (μ=3.92, σ =.1.12) and information exchange with relatives and friends regarding the Covid-19 issue (μ=3.87, σ =.1.10).

Media Gratifications	*M* μ	*SD* σ
Convenience	4.23	.856
Information about Covid-19 issues is easily accessible at any time	4.32	.911
Quick and convenient information about the Covid-19 issue	4.29	.928
Quick and easy information sharing	4.17	.962
It is simple to share links to Covid-19 information on social media	4.15	.991
Interpersonal Discussion	4.01	.957
Share recent details about Covid-19 issues with your family and friends	4.04	1.000
Talk to your friends and family members about your experiences and knowledge of the Covid-19 issue	3.99	1.032
Able to talk about any Covid-19 virus issue	3.99	1.055
Surveillance	3.97	.905
Always aware of the environment around you	3.75	1.130
Directly learn about Covid-19 issues both inside and outside of the nation	4.13	1.012
Able to keep a closer eye on Covid-19 issues	3.85	1.186

Satisfy the desire to stay informed and updated about the Covid-19 problem	4.16	1.000

N = 404

Table 5: Media Gratifications During Pandemic

The media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic in Sabah is shown in Table 5 above. When the Covid-19 results were analyzed in relation to media gratifications, it became clear that audiences were most satisfied by the convenience of media itself (=4.23, =.85). This was followed by interpersonal discussion (μ=4.01, σ =.95) and surveillance gratifications (μ=3.97, σ =.90). About media gratifications that were considered as convenience, this was translated to easily accessible at any time (μ=4.32, σ =.91), quick and convenient information about the Covid-19 issue (μ=4.29, σ =.92), quick and easy information sharing (μ=4.17, σ =.96) and it is simple to share links to Covid-19 information on social media (μ=4.15, σ =.99). Meanwhile, people in Sabah translated the gratifications of interpersonal discussion in media as share recent details about Covid-19 issues with family and friends (μ=4.04, σ =1.00), talk to friends and family members about experiences and knowledge of the Covid-19 issue (μ=3.99, σ =1.03) and able to talk about any Covid-19 virus issue (μ=3.99, σ =1.05). Surveillance gratifications seen as fulfilling their desire to stay informed and updated about the Covid-19 problem (μ=4.16, σ =1.00), directly learn about Covid-19 issues both inside and outside of the nation (μ=4.13, σ =1.01), able to keep a closer eye on Covid-19 issues (μ=3.85, σ =1.18) and also the satisfaction of always aware of the environment around them (μ=3.75, σ =1.13).

Discussion

This study's findings suggest that Sabah's audiences were actively using social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. This result is consistent with a report issued by MCMC (2021), which stated that Malaysian society's pattern of media use was very high around the time of the Covid-19 crisis. During the Covid-19 pandemic, social media was the most widely used form of media in Sabahan society, followed by news portals, television, radio, and newspapers. The audience in Sabah is particularly aware of the need for information and awareness of their environment, especially when being confronted by this pandemic, as evidenced by the discovery that cognitive need is the most crucial need in media usage. This was made clear by the responses from this study, where the audiences needed information about Covid-19 to lessen stress and their worries. This is completely consistent with the primary usage aspect, which is information searching. Furthermore, the main gratifications enjoyed by the residents of Sabah was the ease with which information could be quickly shared and accessed.

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