The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mobile Messaging Application Among Millennials in Public Universities in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Mobile messaging apps are currently a popular method in Malaysia for communicating while on the go, owing to its convenience, reliability, and contact-free feature of mobile application. Fueled by mobile internet and smartphone growth, mobile messaging apps have become a strong force in the mobile app sector, offering users an alternative to SMS-based texting paired with social media elements and enhanced features, such as group chats and photo sharing. The study was anchored using the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology 2 theory. A survey with 150 respondents and PLS analysis is used to determine the antecedents of mobile application continuance usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results revealed that there is an influence in the usage of mobile messaging apps among the younger generation in Malaysian public university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main implication shows that mobile application among young generations in public universities has become popular. The convenience usage of the internet has turned the world into a global village.

KEYWORDS

continuance intention, millennials, mobile messaging application

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic era, which started end of 2019, had affected people globally and locally. The pandemic has affected people psychologically and physically, with fear, suspicion, and anxiety rising in the community. As of 12 February 2021, the World Health Organization reported 106,991,090 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2,347,015 deaths worldwide (WHO, 2021). The messaging application or messaging app is software that allows users to send and receive messages. The main characteristic of mobile messaging apps is not only being able to send text, picture messaging, or voice recordings. However, users also can share files from their phones and computer.

Mobile messaging application activities create great potential among consumers and marketers, especially millennials, as these avenues have changed the traditional mobile business model into new mobile business opportunities. This growth is due to the smartphone industry, which is rapidly

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developing, both in terms of market size as well as in terms of models and suppliers. According to Holst (2018), 40% of the world population will own a smartphone by the year 2021. From the Millennial's perspective, smartphone usage gives the users the advantage of communicating through mobile apps at their own convenient time and place. Among the benefits of these mobile apps is the ability to get information at their fingertips through the accessible database collection, which is captured instantly, plus many more.

Data from the April 2019 report by Statista showed that 1.6 billion users were using What's App messenger, making it the most popular global mobile messenger app. This is followed by 1.3 billion users of Facebook messenger, 1.1 billion users of WeChat, and 807 million using QQ Mobile. While Skype, Snapchat, Viber, and Telegram users were at 300 million, 287 million, 260 million, and 200 million, respectively (Clement, 2019). In the context of Malaysia, statistics from January 2018 to January 2019 show that mobile subscribers are 205 thousand, and 88% are smartphone users. Global Web Index (Q2 & Q3, 2018) reported the percentage of local Internet users performing each activity on a mobile phone each month, 96% using mobile messengers, 95% on videos, and 73% on games. Meanwhile, 66% of users use mobile banking, and 85% use mobile map services. Another report showed that there were 1.021 billion users who downloaded mobile apps in 2018. Top mobile apps by an average of local active users throughout 2018 were What's App messenger, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, and WeChat. These apps are followed by Waze, Lazada, Grab, Telegram, and Shoppe, respectively (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2019). Therefore, it is expected that this number will increase through the innovation of smartphone technology and the users' intention to use smartphones.

Although mobile messaging apps enhance connectivity and provide accessibility for people, there are a few disadvantages; for example, users are so attentive (Chang & Tang, 2015), and addictive (Noë et al., 2019) in using mobile messaging apps. Based on the study by Huang and Zhang (2019), WeChat messenger in China was productive but at the same time was a problematic tool for work-related. WeChat contributed to the perception of paradoxes like organizational norms, co-worker expectations, and conflicts in personal understanding. Whilst, another study done on KakaoTalk, a famous mobile messaging app in Korea found that information and system features were overloaded (Cho, Lee & Kim, 2019), which led to a significant increase in burnout or emotional exhaustion, conflict, and turnover intention among employees. This will affect the millennial generation especially if they are employees. The third issue of the mobile messaging applications is cyber violence, abuse, and bullying regardless of using a word or text writing, audio, and video, especially on women and girls. According to Cardoso, Sorenson, Webb, and Landers (2019), among the highest usage of cyber violence is 63.2% of cyber-or in-person stalking, 58.4% from mobile telephones, and 43.9% through emails. The study advised women to adjust and relook at their online usage to avoid and defend against cyber abuse.

In the world of mobile environments, the use of mobile messaging apps has grown tremendously and has become an important business platform. Nevertheless, studies investigating individuals' use of mobile messaging apps and their continuation usage still leave room for improved understanding, especially in the situation of the pandemic. Previously in terms of theoretical framework, research on mobile applications has been established using Theory of Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) to study variables of perceived ease of use, perceived informative usefulness, perceived social usefulness, and perceived enjoyment among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities (Normalini, Saravanan, & Arokiasamy, 2017). Their results revealed that perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, and attitude had a significant effect on the intention to use mobile apps among the undergraduates. The research on mobile messaging apps needs to be updated after a certain period, as technology evolves and innovates. Hence, this study would further extend the research to investigate the determinants that influence the continuance usage intention of mobile message applications among the Millennials during the COVID-19 pandemic. unified theory of acceptance (UTAUT) and use of technology 2 (UTAUT2) is the underlying research model used in this study. A

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