Internet Usage among Female Undergraduates in Ferdowsi University, Iran

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ABSTRACT

The fastest growing audience of the Internet world is women. This study was designed using the Uses and Gratifications theory framework to understand Internet usage among female undergraduate students. The objectives of this study are to identify the relationship between knowledge of English language, purposes of Internet usage with gratification derived from Internet usage and problems in using the Internet. Non-probability sampling was employed in this study. Of the 319 respondents who participated in the study, 62 were from the field of English language and 257 from other fields of humanities. The relationship between purposes of Internet usage with gratification derived from Internet usage is significant and positive. There is no significant relationship between knowledge of English language and gratification derived from Internet usage.

Keywords: Internet usage, Iran, Uses and Gratifications Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, the Internet is the fastest growing communication technology today (Dlodlo and Sithole, 2001). The Internet revolution has brought effective changes to the area of education (Luan *et al*., 2005). According to Internet World Statistics*,* as of 30 June 2010*,* 1,966,514,816 billion people of the world have used the Internet. Year 2010 statistics of Internet users in Iran show that 33 million people use the Internet with 43.2% penetration against a population of almost 77 million (Internet World Statistics, 2010). The use of communication technology is also growing rapidly in colleges and universities. The assumptions about the Internet are that it benefits the college students tremendously and learning appears to be a rich field that is just beginning to be discovered.

Lack of information creates a negative impact on our lives, particularly on the educated segment of the society. The Internet is one of the most important mass media in the world as it has changed the world in many ways. Students are the most important group in society because they are envisaged to build society in the future, especially the female students who have a tremendous effect both on society and home. Education in developing countries is growing rapidly, especially among women (Fahimi and Moghadam, 2003). Women who use the Internet tend to be more open-minded than those who do not use the Internet (Trish, 2011).

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According to Owston (1997), educators around the globe have shown a greater interest in the World Wide Web than in any other recent technology. The goal of this study is to gain an understanding of Internet usage among female undergraduates as a resource to fulfill the purposes of their Internet surfing.

Most information stored on the Internet is in English specially, academic data. It is generally acknowledged that English is an increasingly dominant language in the world. In Iran, English is considered a foreign language. For this reason, students find the language strange, although they learn English from secondary school level onwards. In other words, they do not have basic skills to use the Internet. This research seeks to establish relationships between Internet users and users' language (Dahmardeh, 2009).

Thus this study seeks to offer a better understanding of the use of the Internet by focusing on the following research questions.

1. What are the purposes of using the Internet among female undergraduates?
2. What are the problems of using the Internet among female undergraduates?
3. Is there a relationship between knowledge of English language, purposes and gratification of Internet usage?

This current study also has another application. The results of this study are expected to identify the role of Internet use among women in order to formulate educational plans for a developing country such as Iran. Better incentives, therefore, can be designed by the government to improve the learning of English by the future generation particularly if institutes for learning English are established for young learners, that is, at kindergarten and primary school levels (Seifkashani, 2003).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Uses and Gratifications theory (U & G) is suggested as the framework for the current research to analyse purposes, problems and knowledge of English language in relation to Internet use. The U & G theory has a long history within the field of communication investigation and has proven to be a useful model for researching how and why people use certain communication media. The U & G theory can be a starting point for studying students' Internet usage in real surfing behaviour (Roy, 2007).

Rubin (1994) states that people use communication media to fulfill a variety of needs. Windahl (1981) noted that the main difference between the traditional Effects theory and the U & G theory in mass communication is usually examined from the point of view of communicators in the former, while the members of audience is the starting point in U & G studies. According to Blumler and Katz (1974), for both society and individuals, the media serves the functions of surveillance, correlation, entertainment and cultural transmission. Katz *et al.* (1974) state that the U & G theory is an attempt to explain how individuals use the media to satisfy needs and achieve goals instead of the media having ultimate power over the viewer.

Individuals selected to expose themselves to the media perspective approach tend to reinforce and satisfy their personal interests and values (John, 1997). Several studies have taken this approach to explain this phenomenon. Lin (1993), in a study on adolescent viewing and gratification in relation to the videocassette recorder (VCR), found that VCR

and remote control devices enhance audience control of the viewing environment, which leads to increased entertainment gratification. Katz *et al.* (1973) studied people's use of the mass media to meet specific needs and presented a five-fold classification of needs, which they say all media users essentially have. These are:

1. Cognitive needs: needs related to strengthening of information, knowledge, and understanding of our environment.
2. Affective needs: needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable, and emotional experiences.
3. Personal integrative needs: needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status of individuals.
4. Social integrative needs: needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends and the world.
5. Escapist needs: needs related to escape, release tension, and the desire for diversion.

Katz *et al.* (1974) compiled their own and other researchers' works in the U & G theory from the 1940s to 1970s to offer a theoretical and methodological framework on perspectives of gratification research. They presented the use of media in terms of the social psychological needs of the audience. These studies were mostly concerned with the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, leading to different patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in needs gratification and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended.

According to Hunter (1997) who carried out theoretical research on the uses and gratification of the Web, the WWW can gratify three major needs through the popular uses of browsing the Web, that is, seeking information and entertaining. Hunter suggested that the gratification users receive from browsing can be seen as an extension of their affective and cognitive needs. Information seeking mostly satisfies cognitive needs and entertainment satisfies aesthetic and escapist needs.

The two most important tools are the WWW and the e-mail according to studies done on uses and gratification derived from the Internet. They seem to gratify most of the needs, which arise out of using the Internet. In 1997, Hunter postulated that the Web is sufficient to gratify the primary needs laid down in the needs model of Katz *et al.* (1973).

The U & G theory is related to the way people use media. At the outset, research on the media has focused on the influence and effects the media have had on the audience. The motives behind media use did not focus on the U & G theory. Since its inception in the early 1940s, the theory has come a long way. According to Fagerlind *et al.* (2000), the theory currently considers not only the pleasure people search for in media but also the attitudes of the audience towards the medium and its contents. The U & G theory is a psychological communication perspective that focuses on individual use and choice by asserting that different people can use the same mass medium for very different purposes (Hanjun and Roberts, 2005).

The objectives of the U & G theory are, firstly, to explain the psychological needs that shape why people use the media and what motivates them to engage in certain media-use behaviours for gratification (Rubin, 1994). Secondly, it is to explain how individuals use

mass communication to gratify their needs, and last but not least, it is to identify the positive and negative consequences of individual media use.

The key concept of the U & G perspective is that selected people use the media motivated by their desire to gratify a range of needs. This study aims to address the use of the Internet among female undergraduate student subscribers by linking it to the well-grounded U & G framework. In line with the review of previous literature of this study, it has been identified that the gratification for using the Internet can be categorised as escape, affective, cognitive, social integration and personal integration, which are the dependent variables of the study. Two groups of independent variables, namely, knowledge of Enflish language and purposes of Internet usage have been studied to see the effects of gratification derived from Internet use.

2.1 Purposes of Internet Usage

Ucak (2007) studied the Internet use habits of the Department of Information Management Hacettepe University, Ankara. He found that the students preferred electronic media to printed media in seeking information and they mainly used the Internet to do homework and prepare for their lessons. The students found the Internet's easy access to information more important than its other features and used search engines mostly for seeking information. Google is most frequently used as a search engine. While most of the students said that they had learned to use the Internet on their own, the majority considered themselves as only partially competent in using it. In terms of the need for information and ways to reach it, electronic media preference for the purpose and frequency of using the Internet, differences were found between the first-year students and those of other years. Also, in terms of the answers given to the survey questions, there were no important differences among the respondents in how they reach the information through the Internet, the preferred search engines and the extent to which search engines meet their information needs.

Suryani (2007) explored new media usage among Indonesian students in Australian universities. She found that the Internet has become an important source of information which students use to support their learning processes. The convenience of the Internet has changed the way students search for resources. For studying and learning, lecturers are no longer seen as the main source of information. Suryani, (2007) confirms that learning processes are influenced by new communication technologies but that the impacts are complicated depending on the users and their usage patterns. Thus, she could not agree with Hemenway's argument (2000) that "the Internet is a dynamic, broad-based, relatively inexpensive tool of communication and information gathering" (2000:119). Although in certain circumstances, this may be true, it is hard to apply it in the Indonesian context where the infrastructure does not yet provide for quick access to the Internet and other new media technologies. In Indonesia, most participants confirmed that they had difficulties securing Internet access. There are problems related to connection, download speed and capability even when access is possible. However, all interviewees agreed that in their daily activities while studying in Australia, the Internet was a basic need. In addition, they expressed their desire to maintain their access to the Internet after returning to Indonesia and as a means of

learning and educational development, they would encourage others to take advantage of the Internet (Suryani, 2007).

Asemi (2005: 6-8) studied the information-searching habits of Internet users in a medical science university in Isfahan. She found that students' purposes for using the Internet are: searching information for research (55%), looking up general kinds of information such as travel and tourism (37%) and downloading music, movies etc. (8%). For those who do research and read e-journals, the figures are 28% and 41% respectively, and for the purposes of e-mail, it was 37%. Yahoo and Google are the most popular and widely used search engines with 61% and 68%, respectively. A total of 54% of the respondents said that they always find the information useful, while 51 % state that the Internet is the best source of information . Regarding problems in using the Internet, most complaints are related to slow Internet connections or the computer system being down.

Kerins *et al.* (2004) carried out a study on graduate engineering students and found that the majority reported that the Internet is the first source of information they would use for a project, and similarly Mittermeyer, (2003), in a study on incoming first-year undergraduate students in Quebec, found that many reported that they use the Internet extensively for seeking course-related information.

Bastani and Fazel-Zarand (2008) investigated the influence of the Internet on social connections among Internet users in Iran. They found that far from alienating people from their richer relations, the Internet has not changed the relationships significantly for most respondents, and for a noticeable portion of the Iranians in the study, it has increased their social contacts with different groups. The principal component analysis was applied to the dataset to unearth the common patterns of user behaviour. An increase in social contacts is more evident among women. This is despite the fact that there is a significant gender gap in Internet use in Iran. This finding suggests that as maintaining relationship is important for women in the offline world, it is also important for them when they are online. Another interesting finding is that although ethnicity plays a major role in having access to the Internet, it does not have a significant impact on social contacts.

Griffiths and Donald (2008: 21) reported that based on 186 million users in US, the most common category of information sought through the Internet is related to personal or family information needs (89%), followed by work-related needs (47%), and education needs (18.1%). Users' need for information could fall into several categories, such as personal, medical, and work-related information needs.

In 2006, the Internet was accessed about 7.5 billion times to seek education related information (11% of all important Internet uses). The Internet was used more for educational purposes by teachers (25%) than by students (15%). Other educational information needs were related to information about schools, education requirements, financial aid, counselling, Personal Travel Assistant (PTA) etc. (Griffiths and Donald, 2008: 37).

The services on the Internet that were accessed consisted of search engines such as Google or Yahoo, viewing or downloading e-books, viewing or downloading articles, viewing blogger websites, using e-mail and chat mail or instant messaging, obtaining information from a library, visiting a virtual museum exhibit or online museum programme, and placing an order online (Griffiths and Donald, 2008).

Kiesler (1997) reported that online communication shows relationship building, which improves communication between parties, and consistently documents both sex and generational differences. For instance, women are more likely to engage in online communication to maintain personal connections with family, friends and coworkers while men use online communication for pursuing sexual interests and romance (Weiser, 2002). In terms of generational differences, young adults spend more time using online communication and are more comfortable doing it compared to the older generation (Thayer and Ray, 2006).

Furthermore, according to Horrigan (2006), if people need information on a specific scientific topic, the Internet is the primary source to which they turn. Two-thirds of Internet users reported that they have come upon news and information about science when going online for other purposes, and half of all Internet users have been to a Web site which specialises in scientific content.

The results of this study support the previous studies. Generally, we can conclude that information seeking on the Interment is widely prevalent and people use the Internet as the first and important source of information.

2.2 *Knowledge of English Language*

According to Crystal (2001), the Internet language (Netspeak) is a development of millennial significance given that a new medium of linguistic communication does not arrive very often, in the history of the human race. It therefore must be investigated and documented. Weinreich *et al.* (1968) noted this and examined Communication Intermediate Language (CIL) from the perspective of language contact and convergence. The super central languages of the Internet specific sites, and those that are being used in portal type functions and as the language of regional and multi-country sites, appear to be English (380 million), Chinese (185 million), Spanish (113 million), Japanese (88 million), French (64 million), German (62 million), Portuguese (51 million), and Arabic (46 million) (Internet World Statistics, 2008).

The super central language for Africa is chiefly English, followed by French. English and Arabic are the languages for the Middle East and North Africa, but French also has some limited functions here. Then, while it would appear that the super central functions of some languages are being transferred to and reinforced by computer-mediated communication, it seems that a number of super central languages are not transferring to the Internet and that Computer Mediate Communication (CMC) is having a negative impact on their status. The languages affected are Hindi and Swahili, whose super central functions appear to have been taken over by English on the commercial Internet, despite the fact that both languages are present on the Internet both in the form of local sites and in major international Internet sites such as Google and the BBC World Service, and despite de Swaan's results that Hindi has a much higher communication value than English within the Indian language constellation (de Swaan, 2001).

In Iran, although there is good progress in the development of Persian sites on the Internet, scientific information produced in English or useful information for the public is limited. Promoting current events would be possible through the promotion of English in educational programmes and institutions of the country. In addition, an immediate plan is

also required to produce local and community information on the net and translate the scientific sources to Persian language (Seifkashani, 2003).

The findings of this study challenge Weinreich's study, but support de Swaan and Seifkashani's study. The current study finds that half of the respondents use the Persian language, but if they had a good command of the English language, they would use the Internet in English. If the users had a poor command of the English language, they would revert to the Persian language. But due to the fact that most of the scientific information is produced in English, Iran should have plans to promote English in education programmes.

2.3 Problems of Internet Usage

Riahinia and Azimi (2008) evaluated academic Iranian women's use of the Internet in Tarbiat Moalem University in their study. They found that their main problems are low speed, lack of facilities (including lack of hardware and computer facilities), language barrier, and high cost of scientific resources. This study showed that as the women became older, they would be less interested in romance and fantasy and were more inclined towards special issues related to women's characters and responsibilities. Nearly all the women's websites indicate interest in youth and middle age lifestyle, and in some ways, they do refer to material for older women.

Schwindt and Tsai (2000: 45) conducted a study on faculty members at 58 institutions belonging to the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) to determine trends in the use of Internet courses in graduate human resource development (HRD) programmes. Of the twenty-seven institutions that submitted valid responses, 10 offered Internet courses in HRD and 17 did not. The reasons given for not offering Internet courses were: (1) not enough time to develop courses; (2) lack experience in developing Internet courses; (3) lack time to deliver and administer courses; (4) lack equipment; and (5) insufficient student demand.

Mui *et al.* (2002: 265) conducted a study to examine the actual level of Internet usage in the Malaysian construction industry and based on the findings of the study, two of the major shortcomings highlighted by the respondents are slowness in downloading and transmission of virus, at 59% and 50%, respectively. The problem of virus transmission can be arrested most of the time by a reliable anti-virus programme while the speed of connection and downloading could be improved with better infrastructure. Another problem identified and stated by 47% of the respondents is that they faced connection problems, with the major complaint being the difficulty of connection and frequency of disconnections.

Based on the literature search, it can be generally concluded that the speed of Internet connection and slow downloading are the most important problems among users. The results of previous studies are in agreement with the results of this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

Respondents for this study were selected using a quota sampling method. Of the 1718 students registered in the Human Sciences faculty, 272 students were studying English while 1446 were taking up other fields such as History, Geography, Social Sciences, Russian,

Arabic, French, and Persian languages. Therefore, 19.4% of the students were studying English while 80.6% were studying other Human Science subjects.

Based on the suggestion of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the ideal sample size for students studying English was 62 and for other fields in Human Sciences, the sample size was 257. Therefore, the total number of respondents (English and Human Sciences) selected should be 319. To gather data for the study, a self-administered questionnaire was developed containing 67 questions for measuring both dependent and independent variables under five sections (A to E). Sixty-six questions were close-ended questions with one being an open-ended question. The close-ended questions of the questionnaire required users to choose from a limited number of pre-selected answers and responses that were analysed statistically. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003), close-ended questions help to simplify the data analysis as the answers are easily quantified.

Singleton *et al.* (1988) postulated that this method was adapted because it is less time-consuming and inexpensive as compared to a one-to-one interview and telephone interview (as this study was about individual Internet use among female undergraduate students). This study required an instrument that could guarantee confidentiality. Ary *et al.* (1990) stated that questionnaires assure confidentiality of the respondents and may elicit more truthful responses.

The data collection method was to drop the questionnaire and collect them later. Babbie (2007) mentioned that when research workers either deliver the questionnaire, pick it up, or both, the completion rate seems higher than the straightforward mail survey. Considering all the alternatives, therefore, the 'drop and collect' method was adopted for the data collection of the study. The procedure for filling out the questionnaire was as follows: selected female respondents were asked three questions; first about their programme, second, whether they used the Internet, and third, whether they were employed. Only if they qualified, were they given the questionnaire to fill out.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Knowledge of English Language

Users were asked to self-rank their level of knowledge of English from very good to very poor. Knowledge of English language was measured with 4 items, which were reading comprehension, English listening, English writing and English speaking. For Listening, 49.2 % of the respondents said that their listening skills were very good and this received the highest percentage from respondents. For speaking, 37.1% of the undergraduate students said that they had poor speaking skills. For writing, 38.6 % of the respondents stated that they had poor writing skills, while 28.6% said that they had very good writing skills. For reading, 41.4% of respondents said they were very good, 35.8% moderate and 22.8 % very poor (Table 1).

4.2 Purposes of Using the Internet

There are four dimensions to purposes of Internet usage: information, entertainment, communication and services (Table 2).

Table 1. Knowledge of English language (n=319)

Variables	Percentage			
	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Reading
Very poor	16.8	37.1	38.6	22.8
Moderate	34.0	33.5	32.8	35.8
Very good	49.2	29.4	28.6	41.4

As shown in Table 2, the Information dimension had the highest overall mean (M=20.46) and communication dimension with (M=7.36) had the lowest overall mean. Aldesardottir's (2000) study found the same trend, with searching for information reported to be the most important purpose among users (Giffiths, 2008 ; Horrigan, 2006).

4.3 Search Engine
Each respondent was asked to select two engines which they commonly used. The most common search engine was the Persian Google.com (70.2%) followed by Yahoo.com (69.0%) (Table 3).

4.4 Language for Searching
The most preferred language selected by the respondents was Persian with 55.8 %, followed by English with 40.1 % (Table 4).

4.5 Gratification Derived from Internet Usage
There are five dimensions to gratification derived from using the Internet: Escape, Affective, Cognitive, Social Integration and Personal Integration. In the escape dimension "Because it is a pleasant break from my routine" had the highest mean (M=3.66, S.D=1.1) and "To get away from pressure and responsibilities" (M=2.67, S.D=1.20) had the lowest mean.

For the affective dimension, "Because it is entertaining" (M=4.01, S.D=1.02) had the highest mean and "To role play or experiment with my identity" (M=2.44, S.D=1.21) had the lowest mean. In the cognitive dimension, "To get information about something" had the highest mean" (M =4.44, S.D =0.90) and "To help with my research" had the lowest mean (M=2.95, S.D=1.22). In the social integration dimension, "To keep in touch with people" (M=3.49, S.D=1.2) had the highest mean and "Because I can talk with different people" (M=0.99, S.D=2.13) had the lowest mean. For personal integration dimension, item, "Because I can do whatever I want" (M=3.24, S.D=1.23) had the highest mean and "To put off doing something I should be doing" (M=2.55, S.D=1.28) had the lowest mean (Table 5).

The highest overall mean (M=3.92) was related to the cognitive category. As we live in an information age, information is vital for living in the society. Thus it can be seen that obtaining information from the Internet was important for most respondents and therefore it had the highest mean in the gratification dimension of Internet usage in this study.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to purpose dimensions of Internet usage (n=319)

Variables (%)	Not at all	Once in a while	Moderate	Frequent	Very Frequent	Mean	S.D
Information							
Seeking information relevant to research	8.0	7.7	16.1	28.6	39.5	3.83	1.25
Seeking news (n=318)	7.6	14.0	29.3	25.8	23.2	3.42	1.2
Searching online for particular news stories, photographs	15.5	14.8	20.8	22.7	26.2	3.29	1.4
Identifying databases	16.8	20.6	25.2	18.4	19.0	3.02	1.35
Checking the weather report	41.0	22.1	13.6	13.6	16.0	2.53	1.48
Using Internet for political news	37.2	16.4	18.2	12.3	9.8	2.29	1.37
Finding medical or health information	22.9	24.8	21	17.1	14.3	2.18	1.45
Overall mean						**20.46**	
Services							
Research digital library	19.9	25.6	22.5	13.6	18.4	2.84	1.38
Read books via the Internet (e-book)	23.3	24.6	28.1	10.1	13.9	2.66	1.31
Checking advertisements and product information	40.6	21.4	20.4	9.6	8.0	2.23	1.29
Banking and paying bills on the Internet	58.4	16.2	11.7	7.6	6.0	1.86	1.23
Purchasing online tickets and hotel reservations for travel	56.5	19.8	11.5	5.1	7.0	1.86	1.22
Shopping (E-commerce)	61.8	19.1	12.4	3.8	2.9	1.66	1.02
Overall mean						**15.59**	
Entertainment							
Seeking information on hobbies	9.6	17.7	28.0	20.9	23.8	3.31	1.27
Seeking entertainment information (n=318)	11.7	20.6	20.6	21.9	25.1	3.27	1.35
Downloading music and other things (n=315)	28.4	19.2	23.3	14.1	15.0	2.68	1.40
Overall mean						**11.73**	
Communication							
Sending and receiving e-mail	22.2	20.3	21.6	14.6	21.3	2.92	1.44
Meeting people	50.8	14.5	11.9	10.6	12.2	2.75	1.35
Chat and instant messaging (IM)	39.9	20.8	14.4	12.8	13.3	2.36	1.42
Overall mean						**7.36**	

Table 3. Respondents' choice of search engines (n=319)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage *
Persian Google.com	224	70.2
Yahoo.com	220	69.0
Morvarid.com	3	0.9
Altavista.com	25	7.8
MSN.com	20	6.3
Negin.net	16	5.0
Babylon.com	6	1.2

* could have more than one answer

Table 4. Language of search (n=317)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Persian	177	55.8
English	127	40.1
French	12	3.8
Other Languages	1	0.3

4.6 Problems in Using the Internet

In relation to using the Internet, 79.2% of respondents mentioned that "It takes too long to view or download the pages"; 70% complained about the connection of the Internet being slow, while 35% complained about lack of access and lack of knowledge. The findings of this study support previous findings that reported slowness in downloading as the main problem in using the Internet (Mui *et al.*, 2002).

The major two complaints of "Take too long to download" and "Slow Internet connection" relate to the network and Internet speed in Iran. As more than half the respondents had the same complaints, the government should allocate expenditure for upgrading speed and connection equipment. The third complaint relates to speaking in English. Iran is a monolingual country and almost all Iranians speak Persian (Table 6).

4.7 The Relationship between Knowledge of English Language and Gratification

The Pearson correlation analysis was used to test for relationship of each gratification category to knowledge of English language. In general there was no relationship between knowledge of English Language and gratification category by Internet use (Table 7).

4.8 Relationship between Purposes and Gratification Offered by Internet Usage

As shown in Table 8, there are four dimensions to purposes of Internet use: Information, Services, Entertainment and Communication. Correlation was used to determine the

Table 5. Distribution of respondents according to gratification dimensions of Internet usage (n=319)

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	S. D
Cognitive							
To seek information on something	2.2	3.5	5.1	26.3	62.9	4.44	0.90
To learn new things	1.3	2.9	6.7	33.3	55.9	4.39	0.83
Because it is easy to get the information I need (n=318)	2.2	7.6	8.6	32.5	49.0	4.18	1.02
It is more convenient than going to the library	6.0	9.2	13.7	24.8	46.3	3.96	1.23
To keep up to date on popular sites	7.7	10.6	22.1	28.8	30.8	3.64	1.23
To help with my research	16.5	15.8	35.8	20.0	11.9	2.95	1.22
Overall mean						**3.92**	
Affective							
Because it is entertaining	5.1	5.7	12.3	36.7	40.2	4.01	1.02
Because it is stimulating	11.3	31.5	11.3	25.7	20.3	3.32	1.23
Because it is exciting	8.8	6.9	18.6	39.6	26.1	3.7	1.88
To role play or experiment with my identity (n=318)	32.6	13.7	36.1	12.1	5.4	2.44	1.21
Overall mean						**3.36**	
Personal Integration							
Because I can do whatever I want	9.2	19.4	27.0	26.3	18.1	3.24	1.23
Because I can act however I want (n=318)	12.5	13.8	31.5	26.7	15.4	3.18	1.22
Because I feel more in control	7.3	9.9	29.0	33.1	20.7	3.5	1.14
I can do things in my own space	14.7	19.5	20.8	24.9	20.1	3.1	1.34
To put off doing something I should be doing	26.5	25.2	25.2	12.9	10.3	2.55	1.28
Overall mean						**3.11**	
Escape							
Because it is a pleasant break from my routine	6.1	12.2	18.3	35.7	27.7	3.66	1.1
To relax and unwind	14.6	18.4	30.4	23.7	13.0	3.02	1.23
Because it makes me feel less tense	15.7	18.8	27.2	25.2	13.1	3.01	1.26
To get away from pressure and responsibilities	22.1	19.6	34.6	16.0	7.7	2.67	1.20
Overall mean						**3.09**	
Social Integration							
To keep in touch with people	10.4	9.4	23.3	34.3	22.6	3.49	1.2
Because I need to talk to someone (n=318)	19.6	13.9	22.5	25.9	18.0	3.08	1.3
Because it is a distraction from loneliness	19.9	18.6	27.9	22.8	10.9	2.86	1.27
Because I can talk with different people	21.4	13.3	24.9	25.9	14.6	0.99	2.13
Overall mean						**2.28**	

Table 6. Distribution of respondents according to problems in Internet usage (n=319)

Variables	Agree %	Disagree
Takes too long to download	79.2	20.8
Slow Internet connection	70.3	29.7
English for non-native speakers	62.2	37.8
Wasting time	56.4	43.6
Overload of information	55.3	44.7
Expensive	54.9	45.1
Loss of personal information	47.9	52.1
Lack of time	46.8	53.2
Difficult to find information	45.4	54.6
Too complicated to use	36.7	63.3
Lack of access	35.5	64.5
Lack of knowledge	35.3	64.7

Table 7. Correlation between knowledge of English language and gratification offered by Internet usage (n=319)

	Pearson's r	
Gratification	r	P
Escape	0.027	0.627
Affective	-0.008	0.883
Cognitive	0.018	0.751
Social integration	0.153*	0.006
Personal integration	0.109	0.054
Overall	0.084	0.137

*p<.05

Table 8. Correlation between purpose and gratification offered by Internet usage (n=319)

	Pearson's r			
Variables	Information	Services	Entertainment	Communication
Escape	0.155	0.151	0.356	0.206
Affective	0.17	0.96	0.31	0.182
Cognitive	0.296	0.233	0.354	0.239
Social integration	0.245	0.271	0.278	0.477
Personal integration	0.251	0.224	0.271	0.251

*p<.05

relationship between dimensions of purposes of Internet usage and gratification derived from Internet usage. The results indicate that there were positive and significant relationships between each dimension of purpose of Internet usage. Generally, significant relationships were found among the five dimension of gratification and four dimensions of Internet usage.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the purposes of Internet usage had a positive significant relationship with gratification derived from Internet usage. All dimensions of gratification had significant relationships with all purposes of Internet usage, that is, information, services, entertainment and communication.

There were no significant relationships between knowledge of English language and all five dimensions of gratification derived from Internet usage, that is, cognitive, affective, social integration, personal integration, and escape.

In terms of gratification derived from Internet usage, the highest mean was related to the cognitive dimension. The results of the current study confirm that users use the Internet for information searching which is relevant to the cognitive dimension of gratification (Ferguson and Perse, 2000; Kerins et al., 2008).

The complaints of 79% of the respondents about connectivity and slow speed of downloading from the Internet are supported by the study of Riahinia and Azimi (2008) who also found that the main problems are low speed connection and language barrier. Furthermore, current research carried out by Mui et al. (2002) also found that slowness in downloading is the main problem of using the Internet.

In terms of purposes of Internet usage, the highest mean related to the information dimension. The results of this study are similar to the results of previous studies carried out by Ucak (2007) and Asemi (2005).

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and results of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

Internet use offered female undergraduates mixed gratification. It means that they did not emphasise only one category of gratification. Based on the mean score of every factor in each type of Internet user, 'Cognitive' appeared to be the dominant gratification for using the Internet. The findings indicate no differences in Internet usage among students studying humanities and English. Students who are not skilful in English access the Internet in the Persian language.

Female undergraduate students used the Internet if they had a good knowledge of English; otherwise, they read sites in Persian or used the Persian search engines. Both groups used the Internet and therefore English language had no effect on Internet usage. The study findings also indicate that the main purpose for using the Internet was to seek information relevant to research. This investigation is supported by studies of Ucak, (2007), Suryani (2007), Asemi (2005), Kerins et al. (2004) and Griffiths and Donald (2008).

The major problems of using the Internet were the time taken to download pages, slow Internet connection, and knowledge of English language. Some of the respondents

suggested that the cost of Internet usage be decreased while the speed of Internet connections be increased. They want educational classes for professional uses of the Internet, and suggest increasing the number of computers in the university and dormitory as well as creating awareness and providing information on the disadvantages of the Internet. They want to be connected to the scientific sites and have easy access to scientific articles.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Part A: Demographic Profile

1. What is your field of study? ………..
2. Which semester are you in? ………..
3. How old are you? ……
4. Do you have any occupation?   Yes ☐   No ☐

Part B: Purposes of Internet usage

The following statements relate to purposes of using the Internet. Please indicate your frequency of using the Internet on the following scale:

1. Not at all 2. Once in a while 3. Moderate 4. Frequent 5. Very frequent

N	Purpose of Internet Usage	Scale
1	Reading books via the Internet (E-books)	1 2 3 4 5
2	Reading journal articles via the Internet (E-journals)	1 2 3 4 5
3	Sending and receiving E-mail	1 2 3 4 5
4	Accessing data bases	1 2 3 4 5
5	Finding information about my hobbies	1 2 3 4 5
6	Finding news	1 2 3 4 5
7	Finding entertainment information	1 2 3 4 5
8	Shopping (E-commerce)	1 2 3 4 5
9	Finding medical or health related information	1 2 3 4 5
10	Meeting people	1 2 3 4 5
11	Finding information relevant to research	1 2 3 4 5
12	Chatting and instant messaging (IM)	1 2 3 4 5
13	Listening to music	1 2 3 4 5
14	Downloading music and other things	1 2 3 4 5
15	Finding research studies in the digital library	1 2 3 4 5
16	Banking and paying bills through the Internet	1 2 3 4 5
17	Arranging for travel, e,g. buying online tickets & hotel reservation	1 2 3 4 5
18	Checking advertisements and product information	1 2 3 4 5
19	Checking weather reports and forecasts	1 2 3 4 5
20	Searching online for particular news stories, photographs	1 2 3 4 5
21	Searching for political news	1 2 3 4 5
22	Others; please specify	
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	

Part C: Knowledge of English Language

Please indicate your knowledge of English language by ticking the relevant columns:

N	Statements	Scale				
	Level of knowledge of English language	Very good	Good	Moderate	Poor	Very poor
1	Reading comprehension					
2	English listening					
3	English writing					
4	English speaking					

1. Which of the following search engines do you prefer? (Choose 2)
   PersianGoogle.com ☐   Yahoo.com ☐   excited.com ☐   Alta vista.com ☐
   MSN.com Negin.net ☐   Babylon.com ☐   Morvarid.com ☐
   Others, please specify………..........

2. What language is mostly used for searching?
   Persian ☐   English ☐   France ☐   Others ☐

Part D: Problems in Internet Usage

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

N	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1	It takes too long to view or download pages		
2	Difficulty in finding relevant information		
3	Overload of information on the Internet		
4	English language is for people who are not native speakers		
5	Internet connection is slow		
6	Internet connection is expensive		
7	Internet is too complicated to use		
8	Security or privacy concern to viruses and loss of personal information		
9	Lack of Internet knowledge		
10	Lack of time		
11	Lack of access		
12	It wastes too much time		
13	Others, please specify: 1. 2.		

Part E: Gratification Derived from Internet Usage
Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement for each of the statements:
1. Strongly Disagree   2. Disagree   3. Neutral   4. Agree   5. Strongly Agree

N	Statements	Scale				
	I use the Internet:					
1	Because it is exciting	1	2	3	4	5
2	To keep in touch with people	1	2	3	4	5
3	Because I feel more in control	1	2	3	4	5
4	To role play or experiment with my identity	1	2	3	4	5
5	To learn new things	1	2	3	4	5
6	To relax and unwind	1	2	3	4	5
7	Because I can talk with different people	1	2	3	4	5
8	Because it is stimulating	1	2	3	4	5
9	Because I can do whatever I want to	1	2	3	4	5
10	Because it distracts from loneliness	1	2	3	4	5
11	To keep up to date on popular sites	1	2	3	4	5
12	Because I can act however I want	1	2	3	4	5
13	It is more convenient than going to the library	1	2	3	4	5
14	To get away from pressure and responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
15	To help with my research	1	2	3	4	5
16	I can do things in my own space	1	2	3	4	5
17	Because I need to talk to someone	1	2	3	4	5
18	Because it is easy to get information I need	1	2	3	4	5
19	Because it is a pleasant break from my routine	1	2	3	4	5
20	To put off doing something I should be doing	1	2	3	4	5
21	Because it is entertaining	1	2	3	4	5
22	Because it makes me feel less tense	1	2	3	4	5
23	To get information about something	1	2	3	4	5

What is your suggestion for improving Internet usage among female students?

....
....
....