



## Uses and Gratifications of Mobile Phone Users in Iraq

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### ABSTRACT

This study delves into the impact of mobile phones on human connections, shedding light on the complex relationship dynamics influenced by contemporary needs and highlighting the pivotal role these devices play in today's society. An extensive review of research from across the globe, including Europe, America, Asia, Australia, the Arab world, and Iraq, was undertaken. This comprehensive analysis revealed a wide range of gratifications users gain from mobile phone usage, which was thoughtfully categorized into two main groups: utilitarian gratifications, with 15 distinct types, and expressive gratifications, covering 17 unique types. The investigation also explored the psychological motivations behind mobile phone use, considering both expressive and utilitarian perspectives. The findings offer an in-depth understanding of the various pleasures Iraqi users derive from their mobile phones, as well as the psychological factors driving this engagement, thereby providing a thorough scientific explanation of mobile phone gratification. This research not only uncovers the extensive array of user gratifications but also deepens the understanding of the psychological motivations behind mobile phone usage in Iraq.

**Keywords:** use, gratifications, uses and gratifications theory, mobile phone.

### INTRODUCTION

The era of mobile technology has witnessed an unprecedented acceleration, characterized by relentless advancements and widespread adoption across the globe. Smartphones, now integral to our daily existence, serve not only as tools for communication but also as perpetual companions, assisting us across various aspects of our lives. Their application transcends the initial intentions of their creators, mirroring the unique identities of users and catering to their distinct desires, thus influencing both product design and the nature of fulfillment derived from their use.

Mobile phones have revolutionized the way we access communication services, breaking free from the geographical constraints associated with traditional landline telephony. These devices have evolved to offer a plethora of functionalities beyond mere voice communication, encompassing text messaging, multimedia sharing, weather alerts, data exchange (via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth), and internet connectivity, among others. This evolution reflects a shift in user expectations and satisfactions, moving away from basic utility to embrace a broader spectrum of desires, including aesthetics and beyond, influenced by the product's design and capabilities. Consequently, the relationship between users and their mobile devices has evolved, transcending traditional utility to encompass a multifaceted array of interactions and gratifications, reshaping the very essence of mobile communication technology.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the motivations for using mobile phones?
2. What types of gratifications do Iraqi users obtain from using mobile phones?

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- The research aims to identify the types of psychological motivations that drive Iraqi users to use mobile phones to satisfy specific gratifications.



## TERMS DEFINED

**Use:** The term "use" serves interchangeably as a stand-in for "usage" or "practice" in some contexts, while in others, it denotes "ownership" or "control." This notion of utilization prompts the question: how do individuals actually employ tools or technological devices in practice? Hence, understanding utilization necessitates first securing access to the technology or equipment, indicating its material presence (Boukhnoufa, 2007, p. 73).

**Gratification:** Within the realm of psychoanalytic theory, gratification is described as the alleviation of tension. This concept emerges from the buildup of stimuli, leading to discomfort, which in turn motivates the organism to take action towards achieving gratification. Here, the decrease in stimulus is perceived as a form of pleasure. Gratifications represent various methods through which needs are fulfilled, as identified by users, and are closely linked to the proactive engagement with a medium (Stafford & Gillenson, 2004, p. 71).

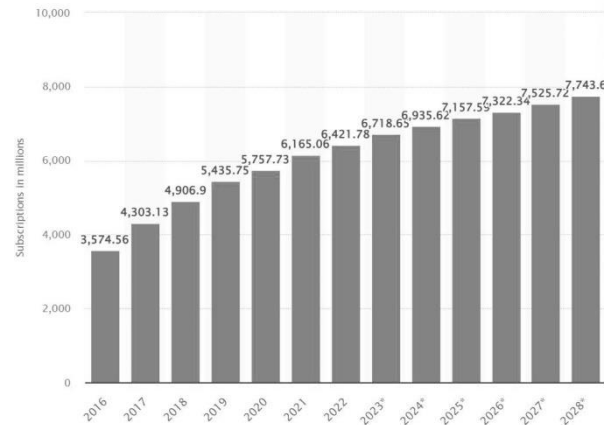
**Uses and Gratifications Theory:** This theory delves into the motivations and reasons behind individuals' engagement with media. Originating in the 1940s, it seeks to understand how individuals utilize media to satisfy their specific needs and what drives their preferences for certain types of media (Hossain et al., 2019, p. 3).

**Mobile Phone:** Commonly referred to as a cell phone, this portable device facilitates communication on the go, enabling users to make and receive calls via a radio frequency link. Its operation remains uninterrupted during movement, as long as the user traverses within the bounds of a radio service coverage area (Wikipedia, 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MOBILE PHONE RESEARCH

The technological advancements that have markedly transformed human existence are often hailed as marvels of the technological era. Through the enhancement and evolution of communication technologies, a novel mode of interaction has emerged, connecting individuals across vast distances. The mobile phone, in particular, has demonstrated an exceptional rate of adoption, with its user base expanding rapidly over time. Within just two decades following its introduction, mobile phone ownership soared to 1 billion users. This exponential growth continued, with the user count doubling to 2 billion in merely an additional forty months. By two years later, this figure had escalated to 3.5 billion users globally (Rehmani, & Ishfaq, 2011, p. 101). Between 2013 and 2022, the global mobile phone user base experienced significant expansion, reaching over 6.295 billion by 2021 (bankmycell, 2021), as illustrated in Chart 1. With the global population at the dawn of 2022 standing at 7.9 billion, this indicates that approximately 66.53% of individuals worldwide possess a mobile phone. Furthermore, data from Bankmycell reveals that there were 8.97 billion mobile internet-connected devices globally, including tablets, in 2021 (bankmycell, 2021). Predictions for early 2024 suggested a user base of 6.935 billion, with projections estimating a rise to 7.743 billion by 2028 (statista, 2024). In Iraq, mobile phone users increased from 1.53 million in 2005 to 36.95 million in 2020, against a backdrop where the population in April 2022 was recorded at 41,897,325 (worldmeter, 2022).



**Chart (1) number of mobile phone users in the world from 2016-2024 and the expected number of users in 2028**  
(statista, 2024)

Mobile phones serve as a bridge in personal communication, enabling interactions between individuals that are not limited by temporal or spatial boundaries. Some view mobile phones as tools for mass communication as well, offering informational and entertainment services akin to traditional electronic communication mediums. This dual nature of mobile phones merges the realms of personal and mass communication. Indeed, mobile phones encompass the traits of both direct, unmediated personal interactions and broader mass communication channels. They retain the core functionality of landline telephones, facilitating direct communication between two parties. However, they transcend the geographical limitations inherent to landlines, embracing the dynamics of mobility and accessibility.

The evolution of the mobile phone has elevated it from a basic tool of communication to a versatile device capable of fulfilling a myriad of needs through its multi-functionality and connectivity with various other communication technologies and devices (Sibel Hoşut, 2010). Since 2004, the prevalence of text messaging and mobile phone utilization has significantly surpassed that of landline telephones (Avidar et al., 2013, p. 605). From that point onwards, the adoption and usage of mobile phones, particularly smartphones, have seen a consistent rise. Observations from usage patterns and scholarly investigations indicate a remarkable surge in global mobile phone user numbers, alongside significant advancements in smartphone technology during the last decade of the twenty-first century (Bakke, 2008, p. 20).

The global proliferation of mobile phones is driven by several compelling factors, notably their enhanced speed, portability, durability, and versatility compared to earlier models. These devices boast an array of features that captivate users, including voice mail, text and multimedia messaging, weather forecasts, data transfer capabilities (via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth), internet connectivity, digital and video cameras, note-taking applications, contact storage, navigation systems, encyclopedic resources, alarm functions, audio recording, caller ID, personal organizers, flashlight functions, and much more. Such advancements have universalized mobile phone usage across both developed and developing nations (Wilska, 2003, p. 442).

In the twenty-first century, the mobile phone has become an indispensable element of daily life, to the extent that being without our phone feels unusual. Katz and Aakhus elucidate this phenomenon by stating, "The mobile phone's ubiquity profoundly influences people's daily lives, their interpersonal relationships, and the essence of human interaction. Whereas traditional communication was predominantly face-to-face, it has now evolved to include the mobile phone as an integral component of personal interactions, creating a



hybrid form of engagement where face-to-face encounters are augmented by the phone, serving as a portal to this enhanced mode of interaction." (Katz & Aakhus, 2002, p. 31). Understanding the distinction between instrumental and ritualistic uses of mobile phones can significantly benefit both users and designers in numerous ways. Recognizing when a user engages with a mobile phone aimlessly versus when they do so with a specific, intentional objective allows designers to tailor experiences that cater to the user's needs more effectively. This understanding is crucial for designers aiming to grasp how users perceive and interact with their products, including the motivations behind product use and the needs, desires, and passions that these products fulfill. Gilham and Van Belle highlight a critical gap in our understanding, noting, "There is a lack of clear comprehension regarding mobile phone users and their motivations for usage." (Chigona et al., 2008, p. 2199). Through a detailed examination of usage patterns and the gratifications users derive from mobile phones, it is possible to uncover both the tangible and intangible motives and desires that prompt users in Iraq to engage with this technology.

### **USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY**

The Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a lens through which we can dissect how users interact with mobile phones and the various types of fulfillment they derive from such use, shedding light on their underlying desires and necessities. This approach offers a structured method for deciphering the motivations behind media utilization aimed at satisfying user needs. The central inquiries driving this research domain since the early 1940s have been: What propels individuals to engage with technological media, and what are the underlying dynamics of these motivations? Such questions have spurred researchers to delve into the rationale behind diverse user behaviors in their engagement with communication media. Blumler & Katz are recognized as pioneering researchers in the field of communication effects for their application of the uses and gratifications theory to examine the ways in which people utilize various communication mediums to gather information and fulfill specific needs (R. Nicholas Gerlich et al., 2015, p. 69). Wimmer & Dominick, on the other hand, posit that the inception of the uses and gratifications theory dates back to the 1940s, sparked by inquiries into why individuals engage in particular activities with communication media (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994, p. 115). The theory's emergence is also linked to a debate initiated by Katz in 1959 concerning the perceived decline of communication research, where he observed, "The field of communication, as a persuasive field, now seems to be dying, but not all fields of communication are in the same state." (Idid et al., 2012, p. 5).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory stands as a pivotal framework for understanding the motivations behind individuals' use of communication mediums. Originating from early communication studies, which perceived the audience as passive recipients influenced primarily by the media, this theory revolutionized the perspective by asserting that users are proactive participants in their media consumption. It emphasizes that users actively select and engage with media based on their own needs and preferences, thereby playing a significant role in their interaction with media.

This theoretical approach was developed in contrast to earlier models like the "hypodermic needle" theory, which suggested that media could directly influence and shape audience behavior by 'injecting' specific values, ideas, and attitudes. In stark contrast, the Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that individuals seek out media to fulfill specific needs, driven by purposeful goals. According to Kuss & Griffiths (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011, p. 3536) people intentionally choose certain communication mediums to meet their personal needs, highlighting the user's active role in the selection process (Obono, 2016). The theory accentuates the user's control over and interaction with the medium, aiming to uncover the underlying motives for media usage.

This user-centric viewpoint suggests that technology users are not merely passive consumers but are actively engaged in seeking out media experiences that satisfy their



unique needs. Research within this framework has identified that the motivations for digital media use can be categorized into instrumental and expressive purposes. Instrumental uses are goal-directed and purposeful, while expressive uses represent more spontaneous and habitual engagement without a specific objective in mind. Through this lens, the Uses and Gratifications Theory offers a comprehensive understanding of how and why individuals interact with media, providing insights into the active nature of media consumption.

The foundational perspective of the Uses and Gratifications Theory is built upon four essential assumptions (Malleus, 2014, p. 21):

1. The selection of communication mediums by individuals is characterized by proactive and intentional decision-making.
2. Such decisions are motivated by specific reasons, informed by prior interactions with various communication mediums.
3. The choice of communication mediums is made with the intention of fulfilling particular needs and desires.
4. Communication mediums exist in a competitive landscape, vying with alternative options to meet individual requirements.

Findings from previous studies grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory suggest that people engage with communication media for two primary reasons: either for the content it delivers, which spans from informative to entertaining material, or for exploratory reasons, familiarizing themselves with the medium's functionalities, like interacting with technological attributes or navigating the internet. Researchers often classify these motivations into two distinct categories: content-related gratifications and process-oriented gratifications.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory underscores the empowerment of users by vesting them with control over their media consumption choices. This perspective is particularly insightful and crucial for understanding the strategies and motivations driving the use of communication mediums, alongside the patterns of exposure and their consequent impacts. With modern mobile phone technology offering a wide spectrum of opportunities for gratification and usage that transcend basic functionality, it becomes an ideal subject for investigation under the Uses and Gratifications framework.

### **MOBILE PHONE GRATIFICATIONS IN LITERATURE**

In light of the vast number of studies and the diverse gratifications identified from mobile phone use, the researcher has chosen to compile these findings into a table, arranged chronologically to cover the period from 2000 to 2022. As follows:

No.	Author/ year	Gratifications
1	(Leung & Wei, 2000)	Style, status, intimacy, socialization, relaxation, mobility, instant access, functionality, and reassurance.
2	(ling & Yuttri, 2002)	Safety, security and self-presentation
3	(Özcan & Koçak, 2003)	Status, relaxation, functionality, work, safety and socialization.
4	(Wei & Lo, 2006)	Intimacy, affection, social utility, style, status, information, mobility, and accessibility.
5	(Walsh et al., 2007)	Self, socialization, and safety
6	(Hooper & Zhou, 2007)	Social interaction, freedom, self-image, self, security, work and dependability
7	(Ho & Syu, 2010)	Fun, wholeness, control, intimacy, escape, relaxation and stress relief
8	(Sibel Hoştut, 2010)	Relaxation, social interaction, reassurance, status, style, and innovation
9	(Paragas et al., 2010)	Social interaction, instant access, mobility, and security



10	(Chua et al., 2012)	Leisure time, accessibility, self, socialization, and maintaining relationships
11	(Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012)	Social interaction, privacy, status symbolism, and security
12	(Joo & Sang, 2013)	Information, following the news, and relaxing
13	(Melh, 2013)	Communication, intimacy, control, information, social status, sociability, and enjoyment
14	(Al-Barashdi et al., 2015)	Social interaction, information sharing, enjoyment, self-identity, assertion, self-development, safety, freedom, privacy, self-expression, and gossip.
15	(Ayad, 2017)	Social communication, information, news, education, transactions, shopping, avoiding boredom, and personal relationships
16	(Meng et al., 2020)	Information, entertainment, communication, self-expression, and fun
17	(Castaldi et al., 2022)	Benefit, play, satisfaction, communication, social interaction, comfort, facilitation, relaxation, enjoyment, and amusement

### Methodology

The analysis of literary works related to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, specifically within the context of mobile phone research, coupled with the synthesized gratification findings from the seventeen studies presented in the table mentioned earlier, has unveiled a consistent pattern of core gratifications across all examined studies. These findings can be succinctly reorganized into two primary categories, reflecting the basic typologies observed in prior research on the Uses and Gratifications Theory across various fields: instrumental and expressive. This division is consistent with the general typology of gratifications frequently recognized in the literature on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, as follows:

<b>Instrumental gratifications</b>		
Information	self-development	research
education	communication	Convenience
monitoring	shopping	mobility
instant access	Work	Dependability
Holistic	Control	Innovation
<b>Expressive gratifications</b>		
Self	distraction	social interaction
privacy	companionship	Fight boredom
relaxation and relieve stress	enjoyment	leisure
habit	escape	intimacy
safety and reassurance	social status	gossip
style		Freedom

After pinpointing the key gratifications pertinent to the study's focus, a survey was developed and distributed among 105 graduate students at the College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad. Following the retrieval of the completed questionnaires, a detailed analytical examination was undertaken to evaluate the extent to which the identified categories of gratification were manifested, according to the responses collected from the participants.

### Results

To determine the extent of gratification fulfillment as indicated by the surveyed participants, the analysis utilized a percentage-based formula, taking into account their levels of agreement or disagreement. These levels were quantified using a scale from (1) indicating



"It does not happen at all" to (5) representing "It always happens." The rate of approval was calculated by aggregating responses that signified some degree of approval (3, 4, 5), hence indicating the presence of gratification to various extents. The overall rate of approval was subsequently obtained by computing the mean of these values, employing the formula:  $\text{average} = \frac{\text{sum of values}}{\text{number of values}}$ .

No.	Instrumental gratifications	Average	Gratification chart	No.	Expressive gratifications	Average	Gratification chart
1.	research	85.6%		1.	companionship	34.9	
2.	Holistic	55.2%		2.	Self	17.5	
3.	Information	84.8%		3.	Fight boredom	43.7	
4.	shopping	67.3%		4.	distraction	80.6	
5.	Work	31.8%		5.	leisure	66	
6.	Dependability	66.7%		6.	escape	70.9	
7.	Convenience	97.1%		7.	style	25.2	
8.	Control	59%		8.	Freedom	37.9	
9.	Innovation	68.6%		9.	social interaction	55.8	
10.	education	80%		10.	habit	30.4	
11.	instant access	88.6%		11.	social status	38.2	

12.	communication	60.6%		12.	relaxation and stress relieve	22.5	
13.	self-development	79.1%		13.	safety and reassurance	40.2	
14.	monitoring	78.9%		14.	gossip	39.2	
15.	mobility	76.7%		15.	privacy	29.7	
				16.	enjoyment	46.5	
				17.	intimacy	45.1	

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Mobile phones, endowed with advanced technical features and internet connectivity, cater to various academic needs, achieving research-related gratification.
2. The quest for information is an instrumental gratification. Despite its lesser prevalence, it signifies the value of instant information access, a notable convenience in the modern era.
3. The multi-functionality and adaptable nature of mobile phones empower users to undertake a myriad of tasks, showcasing a holistic utilization approach.
4. Mobile phones facilitate online shopping, epitomizing the gratification derived from acquiring goods and services digitally.
5. The utilization of mobile phones for work-related purposes varied among postgraduate students, with not all finding it beneficial for their professional tasks.
6. The compact, portable design and performance of mobile phones enable reliance on them for daily interactions, showcasing both expressive and instrumental uses.
7. The convenience offered by mobile phones spans various interactive contexts, making them indispensable in both personal and professional spheres.
8. Mobile phones provide a sense of control through their core and additional features, aiding users in managing daily life activities.
9. Innovation gratification is achieved through the phone's role in fostering creativity and problem-solving in everyday interactions.
10. The educational gratification is crucial, particularly for postgraduate students, enhancing their academic engagement and access to resources.
11. Instant access gratification is highly valued, thanks to the phone's portability, ensuring it's a constant companion for users.
12. Communication gratification highlights the phone's capacity to support diverse communication forms, enhancing user satisfaction.
13. Self-development is facilitated by the phone's diverse functionalities, contributing to personal growth and information accessibility.
14. The phone's communicative and informational capabilities allow users to stay connected and informed, fulfilling the monitoring gratification.
15. Mobility gratification is achieved through the phone's design, ensuring constant connectivity and activity engagement across different settings.





16. Companionship, self-satisfaction, and fighting boredom gratifications were not realized, indicating a gap in fulfilling these expressive needs.
17. Distraction was noted as a potential negative impact, pointing to the phone's role in contributing to time inefficiencies.
18. Leisure activities are significantly supported by mobile phones, with applications playing a key role in fulfilling leisurely needs.
19. The phone assists in escaping unfavorable social scenarios, offering a means to navigate out of such situations.
20. Style and freedom gratifications were not prioritized by users, reflecting a shift in the perceived value of these aspects.
21. Social interaction, despite minimal validation, remains an important gratification, underscoring the phone's role in facilitating communication in absence of physical presence.
22. Gratifications related to habits, social status, relaxation, safety, gossip, privacy, enjoyment, and intimacy were not achieved, highlighting a stronger influence of instrumental over expressive gratifications among Iraqi users. This indicates a current preference for the phone's functional benefits over expressive needs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the theoretical underpinnings, empirical evidence, and the conclusions drawn in this research, the following recommendations are proposed for further inquiry:

1. Delve into the correlation between gender and age demographics and their influence on the gratification derived from self-identity satisfaction through mobile phone use.
2. Analyze the connection between the gratifications of escapism and instant access, particularly focusing on how mobile phones serve as enablers for these experiences.
3. Probe into the adverse consequences of mobile phone usage, especially its impact on the fabric of social relationships and the dynamics of social interaction.

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