



WhatsApp and Religious Piety: The Social and Psychological Dynamics of Religious Status Sharing on WhatsApp

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submission: August 25, 2026	Social media Apps play a vital role in connecting the people without any constraint of time or space. Some applications provide the ephemeral media experience which disappears after certain time, mostly after 24 hours. Users practice them for sharing information, personal feelings and likes/dislikes. WhatsApp status feature is one of them and it provides the users with an opportunity to share what is in their heads with others through status update. People love to update status of their interest. In Pakistan, people often update Islamic/religious content on their status. This study investigate the purpose, functions and effects of these religious statuses by applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory as Theoretical framework. Quantitative data analysis of this survey based study showed that religious WhatsApp status gratify several psychological, cognitive, emotional and social needs of users. Moreover, it is also found that instead of their gender or age, the formal education and intellectual engagement shapes the usage patterns of users. Results further revealed that higher level of obtained gratifications results into recommendation of the content to others.
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Introduction

In the modern age of information societies, newer technologies made it possible to connect the whole world in a network. Social media played a vital role in connecting the people without any constraint of time or space. Research reveals that messages sent and received by using these applications reflect the feelings, behaviors and thoughts of the users (Nandwani & Verma, 2021). Widely used social media networking apps like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp offer the ephemeral media experience through their status/story update features. These statuses or stories are not only being used for sharing information but also to share the personal feelings and likes/dislikes. WhatsApp provide the ephemeral media experience through its feature status update, which disappears after 24 hours. In Pakistan, people love to update status of their interest. They often update Islamic/religious content on their status. This study investigate the purpose, functions and effects of these religious statuses.

Two former employees of Yahoo named [Brian Acton](#) and Jan Koum, developed WhatsApp Messenger in 2009 as an instant messaging app. Later Facebook purchased it so now is being owned and operated by Meta and commonly called just WhatsApp. Following the suit of Snapchat and Facebook, in February 2017 WhatsApp launched a new Status feature similar to the stories of the later. This feature allowed the users to update status in the form of text, video, link or image, later rolling out a feature called 'Voice Status Updates', allowing users to record voice notes and share them. WhatsApp also provides the facility for privacy of status. Thus, this feature gives great ephemeral experience. Use of WhatsApp among Pakistanis is very high and general observations reveal that they update the status very frequently and extensively. Almost all the WhatsApp users update statuses

and most of these status have an religious touch. They share Islamic quotes, verses of holy Quran, hadiths, pieces of Islamic poetry, a clip or sound bite from the sermon of any Islamic scholar, naat, qirat, manqabit, qawaali or some other Islamic or Sufi music pieces on their status. This study is aimed to find out that what are the motives behind updating Islamic status on WhatsApp among WhatsApp users of Pakistan. This study examines the frequency with which respondents update their WhatsApp statuses with Islamic content. It also determines that whether WhatsApp status-update frequency varies according to respondents' educational level and gender, along with identifying the gratifications obtained and their relationship with recommendation of sharing Islamic content through WhatsApp to others.

Literature Review

Consumption patterns of the media users in digital landscape has been changed, now they prefer the short lived and fast-paced content. Users highly value the instant gratification so ephemerality has become the rule of the day. Ephemerality is a technical innovation in the world of social media, which aims to design a system to erase communication content after a short period (Ma et al., 2021). Ephemeral media is a temporary digital content that disappears automatically after a short time, usually 24 hours. It has become an influential mechanism to enhance engagement (Nguyen et al., 2026). In WhatsApp, a feature called status provides the ephemeral experience to the users just like the story in TikTok and Facebook.

WhatsApp is the most popular app, which everybody seems to be using (Harjinder & Ashwani, 2018). It is so popular because it is user friendly (Saputra et al., 2021), it enables the users to communicate in a multimodal way through the instant messaging. Several communities rely on WhatsApp as a core form of communication. WhatsApp messenger has many edges on other social media Apps; it is users managed and provides the possibility of posting desired content. It is a potential place to express one's feelings, opinions, and thoughts, along with the surety of the privacy of users through end-to-end encryption and the information published reaches to the authorized friends according to the settings. Thus, people love to update statuses on WhatsApp. Previous studies exhibited that WhatsApp users are goal oriented and they update their statuses with pragmatic approach (Sánchez-Moyaa & Cruz-Moya, 2015). They share the content based on their cultural and collective memory having several motives behind it. WhatsApp statuses entertain, inform, and help. While the biggest motivations behind this feature's use are the norms of reciprocity, habitual diversion, and socialization (Islam et al., 2020). These statuses gratify the social cognitive needs of the users (Khan, 2017). As a qualitative analysis of WhatsApp statuses resulted that the four major categories of the content updated as status are: religious, social, personal and national content (Assaggaf H. T., 2020).

Research shows that people use ephemeral media for self-expression and highly rely on augmented filtered reality. They often share their happiness and sadness by updating statuses. On the other hand, this usage has its pros and cons as a study resulted that WhatsApp is a source of pleasure and excitement having the ability to make the users addicts (Mahajan & Mahender, 2021). Some researchers highlighted the role of WhatsApp statuses in reducing stress (M.A.F.Ashfa et al., 2021). Another study endorse the results as it found the depression as a significant predictor of high level of Facebook status update (Shah et al., 2025).

Previous research also indicated that WhatsApp status updates are a potential source for imparting knowledge and information (Avani & Aanal, 2014). WhatsApp Messenger is one of the most convenient modes of transmitting information by the messages people communicate through their status notifications. The results of a content analysis of WhatsApp statuses revealed that people update statuses to communicate countless issues ranging from religious, personal or emotional issues to love, totems and popular sayings of a humorous nature (Mapako & Mareva, 2025). Moreover, WhatsApp statuses are being used for Self-presentation and identity construction (Hornoiu, 2021).

Some people update statuses for motivation (Shehabat & Rababah, 2021). This motivation may be for themselves or for others. Research proved that the most of Pakistanis update politico-religious content on WhatsApp status to show their religious associations and political affiliations at once (Saleem et al., 2022). This content including political and religious narrative, spread misinformation as people are less bothered about fact-checking (Garimella et al., 2025). Sometimes these communications have hidden meanings. A study resulted that WhatsApp users update their status keeping their specific target audience in mind. They may have the professional or personal relations with their audience. They use WhatsApp statuses, as cryptic protest discourses against their opponents, may be real or imagined. This audience condition online human communication in multiple ways (Mamvura & Masowa, 2017). Some researchers see the WhatsApp statuses as a novel arrangement of announcements. A study indicates that youngsters use WhatsApp statues to express their beliefs along with to reveal their thoughts. They use announcement on WhatsApp status to express emotional, religious, cultural, political and social issues (Busabaa et al., 2022). The demographic characteristics of users (age and gender) have a significant relationship with the type of theme used and their privacy concerns (Malekhosseini et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). Contrary to the traditional media-effects approaches, this theory provides an audience-centered perspective, which helps to understand that why and how individuals select and use media to satisfy their particular psychological and social needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). The core idea of this theory is that media users are active and conscious participants in media use. They are not passive recipients of messages as they make purposive choices among available media and its content according to their needs and expectations for gratifications. This theory also conceptualizes the media use as a process under the influence of social and psychological circumstances. Not only in terms of generating needs and expectations from the media or content but by guiding the patterns of media exposure and use, producing particular gratifications and, potentially, other consequences. Therefore, Uses and Gratifications theory emphasizes the relationship between individual needs, motivations, media choices, usage patterns, and gratifications. This theory has increased relevance in the current digital media landscape, internet and social media enabled the users not only to consume content but also to select and produce content. In the context of WhatsApp Status, users are not simply selecting pre-existing media content; they can actively create and disseminate their own content to a network of contacts. Therefore, posting an Islamic status can be understood as a form of active media use and user-generated communication, through which individuals may seek both personal and social gratifications. Thus, the theory is particularly appropriate for investigating WhatsApp Status, where users are deciding what content to view, create, and circulate within their personal networks. Research on religion and new media further supports the applicability of UGT to religious communication. Researchers found that people might engage with religion through new media because it can fulfil needs like learning, self-oriented needs, and passing time (Ratcliff et al., 2017). These findings suggest that religious media use should not be regarded as a uniform or exclusively spiritual activity. Rather, religious content satisfies several overlapping informational, personal, social, emotional, and communicative needs.

Methodology

This Quantitative study is based on the data collected through a standardized online questionnaire. The researchers disseminated the link of this questionnaire among a selected sample of 410 active WhatsApp users. This sample was selected by using Purposive-sampling technique. After the collection, data was analyzed through SPSS to get insight that why and how WhatsApp users update and consume religious content shared on their status update.

Hypotheses

- **H₁:** There is a significant association between users' educational level and their frequency of updating WhatsApp statuses.
- **H₂:** There is a significant association between users' gender and their frequency of updating WhatsApp statuses.
- **H₃:** There is a significant positive relationship between the number of gratifications obtained from sharing Islamic content and users' recommendation of this activity to others.

Findings & Discussion

Table 1. Education of Respondents

Education		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bachelors	132	32.2	32.2	32.2
	Elementary	2	.5	.5	32.7
	Intermediate	20	4.9	4.9	37.6
	Masters	178	43.4	43.4	81.0
	Metric	2	.5	.5	81.5
	MPhil	56	13.7	13.7	95.1
	Ph.D.	20	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	410	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Age of Respondents

Age		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15-25 Years	192	46.8	46.8	46.8
	26-35 Years	162	39.5	39.5	86.3
	36-45 Years	30	7.3	7.3	93.7
	46-55 Years	20	4.9	4.9	98.5
	Above than 55	6	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	410	100.0	100.0	

Findings of this study (Table 1,2) revealed that the most of the respondents are youngsters of 15 to 35 years old, 70 percent of them is female, 39 male and 1 percent others. Moreover, majority is highly educated as data indicated that 43.4 % of them have masters degree, 32% bachelors, and 13.7 % have MPhil degrees.

Table 3. Education and Status update

Education	Daily	Few times in a year	Once in a month	Once in a week	Twice a week	Total
Bachelors	48	20	18	36	10	132
Elementary	2	0	0	0	0	2
Intermediate	10	2	0	6	2	20
MPhil	12	18	4	12	10	56
Masters	36	46	32	30	34	178
Metric	0	0	0	2	0	2
Ph.D.	6	10	0	2	2	20
Total	114	96	54	88	58	410

Table 4. Chi-Square

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	61.605	24	.000
Likelihood Ratio	—	—	—
Linear-by-Linear Association	—	—	—
N of Valid Cases	410		

Note. $p < .001$.

Table 5. Symmetrical Measures

Measure	Value	Approx. Sig.
Phi	—	—
Cramer's V	.194	.000
N of Valid Cases	410	

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the association between respondents' educational level and the frequency with which they updated their WhatsApp status. The results indicated a statistically significant association between education level and update frequency, $\chi^2(24, N = 410) = 61.605$, $p < .001$. The effect size, measured by Cramér's V, was .194, which indicate that there is a statistically significant association between Education and Updates Frequency. On the other hand, statistics indicate that Strength of association is weak. So, it is concluded that there was a statistically significant association between education and updates frequency, $\chi^2(24) = 61.605$, $p = 0.0000$, with a weak association (Cramér's V = 0.194).

Table 6. Gender and Status updates

Gender	Daily	Few times in a year	Once in a month	Once in a week	Twice a week	Total
Female	64	66	38	48	34	250
Male	50	30	16	40	24	160
Total	114	96	54	88	58	410

Table 7. Chi-Square

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.226	4	.124
Likelihood Ratio	—	—	—
Linear-by-Linear Association	—	—	—
N of Valid Cases	410		

Table 8. Symmetric Measures

Measure	Value	Approx. Sig.
Phi	—	—
Cramer's V	.133	.124
N of Valid Cases	410	

Results of quantitative measures to test the hypothesis about the association between gender and update frequency of Islamic status revealed that the association between gender and updates frequency is not statistically significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 410) = 7.226$, $p = .124$. Cramer's V = .133.

Table 9. Correlation between Gratifications obtained and Recommendations

	Gratifications Obtained	Recommendation to Others
Number of Gratifications Obtained		
Spearman's rho	1.000	.202
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.000
N	410	410
Recommendation to Others		
Spearman's rho	.202	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	—
N	410	410

There was a **weak positive and statistically significant relationship** between the number of gratifications obtained and respondents' recommendation to others, $r_s = .202$, $p < .001$, $N = 410$. This indicates that respondents who reported obtaining a greater number of gratifications tended to be somewhat more likely to recommend the use of the Islamic status updates to others. The findings indicate that higher levels of gratifications obtained were associated with greater likelihood of recommending the practice to others.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study offer valuable insights into the dynamics of religious content shared on WhatsApp status, highlighting the distinct roles that demographic and psychographics play in user engagement. Previous studies based on uses and gratifications of religious and faith-based social media has indicated that individuals use social media for religious information, ministering to others, spiritual enlightenment, entertainment, and comfort. It was also found that users frequent engagement in posting, liking, commenting, and sharing religious content use social media for ministering to others (Anwar & Mujib, 2022; Brubaker & Haigh, 2017). For instance, sharing Islamic content on WhatsApp status involves a distinct form of religious or prosocial communication gratification. A user may upload an Islamic message with the intention of reminding, educating, encouraging, or spiritually benefiting others. In this respect, the act of posting becomes more than personal media consumption: it represents an attempt to use the communicative affordances of WhatsApp to serve others and potentially contribute to religious dissemination or *da'wah*. This interpretation is consistent with previous faith-based social-media research identifying "ministering" or communicating religious material to others as an important gratification associated with social-media use (Saleem et al., 2022). Accordingly, the present study extends the focus from gratifications users obtained, to the association of these gratifications with recommendations to others. This distinction is important because posting an Islamic WhatsApp Status represents a purposive communicative act in which users exercise agency over both the selection of content and its distribution. This study therefore enables the researchers to investigate not only what types of Islamic content users post, but also what underlying needs and motivations lead them to post such content (Hornoiu, 2021). As results of current study showed that education of the WhatsApp users influence the content they share and also the frequency of its sharing, while on the other hand gender has no influence as a result all genders' update frequency has not much variance. Social, psychological, informational, spiritual, and interpersonal needs generate motivations for updating religious content on WhatsApp Status. These motivations influence the selection and posting of Islamic content, which may subsequently provide users with anticipated gratifications such as religious learning, spiritual enrichment, self-expression, identity reinforcement, social connection, communication with others, and the perceived opportunity to disseminate religious messages. The framework consequently positions the WhatsApp user as an active and goal-oriented communicator, rather than a passive recipient of religious media content.

The significant association identified between a user's education level and their update frequency suggests that formal education or intellectual engagement may shape their usage patterns. Educated users might possess a higher comfort level with digital expression or a broader repertoire of religious resources, enabling them to share updates more regularly. Conversely, the lack of a significant association between gender and update frequency indicates that the inclination to share Islamic statuses is a shared practice across genders, pointing toward a more egalitarian digital religious space where both men and women actively participate in virtual outreach.

Furthermore, the positive relationship observed between gratifications obtained and recommendations to others underscores the utility of uses and gratifications theory in digital religious communication. When users derive meaningful personal or social benefits from WhatsApp statuses (such as spiritual fulfillment, emotional comfort, or social connectedness) they are inherently more motivated to advocate for and recommend the platform's content to their peers. This organic advocacy acts as a powerful catalyst for the wider dissemination of religious messaging within social networks. Ultimately, these results demonstrate that digital religious expression on messaging apps is driven less by traditional demographic divides like gender and more by intellectual readiness and the personal value users extract from the content.

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