

ONLINE COMMUNICATION AMONGST STUDENT DURING PANDEMIC: A MALAYSIAN AND TURKISH CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Online learning is the new norm suddenly imposed on many of us in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Online communication is crucial for students to be actively involved in the class, not just to communicate with the educators but also to communicate amongst themselves in forming communities of learning typically created through physical classes in pre-Covid-19 times. We created questionnaires through Google Form pertaining to online communication amongst students in both Malay and Turkish languages. While Malaysia has a rich cultural structure with a wide variety of ethnic origins, Turkey acts as a bridge between the European and Asian continents at the western end of the Asian continent. In this study, we consider the geographies of different cultural structures in order to investigate communication behaviors of students in response to the transformation of higher education to online only during Covid-19. The data from the questionnaire is analyzed to highlight communication platforms utilized by students during the pandemic. Although there are differences in both studies of Malaysian and Turkish students in terms of participant number and their year of study, the similarities of online communication platforms preferred by many students such as WhatsApp and Instagram stand out. Interestingly, we see that male students, both Malaysian and Turkish, use more varied and diverse forms of online communications platforms. Additionally, more female students from Turkey are shown to communicate face-to-face with their friends compared to their male counterparts.

Keywords: Communication platforms, Covid-19, Malaysia, Online classes, Turkey

Abstrak

Pembelajaran dalam talian merupakan norma baharu yang harus diamalkan secara mendadak akibat pandemik Covid-19. Komunikasi dalam talian penting bagi memastikan

penglibatan pelajar dalam kelas dapat berjalan dengan sempurna, bukan sahaja untuk berkomunikasi dengan pensyarah tetapi juga untuk berkomunikasi sesama pelajar. Soal selidik berkenaan cara komunikasi dalam talian telah dibentuk dalam bahasa Melayu dan bahasa Turki. Malaysia adalah negara yang kaya dengan kepelbagaian bangsa dan budaya. Manakala, Turki merupakan negara yang menghubungkan Eropah dan Asia dari segi geografi dan budaya. Dalam kajian ini, penyelidik mengambil kira kedudukan geografi dan budaya yang berbeza untuk mengkaji corak komunikasi pelajar dalam mengikuti pembelajaran secara dalam talian sepenuhnya di era pandemik ini. Data dari soal selidik berkenaan komunikasi antara pelajar yang mengikuti kelas dalam talian sewaktu pandemik, telah dianalisis untuk mengenalpasti platform komunikasi yang digunakan oleh pelajar. Walaupun terdapat beberapa perbezaan diantara pelajar Malaysia dan Turki yang menjawab soal selidik ini dari segi bilangan dan tahun pengajian, namun platform WhatsApp dan Instagram adalah platform yang banyak digunakan oleh pelajar kedua-dua institusi. Penyelidik dapati pelajar lelaki di kedua-dua negara menggunakan platform komunikasi yang lebih pelbagai berbanding pelajar perempuan. Lebih ramai pelajar perempuan dari Turki berkomunikasi secara muka-ke-muka dengan rakan mereka berbanding pelajar lelaki.

Kata kunci: Covid-19, Kelas dalam talian, Malaysia, Platform komunikasi, Turki

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Online classes are the new reality for students of higher learning institutes all over the world. Many online platforms can be utilized for communications amongst students as well as educators. Online communications are important not only for students to undertake online classes but also for peer-to-peer interactions that may lead to peer-to-peer learning and the formation of online learning communities (Sun et al. 2020). Alawamleh et al. (2020) has shown that the Covid-19 induced online learning has a negative impact on communications and its effectiveness. This unfortunately leads to a feeling of isolation amongst students due to the distance becoming a barrier to the formation of learning communities.

In order to examine the communication behaviors of university students during the Covid-19 pandemic, a survey was conducted on this subject using online questionnaires to obtain real data from the students of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Faculty of Science & Technology (56.6% are from the Applied Physics Department) in Malaysia and the Istanbul University Physics Department in Turkey. A total of 159 students voluntarily answered the questionnaire at the Faculty of Science and Technology at UKM. These are first-year

students from the same class. On the other hand, the questionnaire was answered by 39 students in their 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year from the Department of Physics at Istanbul University.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The questionnaire in Figure 1 is an updated version of a physical questionnaire collected and analyzed before the Covid-19 pandemic (Ratanarajah et al. 2020, Rahman et al. 2020). Due to the shift to exclusively online classes, more focus was given to online communication mediums serving as platforms for student interactions and communications. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the first year student answering the questionnaire has never met or even been in a physical class together at their respective universities. Therefore, it is important to understand their online communication habits in order to structure more effective online education options in the future.

At UKM Faculty of Science & Technology the online questionnaire was given in 2021 to first year students taking the online course STQM1913 Mathematical Techniques and they were given 2 weeks to complete the Google Form. All the 159 students from UKM Faculty of Science & Technology that answered the questionnaire in Figure 1, have never met each other.

In 2021, when all courses in the Physics Department of Istanbul University were taught online, the questionnaire was translated into Turkish, see Figure 2, and was sent to all Physics Department students by e-mail. In the questionnaire, a multiple-choice question was asked to express their online communication preferences. The questionnaire was voluntarily answered by a total of 39 students including 6 freshman that have never met face-to-face before. Therefore, the non-freshman students may have met each other in physical classes and through campus activities during pre-Covid-19 era.

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Cara berhubung dengan rakan anda (boleh pilih lebih dari 1 cara berhubung) *

- WhatsApp (WA)
- Telegram (Tele)
- Microsoft Teams (MsT)
- Google Meets (GM)
- Zooms (Z)
- Skype (S)
- Facebook (FB)
- Webex
- WeChat (WC)
- Instagram(IG)
- LINE
- Messenger(M)
- Lain-lain

Figure 1: The Malay version of the online questionnaire answered by 159 UKM students. The translation of the first line is: Choose the medium you use to communicate with your friends (you can choose more than one option).

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Arkadaşlarınızla çoğunlukla nasıl iletişim kurmaktasınız?

Yüz yüze görüşme

Telefonda konuşma

WhatsApp

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

Telegram

Zoom meeting

Diğer...

Figure 2: The Turkish version of the online questionnaire answered by 39 Istanbul University Physics Department students. The translation of the first line is: How do you communicate with your friends?

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most students use more than one communication medium. Therefore Figure 3 highlights that all UKM respondents communicate using WhatsApp, and most use Telegrams (71.07%) as well as Microsoft Teams (64.15%) which is used at UKM by many lecturers to teach online classes. This highlights that students interact with each other outside classes as well. Other popular online communication mediums are Instagram at 38.36% and Google Meet at 23.90%.

From Figure 4, it seems that WhatsApp is also dominant at 86.84% usage amongst the respondents from Istanbul University, Physics Department. However since only 15.7% of the respondents are newly registered students for the 2020-2021 academic term, most of the students have met physically before. Thus the options of speaking on the telephone (telefonda konuşma) and meeting physically (yüz yüze görüşme) are amongst the most popular choices at 55.26% and 47.37% respectively. Instagram leads amongst the online social media platform with 23.68%, followed by Twitter.

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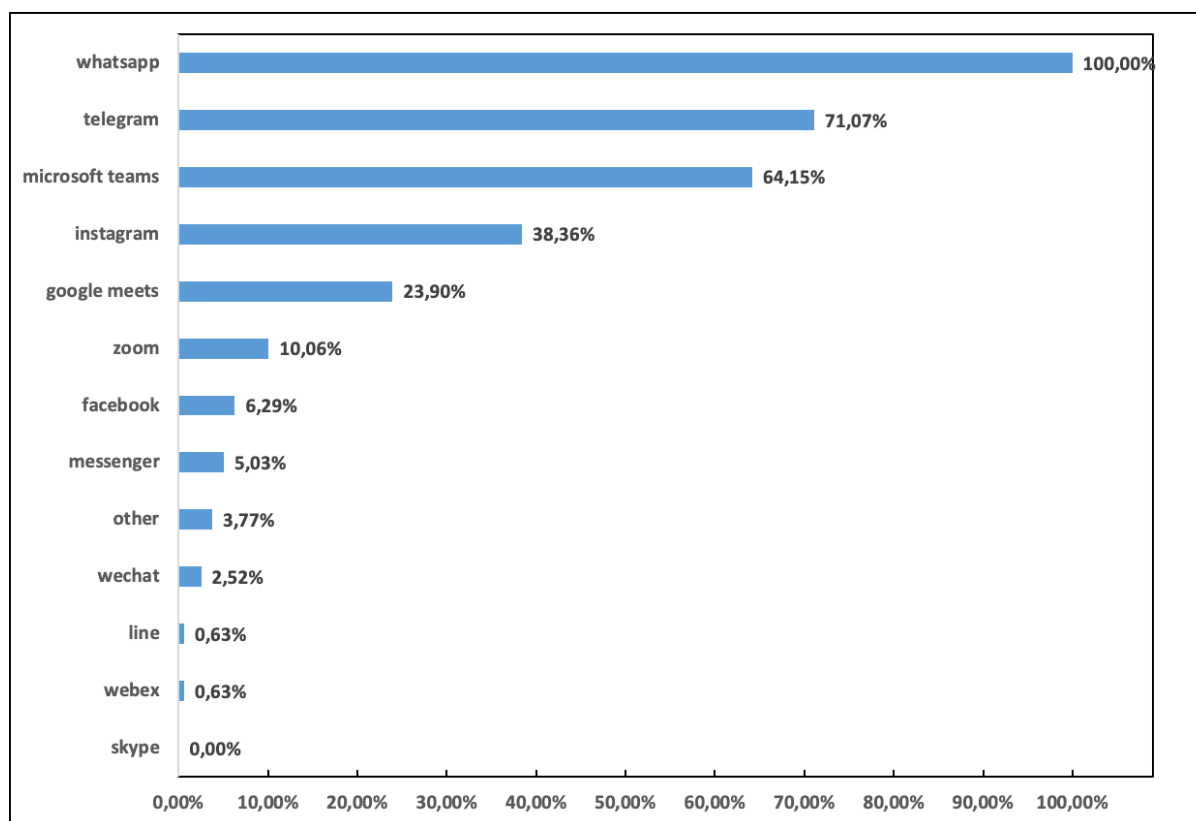
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Figure 3: Communication medium utilized by the 159 UKM Faculty of Science & Technology students in Malaysia.

The Telegram option is not as popular amongst the Istanbul University Physics Department students compared to the UKM Faculty of Science & Technology students. This is most probably due to the popularity of Telegram in Malaysia generally when compared to Turkey. Since Zoom is the platform used by lecturers at Istanbul University, it is used slightly more (13.16%) compared to the UKM Faculty of Science & Technology students (10.06%). Microsoft Teams is more popular among UKM students (ranked third) probably because it has an inbuilt system that allows students to communicate with each other outside of the lecture hour. It is also interesting to note that none of the Istanbul University respondent uses Facebook but 6.29% of the UKM respondents use Facebook.

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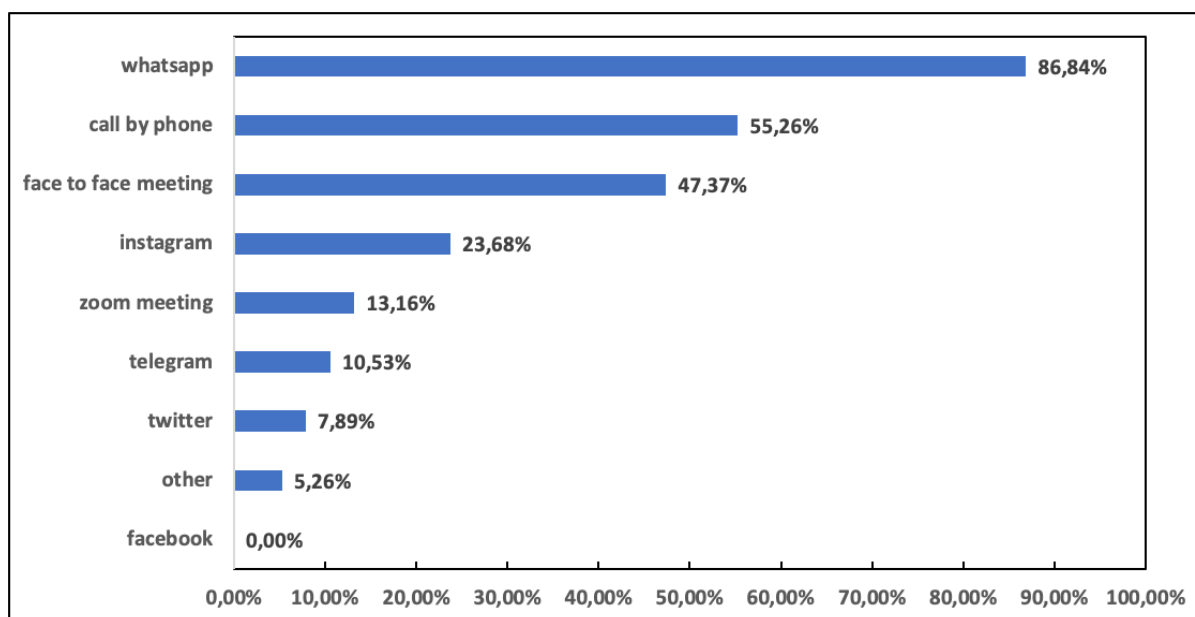
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Figure 4: Communication medium utilized by the 38 Istanbul University Physics Department students in Turkey.

Taking into account Figures 3 and 4, it was concluded that WhatsApp and Instagram are the common medium used by the respondents. In the next section, further analysis according to the gender of the respondents is performed.

3.1 Deeper analysis: communication platform choice by gender

Gender has been shown to lead to different perceptions (Mohamed et al. 2019) and choice of communication platform (Dunaetz et al. 2015, Sun et al. 2020). The respondents from UKM Faculty of Science & Technology are 77.99% female (Figure 5), while the respondents from Istanbul University Physics Department are 68.42% female (Figure 8). Firstly this may be due to the nature of respondents, females have generally been shown to be more willing to answer questionnaires (Smith 2008). However, in Malaysia it is generally known that there are more female undergraduates even in STEM subjects (Tienxhi 2017). Turkey currently has a much better representation of women in STEM (Saglamer et al. 2018).

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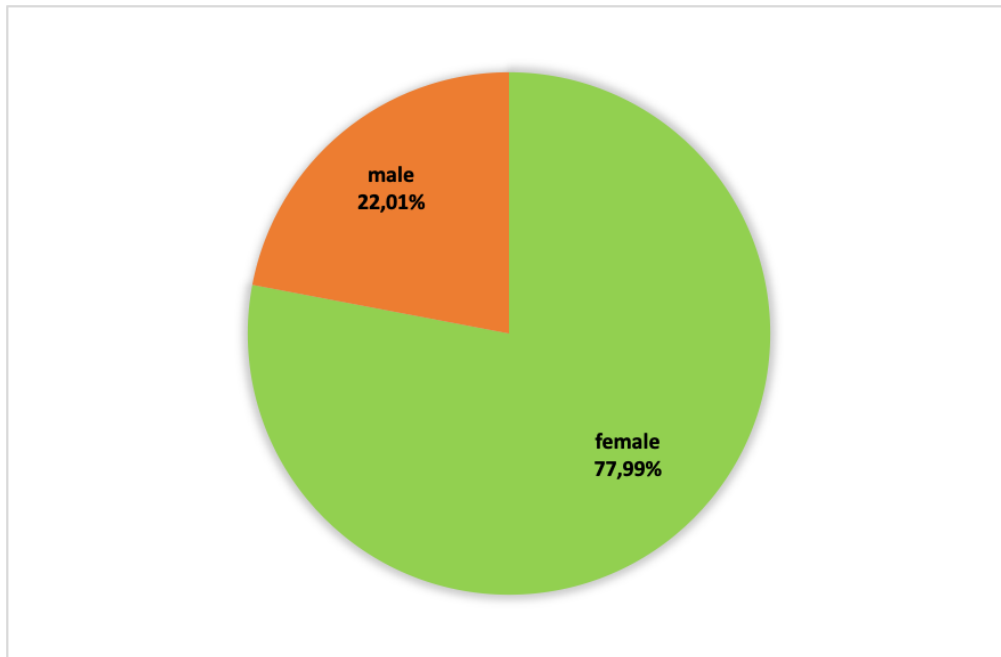


Figure 5: The percentage of female and male respondents amongst the UKM Faculty of Science & Technology students in Malaysia.

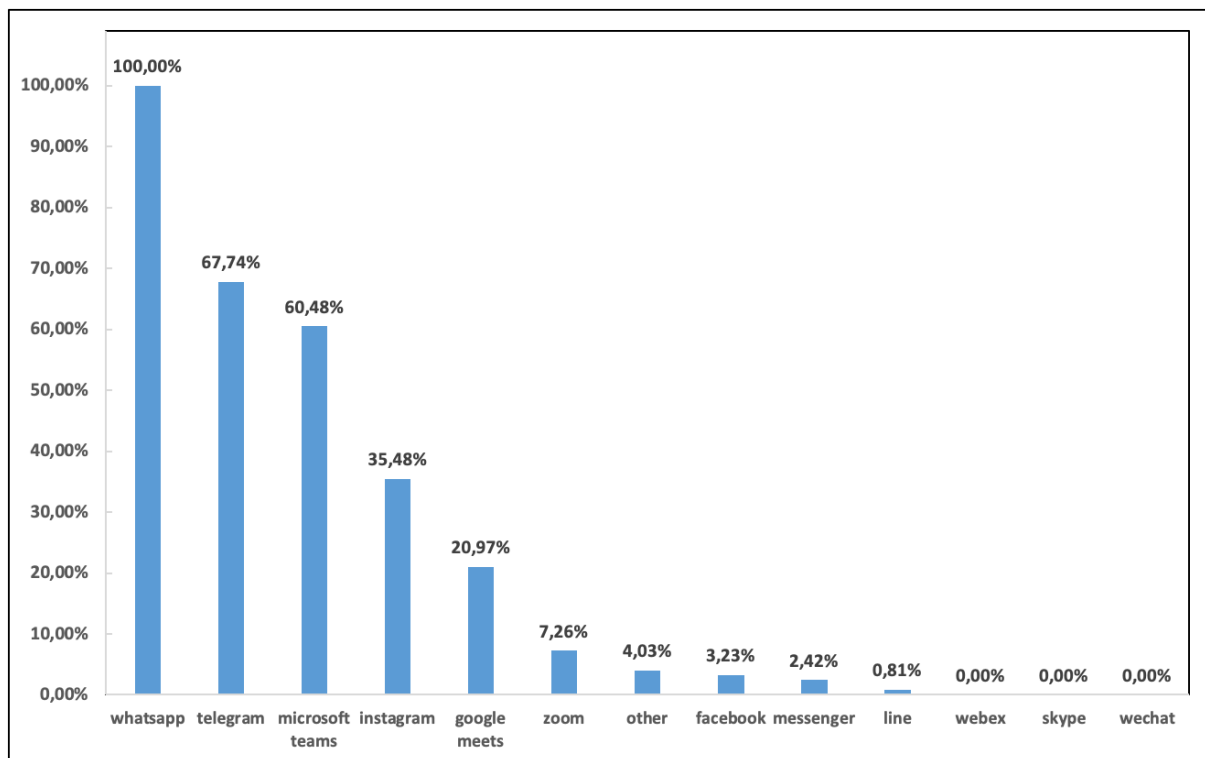


Figure 6: The percentage of online communication platform preferences of female respondents from UKM Faculty of Science & Technology students in Malaysia.

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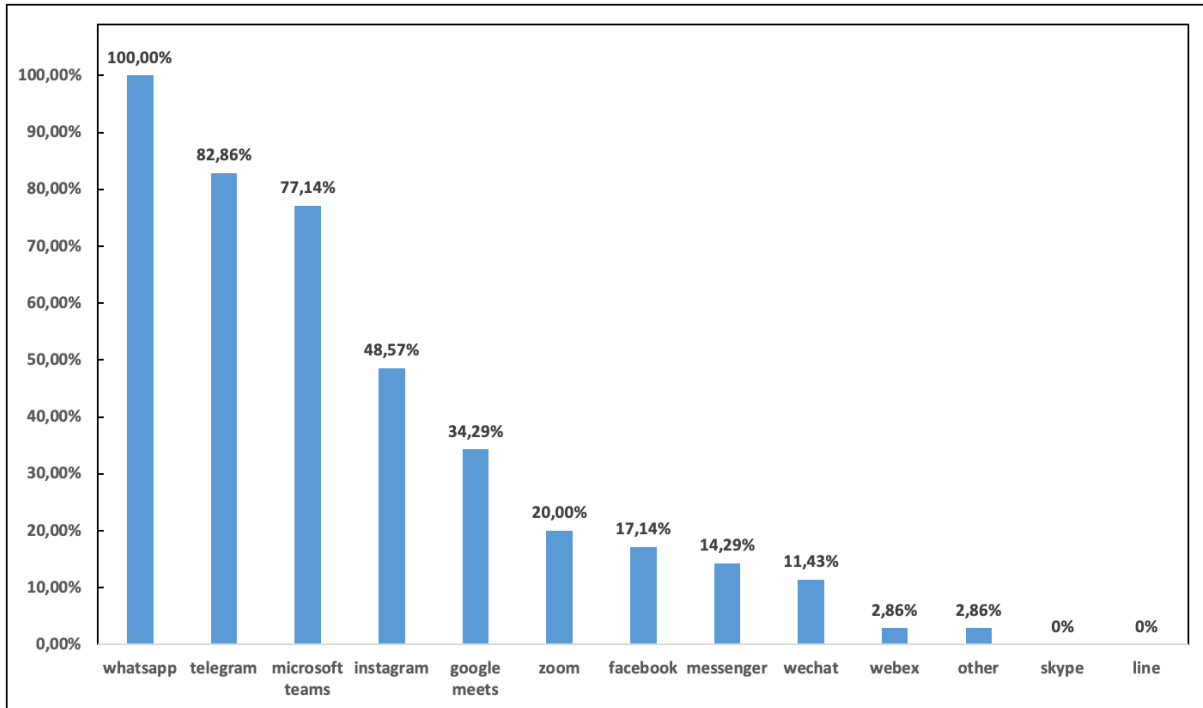


Figure 7: The percentage of online communication platform preferences of male respondents from UKM Faculty of Science & Technology students in Malaysia.

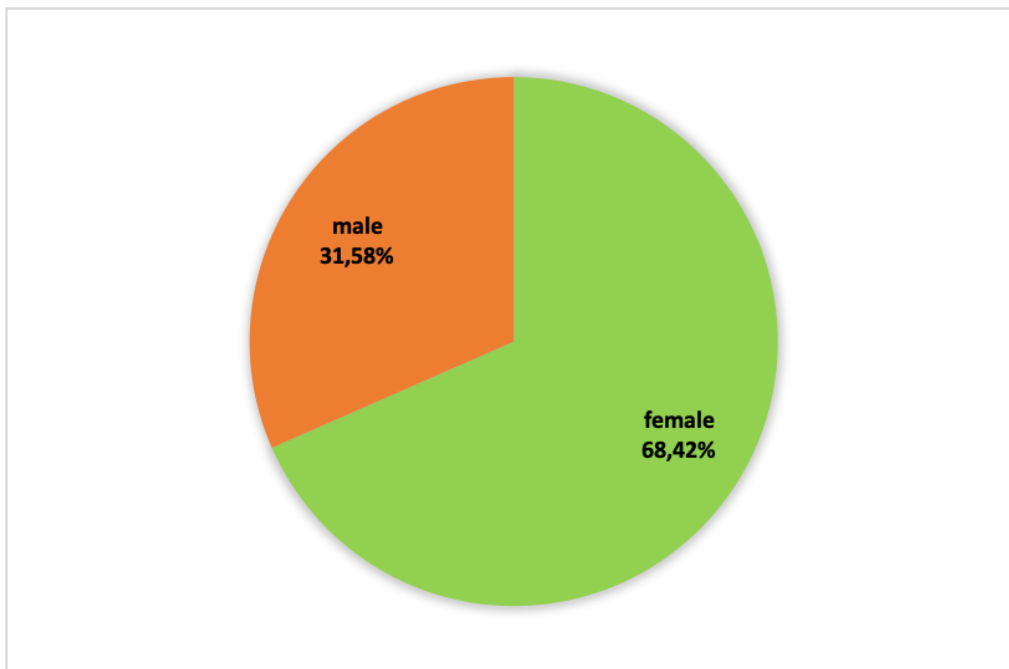


Figure 8: The percentage of female and male respondents amongst the Istanbul University

Physics Department students in Turkey.

In Figures 6 and 7 preferences of female and male students of UKM Faculty of Science & Technology in terms of communication platforms are highlighted. Even though all students used WhatsApp but the communication choice amongst male students is more varied with higher percentages for all other communication platforms. In fact 14.59% of the female students from UKM Faculty of Science & Technology stated that they only use WhatsApp (given the choices in Figure 1) as opposed to only 8.57% of the males that use WhatsApp only.

This trend is also observed in the Istanbul University Physics Department students, where the communication choice amongst male students are more varied with higher percentages for all online communication platforms including WhatsApp as seen in Figures 9 and 10. Only when it comes to face-to-face meetings are the females ranked higher than the males. More female respondents from Istanbul University Physics Department communicate with their friends by meeting up with them (face-to-face meeting at 50% percent) compared to males (41.67%). Thus for Istanbul University Physics Department students we conclude that male online communication is more varied but the females prefer face-to-face communication. Perhaps this is in line with Dunaetz et al. (2015) which states that males are generally more goal oriented in their communication (online communication may be enough for this) while women tend to be more communal and relationship oriented (real meeting solidifies the relationship).

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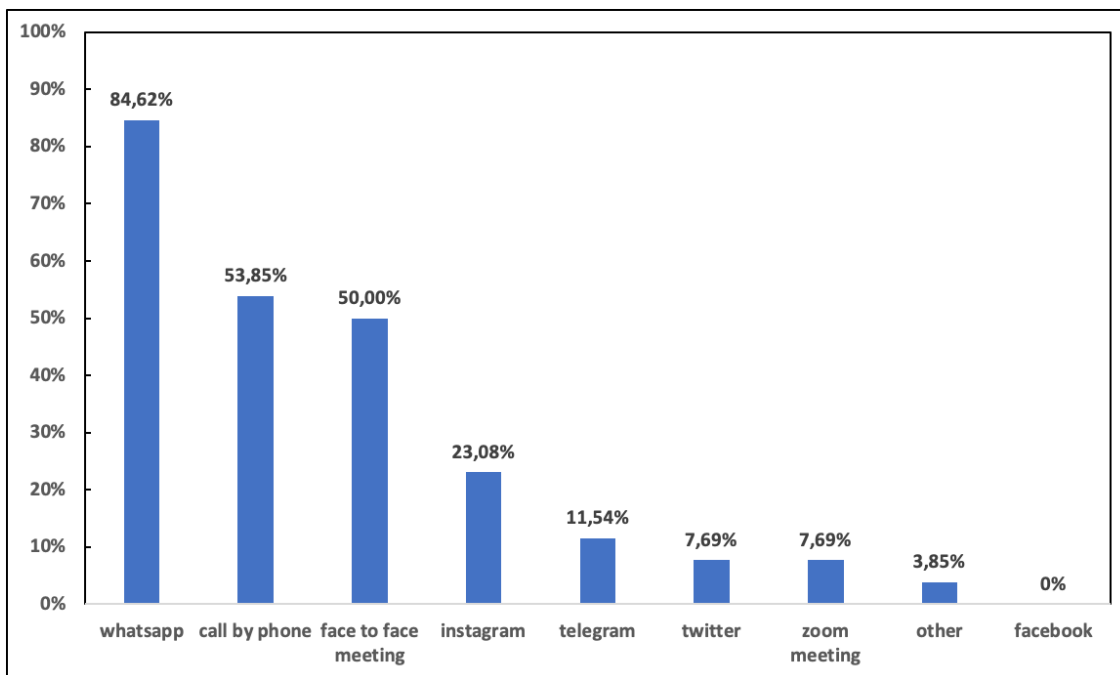


Figure 9: The percentage of online communication platform preferences of female respondents from Istanbul University Physics Department students in Turkey

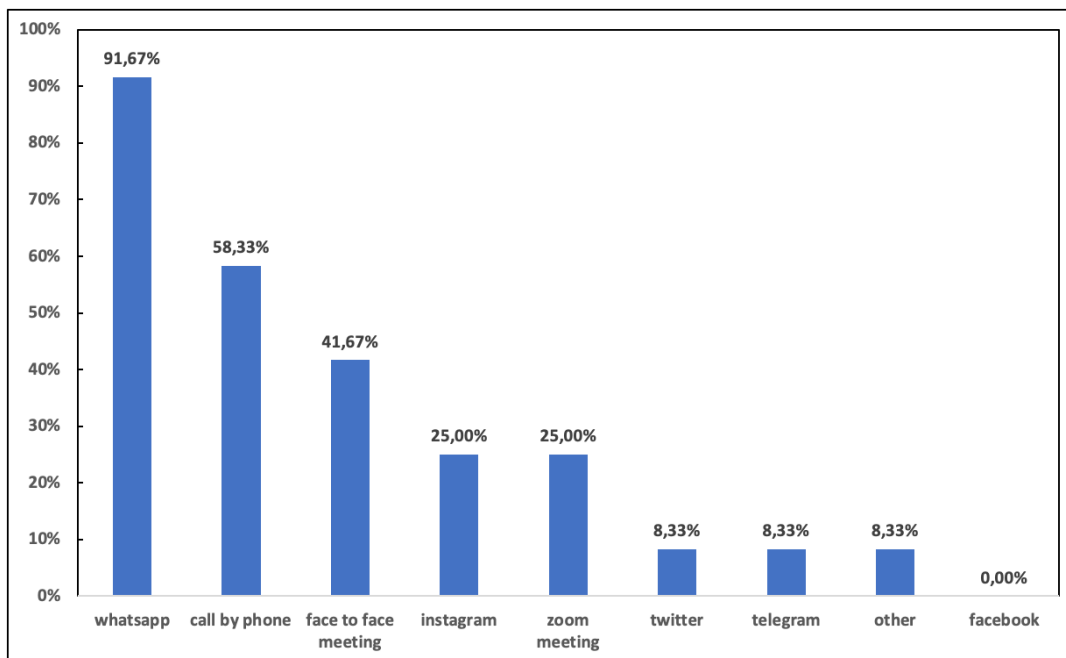


Figure 10: The percentage of online communication platform preferences of male respondents from Istanbul University Physics Department students in Turkey

4.0 CONCLUSION

An online questionnaire via Google Form was produced to investigate students' chosen platform for online interactions. The survey was done during the pandemic in Malaysia and Turkey and it has been analyzed to highlight the various patterns of communication. Despite the differences in outcomes of the responses from Malaysian and Turkish students, the similarities are note-worthy. Firstly, we find that online communication platforms preferred by many students such as WhatsApp and Instagram (which are generally not influenced by online teaching platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom) are similar. Moreover, we find that a general trend for both Malaysia and Turkey is that the male students have more varied online communication preferences. The females from Istanbul University Physics Department meet face-to-face more than males and we suspect if this question was asked to the Malaysian student this may also be the case (due to Covid-19 travel restrictions in Malaysia and taking into account the fact that they have never met each other, this question was not asked). Furthermore, when online and face-to-face communication are compared in various aspects, the evaluation of students' online communication usage preferences will contribute to better understanding and improving the disadvantages of online education. It is important to understand these various trends of communications in order to encourage formation of online learning communities leading to more effective online learning. Many aspects of online learning preferences which is the new norm that came into our lives with Covid-19, its advantages and disadvantages are still not fully explored. Between the two countries an interesting future project would be to predict and compare complex results of the new norm from a technological point of view.

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