



PRIMARY RESEARCH

What's up with Whatsapp? A review of its role in students groups

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Keywords

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Abstract

This study aims to contribute to better enhance the experience of students in WhatsApp groups to utilize its benefits and ensure that students are well-informed about critical information. In this research, an online questionnaire is provided to university students that use academic WhatsApp groups in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data about their experience with WhatsApp. The survey received a total of 34 responses. The results showed that inconsistencies in sending updates, message flooding, and disorganized group chats lead to more students missing them. The survey showed results on which time students' prefer to receive these updates or check on WhatsApp. Furthermore, it's important to implement rules in student group chats while keeping these issues identified in mind. The survey lacked on why some issues occur for these students to miss some messages, and it also received a few responses. With that, the results may not be as accurate as the information gathered is limited.

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INTRODUCTION

Interactions between students and teachers do not only occur through classroom environments but also through the use of digital technologies. An example would be mobile instant messaging applications which are constantly used in education today. They serve a purpose by allowing students to communicate easily with each other and their lecturers outside of class hours. This is important for situations such as students needing clarification, group projects with other students, and the occasional reminders for upcoming events. WhatsApp, a widely used messaging application, has become a primary choice for students for this reason.

The purpose of this study is to determine the role of WhatsApp as a medium of communication for university student groups. It will focus on the students' experiences and their thoughts on using WhatsApp when receiving important messages such as university announcements, events, news, and reminders and how WhatsApp could be better implemented in their student groups to suit their wants and needs.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are as follows:

- To determine the benefits of using WhatsApp for student groups.
- To identify the relation between the number of group chats a student is in and their performance using the group.

Research Questions

Following are the research questions of the study:

- How useful are WhatsApp groups in informing university students about academic activities?
- What effect does the frequency of messages have on the performance of university students?
- What are the most effective ways to communicate information regarding events to university students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will elaborate on topics such as Out-Of-Class Communication (OOC), mobile instant messaging tools, the advantages and disadvantages of What-

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sApp in student group chats, as well as messenger overload. The concept of OOC is defined as the communication between instructors and their students beyond class hours. These actions can range from technology-mediated exchanges to casual interactions (Kuryan & Voronina, 2021). OOC has been identified as a “primary agent of college culture” because of its important influence on college students (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010). It promotes social bonding and learning, which can lead to an increase in student motivation, involvement, and commitment in the classroom (Nkhoma et al., 2018). This allows students to clarify unclear concepts and theories from the class activities outside of scheduled meetings, either by sending emails, messages, or face-to-face interactions (Goldman, Goodboy, & Bolkan, 2016).

Without the help of e-learning tools or online exchanges in OOC, some issues follow. Students are more likely to violate deadline submissions (Bhat, Raju, Bikramjit, & D'Souza, 2018; Jam, Sheikh, et al., 2011) and be unclear about instructions or information, resulting in constant reminders and clarifications from the teacher during class hours as well as affecting the class performance (Nkhoma et al., 2018). Using technologies would greatly benefit students in this aspect which can include the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Instant Messaging (IM). LMS are online learning platforms that provide an interactive and responsive learning environment where the students can receive learning materials, and it can also facilitate communication between students and their instructors (Jam, Donia, Raja, & Ling, 2017; Turnbull, Chugh, & Luck, 2020), such as Google Classroom, Blackboard, Moodle, and more. At the same time, IM and social networks serve a variety of social, informational, and academic purposes. When it comes to these two technologies, students prefer to use the latter as they show little interest in contributing to the forums from LMS platforms which negatively impacts their participation (Deng & Tavares, 2013). The use of IM tools is more favorable to students because these are used in their daily life and are quicker to use than asynchronous tools like LMS (Conde, Rodríguez-Sedano, Rodríguez-Lera, Gutiérrez-Fernández, & Guerrero-Higueras, 2021).

When it comes to effective communication and easy access to information, the use of mobile technologies has been widely adopted. Its mobility has been a motivating factor in using mobile instant messaging applications (Farooq, Akhtar, Hijazi, & Khan, 2010; Wu, Lu, Gong, & Gupta, 2017). It allows quick and easy connections between people with minimal cost and an unlimited supply of available resources, services, and information. The devel-

opment of these digital technologies has impacted the way people communicate. Universities must implement these technologies in a way that will benefit students in an academic setting (da Silva Araújo, 2017).

Information needs to be shared easily among individuals and groups to improve the quality of learning (Don Tapscott, 2014). WhatsApp is one of the numerous applications that supports this. It is the most popular messenger app globally, with approximately two billion active users as of 2021 (Statista, 2021). WhatsApp is an example of a Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) application. MIMs allows users to send and receive text messages, images, videos, geographic information, and more (Jam, Khan, Zaidi, & Muzaffar, 2011; Safieddine & Nakhoul, 2021). Immediate access to these contents is beneficial to both learners and teachers. It enables the teacher or the administrator to deliver learning materials or updates in small chunks, making it less overwhelming and easier for information to be digested (So, 2016).

Using Whatsapp groups helps save a lot of time in managing the class, communicating and sending information to the students, and overall class efficiency. It improves performance in learning activities as well as allows easy and quick access to learning materials. Interactions between the students and the teachers are incredibly important, but due to language barriers, time constraints, or the inability to communicate with all or most of the students in the given class time, there is less communication and participation (Mazhar, Jam, & Anwar, 2012; Gan & Balakrishnan, 2017).

In some cases where emails are being used, communication is not as effective for the reason that students don't check their emails on a daily basis in comparison to an instant messenger application such as WhatsApp. Additionally, it brings a positive social atmosphere creating a sense of community through the use of WhatsApp groups. With WhatsApp's low cost and privacy, it has become a prime choice and is used widely among teachers and students (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014).

WhatsApp groups can contribute to the relationship between the lecturers and students. The students may find it to be more convenient and comfortable to approach their teachers. However, different challenges could arise from these group chats as well. One challenge would be the use of informal language and conversations unrelated to the subject or their studies. During OOC communication, another academic challenge would be the teachers' availability. Students' expectations of a quick and easy solution can discourage them from working on the task themselves (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014).

As the use of WhatsApp has become a crucial part of learning, the case of messenger overload can occur. Messenger overload is defined as excessive communication via messaging applications (Shin & Shin, 2016). This can lead to burnout and technostress (Cho, Lee, & Kim, 2019). Excessive use of MIMs does not negatively affect productivity; however, it can diminish one's quality of life (Lee, Lee, & Suh, 2016), resulting in mobile messenger fatigue and a decrease in performance (Elyana, Ajija, Sridadi, Setyawati, & Emur, 2020). Receiving noncommercial messages, which are messages from friends, acquaintances, family, and colleagues, has a greater impact on mobile messenger fatigue compared to commercial messages. This can then increase avoidance of using mobile messaging applications (Shin & Shin, 2016).

Through WhatsApp, communication has been easier for students in approaching their teachers about subjects, topics, and clarifications in comparison to face-to-face interactions beyond class hours. With this MIM comes multiple advantages and challenges. And excessive use, along with the challenges that come with using WhatsApp, can lead to messages being overlooked and mobile shunning. Being aware of the benefits that come with using WhatsApp and its implications, this research will be conducted among university students working on answering the research hypothesis, which is "Students who receive frequent messages from

multiple group chats tend to miss important updates."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design that has been followed for this study is an experimental research design as the hypothesis of this study asks about the relationship between the number of group chats and the frequency of messages have on the students' ability to check their WhatsApp for university updates. In order to answer the research questions and hypothesis, an online questionnaire using Google Forms was created to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The purposive sampling technique was used in gathering data. This online survey has been sent to multiple university students who use WhatsApp groups in their academic life.

Participants

In sending the questionnaire to the participants, it was mentioned that their personal information, which includes their names, will not be mentioned in this research paper. In total, the online questionnaire gathered 34 responses. The majority of the respondents were female, with a 64.7% rate, while the remaining 35.3% were male. When asked about the nationality of the respondents, most of them were Filipino with a 94.1% rate, while the rest were Pakistani with a 5.9% rate.

Data

TABLE 1. Summary of the respondents

Response Summary	Count-34	Percentage
Gender		
Female	22	64.7
Male	12	35.3
Nationality		
Filipino	32	94.1
Pakistani	2	5.9

TABLE 2. Following are the responses to the short quantitative survey

Survey Queries	Responses
1. How many WhatsApp group chats are you currently in?	%
1-2	20.6
3-4	47.1
5-6	17.6
7+	14.7
2. What do these academic WhatsApp groups help you with?	%
Announcements and events	97.1
Communication with professors	79.4
Communication with other students	52.9

Table 2 Continue.....

3. How useful do you think these WhatsApp groups have been so far in your academics, on a scale of 1 (useless) to 10 (extremely useful)?	%
10	20.6
9	17.6
8	29.4
7	11.8
6	11.8
5	2.9
4	0
3	2.9
2	2.9
1	0
4. How often do you receive updates on these WhatsApp groups?	%
Everyday	20.6
Once or twice a week	79.4
5. Do you feel you stay updated with all the critical updates through these WhatsApp groups?	%
Yes	41.2
Sometimes	52.9
No	5.9
6. Have you ever missed any critical updates on these WhatsApp groups?	%
Yes	23.5
Sometimes	50
No	26.5
7. What is your most preferred time slot to receive academic updates on these WhatsApp groups?	%
8:00 am to 10:00 am	11.8
10:00 am to 12:00 pm	20.6
12:00 pm to 2:00 pm	29.4
2:00 pm to 4:00 pm	26.5
4:00 pm to 6:00 pm	8.8
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm	2.9
8. Do you support & recommend WhatsApp groups as an effective medium, to be continued academic updates for students?	%
Yes	88.2
No	11.8
9. What is your preferred mode of academic communication and updates?	%
WhatsApp Groups	67.6
Facebook / Messenger	11.8
Discord	11.8
Emails	5.9
Student Portal	2.9
Microsoft Teams	2.9
Instagram Stories	2.9

The following chart represents the common themes in the students' responses on why they prefer using WhatsApp or

not as an effective medium for academic updates

TABLE 3. Common themes in the students' responses

Theme	n	Sample Comments
Convenience	5	"Yes, because it provides an easier way of communicating, even if it's for academics or not. You can pretty much use WhatsApp for anything, and almost everyone uses it."
Accessibility	7	"Yes, I do recommend WhatsApp groups as an effective medium for academic updates because it has the easiest access for most people. Everyone has a mobile number, but not everyone has a social media account, and for that reason, WhatsApp is the most reliable app to gather and have access to all the needed people in the group. It also lessens the distraction of people's unnecessary activities that are present in other social media apps and focuses only on messages and important updates."
Quick	3	"Any message group that can give me instantaneous notifications on my phone would be very good."
Formal	5	"It is a professional platform for business matters. Also, Whatsapp messages are faster than email." "I think it's meant to be used for important things. I don't really use it for social purposes. It's a lot more formal and convenient to check for updates in WhatsApp rather than other mediums like Facebook, which makes it fitting to use for university stuff."
Cluttered	3	"I do believe that WhatsApp is a useful medium for notifying students with updates and news, but it may not be as effective as platforms like discord which allows various channels to be made within servers that can be about specific topics only. This helps keep things organized while on Whatsapp; it is required to scroll and go through every chat in order to find a specific chat/discussion we are looking for." "Updates can be buried by conversation if allowed."

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the first question in the survey, the students were asked about the number of group chats they were in. A majority of the respondents were in between 3 to 4 groups on WhatsApp with a 47.1% rate. Since this was quite a relevant question in order to answer the hypothesis, it's difficult to determine whether it would be answered as the majority of the responses fell in the middle range.

The second and third questions were about the students' motivation and purpose for using the group chats and how beneficial it has been in fulfilling those goals. More than half of the respondents marked each listed purpose as their own. The first item is their use of WhatsApp in receiving updates on events and announcements from the university being ranked first. While the second item ranked was their communication with professors and the last with the use of WhatsApp for group work or doubt clearing with other students. Using a 10-point Likert scale, the respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of these groups in achieving these purposes. A majority of the students rated it useful (6 and above) with a rate of 91.2%.

Then, a question of how often they receive these updates is followed after. Three choices were given: every day, once or twice a week, or once a month. No respondents answered "once a month," while 79.4% answered receiving them a few

times in the week, and 20.6% answered "every day." Afterward, they were asked whether they felt that they've stayed updated through using these group chats and if they've ever missed any critical updates. Although most have answered with "Yes" and "Sometimes," with 41.2% and 52.9% on staying updated, only 26.5% answered "No" that they haven't missed any critical updates with these WhatsApp groups. Most of the students who receive these announcements one or twice a week tend to miss them over the students who receive them every day.

When asked what their preferred timing is when receiving these updates, a majority picked between 10 am to 4 pm, with all three choices following closely with 20.6%, 29.4%, and 26.5%. Due to the number of few responses, it is difficult to determine which time slot is best suited for sending these updates.

The last few questions on the questionnaire were about students' preference for using WhatsApp as the main tool for receiving academic updates. However, 88.2% of the respondents answered that they support and recommend it when asked what their preferred mode of communication was not everyone who voted "Yes" chose it, with WhatsApp groups having a rate of 67.6%. When asked why they support its usage or not, 29 of the respondents answered.

The students who voted "Yes" explained how it's more

convenient and accessible, especially since WhatsApp only needs a phone number which most have, rather than a social media account. They have also explained how quick it is to receive notifications and that they see and use it mainly for business and university matters. While the remaining 7 students who voted "Yes" listed other platforms as their preferred medium, such as Facebook, Messenger, Discord, emails, and Microsoft Teams.

For the students who voted "No," which only comprised 11.8% of the responses, they explained how WhatsApp could get too cluttered with other messages, which can affect the number of students that will actually see the updates. They have also expressed their preference for other platforms such as making use Instagram Stories, Student Portal LMS, and Discord to receive academic updates and announcements.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the use of MIMs, specifically WhatsApp, has become prevalent, especially in the academic setting. It is especially helpful during OOC to provide students with clarification, announcements, and other information easily. In this study, the impact of using WhatsApp groups was better understood. It has helped students communicate with each other and their professors and allowed them to receive updates easily. Through this research, it was found that there were no significant differences in students who are in mul-

iple group chats compared to those who are in a few when missing updates. However, the timings in which students receive them play a major role in this, as students who receive updates inconsistently tend to miss them. The survey conducted showed how using student group chats on WhatsApp could be better enhanced. One approach could be to implement rules so the group chat will be kept organized and ensure the students won't miss certain critical updates by discussing and keeping in mind the timings they usually check on their WhatsApp.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, however, has a few limitations. Due to the small sample size of respondents, the results of the survey are not as accurate as they could be. Seeing that there is limited data, the relationship between messenger overload in group chats and the students' performance could not be identified properly. Furthermore, an additional question that could be added was to ask the students exactly why they missed those updates. The current information on the possibility of why students have missed these were taken from the question of whether they supported the use of WhatsApp or not; a specific question on why they missed these could have had a greater impact on this study. Nevertheless, this research could be useful for teachers, professors, tutors, and students that use WhatsApp for academic purposes.

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