WhatsApp an Emerging Medium of Social Interaction: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The study at hand is an attempt to find out dominant perception about use of WhatsApp among university students. It explores its ease of use, effectiveness and potential to enhance social interactions and distance learning. The study, using a positivist paradigm, employed a descriptive, quantitative and survey-based design. The population was made up of 320 sixth-semester BS students from three universities (International Islamic University Islamabad, Quaid-e-Azam University and Bahria University Islamabad) who were majoring in psychology and economics department. Using Siegle's table (2015), a sample of 175 students was chosen in order to provide a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. The use of stratified random sampling definite accurate population representation. Mean, frequency and percentage were the descriptive statistics used to examine data from a self-developed questionnaire. The study concludes that WhatsApp fulfils both emotive and cognitive needs, serving as a valuable tool for social connection and education. Highly favoured by university students, it promotes socializing, knowledge exchange and classroom involvement, augmenting peer-to-peer education. While WhatsApp's widespread use in Pakistan highlights its importance for communication and information sharing, users must consider social, cultural and ethical implications. It facilitates resource access and academic organization, but ethical use is necessary for a positive social impact. To maximize benefits, universities may integrate WhatsApp into official communication channels, educational policymakers may develop usage guidelines and teachers may create interactive learning experiences. Institutions may conduct workshops on effective communication, digital well-being and cybersecurity. Students may be educated on responsible use to understand the impact of their online presence and maintain appropriate boundaries between academic and social interactions. Encouraging students to form study groups on WhatsApp can enhance understanding, build community and make learning more dynamic and engaging.

Keywords: WhatsApp, Emerging Medium, Social Interaction, Distance Learning

INTRODUCTION

The world of education has drastically changed as a result of digital communication technology, especially when it comes to distant learning. WhatsApp is one of the most popular tools for student communication among these technologies. WhatsApp, which is well-known for its easy-to-use interface and broad accessibility, has ingrained itself into students' daily lives, easing both personal and professional conversations. As educational institutions work to improve the online learning experience, it is becoming more and more crucial to comprehend WhatsApp's function in distance learning contexts (Abbas et al., 2019).

Students can pursue their education through distance learning without having to physically attend a typical classroom. Students can study from different locations because to the flexibility and accessibility this style of learning offers. But it also has drawbacks, especially when it comes to encouraging social contact. Online learning can occasionally feel lonely, in contrast to

traditional classroom settings where students can readily interact with peers and teachers. WhatsApp presents a promising solution to this problem by offering a social media and communication platform (Basar et al., 2021).

According to Haleem et al. (2022) students may rapidly and effectively exchange voice notes, photos, videos and messages via WhatsApp. Students who might normally feel alone in an online learning environment might feel more connected thanks to its group chat feature. WhatsApp can assist in bridging the gap between students and their teachers or peers by providing real-time communication, which will enhance the interaction and engagement of online learning.

Even if WhatsApp is used by many people, there is still much to learn about how students view it as a social interaction tool for distant learning. The majority of previous studies have concentrated on its application in collaborative learning and academic communication. However, the specific influence of WhatsApp on students' social interactions, emotional support and sense of belonging in a distance learning context has not been thoroughly explored. This indicates a huge vacuum in the available data (Lee et al., 2023).

Knowing how students view WhatsApp for distance learning reveals both its advantages and disadvantages. WhatsApp facilitates quick and simple communication, enabling collaboration and information sharing between educators and students. But, because of the continuous notifications, it can also be distracting and might not be the best option for in-depth, in-person conversations. It is imperative that educators and policymakers weigh the benefits and drawbacks of WhatsApp in order to optimize remote learning through effective use while reducing its disadvantages (Yeboah & Nyagorme, 2022).

According to Sivakumar et al. (2023) social media has influenced every aspect of life and it is also having a significant impact on higher education, changing the way that instructors and students communicate and exchange knowledge. Social media sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter provide creative means of collaboration, communication and resource access for education. Social media is utilized in higher education to support traditional classroom instruction, foster virtual learning communities and increase student participation. The goal of using social media into teaching methods is to increase student accessibility, engagement and interactivity.

The usage of social media in higher education has advantages, but there are drawbacks as well. Digital diversions, privacy issues, and the spread of false information are just a few of the problems that need to be carefully managed. Furthermore, the way social media is used and the unique requirements of teachers and students might affect how effective it is as a teaching tool. Developing methods that optimize social media's potential while tackling its drawbacks requires a thorough understanding of the benefits and constraints of the platform in higher education. In order to shed light on how social media can improve learning in higher education settings, this study attempts to investigate these characteristics (Sharma & Behl, 2022).

It is important to comprehend WhatsApp's effects on social dynamics, communication patterns and individual behaviours given its explosive growth as a dominating social media platform. Despite its extensive use, academic research that thoroughly examines WhatsApp's influence on contemporary social interactions is clearly lacking. Previous research frequently concentrates on particular facets or demographics, neglecting to investigate wider consequences and possible avenues for enhancement. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a thorough examination of WhatsApp's influence on social dynamics to fill this research gap. Objectives of the study were (1) to analyze the perception of the students about the use of WhatsApp. (2) to determine for what purpose WhatsApp is mainly used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have examined the use of WhatsApp as a communication tool in the classroom, emphasizing how it can improve social and academic relationships. The main reasons why WhatsApp is so well-liked among students are its user-friendliness, instant messaging features and group chat feature, which helps to build a sense of community (Oguguo et al., 2020). The usage of WhatsApp for learning. Students and teachers may communicate quickly and effectively through WhatsApp groups, which facilitates knowledge sharing and collaborative learning. WhatsApp is a useful tool for raising academic engagement since it enables students to communicate educational resources, clear up questions and plan group activities (Suarez-Lantaron et al., 2022).

A vital element of successful learning is social connection. However, because there are fewer in-person interactions, students frequently experience isolation in distance learning settings. Students' motivation and happiness in online learning can be greatly impacted by social engagement. WhatsApp's ability to facilitate constant social engagement can be quite helpful in reducing feelings of loneliness (Ajani & Khoalenyane, 2023). According to Mbukusa (2018) the capacity of WhatsApp to facilitate social connection in remote learning is becoming more widely acknowledged. Students can communicate informally and support one another by using WhatsApp, which helps them create bonds. For distant learners to feel a feeling of community and belonging, this informal communication is essential. With WhatsApp, students can stay in touch and share their experiences, which helps lessen the loneliness that comes with learning remotely. Students' whole learning experience is improved by this connectivity, which makes them feel more emotionally supported and involved in the process.

There are drawbacks to utilizing WhatsApp for social connection in remote learning, despite its advantages. For example, WhatsApp has the potential to cause distractions. Furthermore, even though WhatsApp facilitates rapid communication, it might not be appropriate for more intricate or nuanced conversations that call for in-person communication or more advanced communication technologies (Berewot & Fibra, 2020).

According to (Jordan, 2023) WhatsApp academic applications have been the subject of a lot of research, but its contribution to social interaction particularly in remote learning settings has received less attention. Gaining insight into students' perceptions of WhatsApp's efficacy in this regard is essential to capitalizing on its potential to enhance the virtual learning environment. Although WhatsApp advantages in academic communication are well known, more research is needed to determine how it can improve social interaction in remote learning settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paradigm of this research was positivism. The research was descriptive. The design of the study was survey and quantitative in nature. The study population included students from the social sciences faculties at three universities: International Islamic University Islamabad, Quaid-e-Azam University and Bahria University Islamabad. It focused on 6th semester BS students majoring in psychology and economics departments, totalling 320 students. From this population, a sample of 175 students was selected using Siegle's table (2015) to ensure a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the sample accurately represented the overall population.Self-developed questionnaire was used for the research. The questionnaire was closed-ended and on five Likert scale, strongly agree = 5, agree =

4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1. The total number of statements in the questionnaire was 39.The researcher used content validity for the self-developed questionnaire. In content validity, experts validate the questionnaire while observing the language, use of words, grammar and relevancy of the concepts. The validity of the questionnaire checked by three experts of the Department of Mass Communication and two experts from Faculty of Education belongs to IIUI Pakistan. They had checked the phrasing, configuration language, grammar and context of the questionnaire and gave some suggestions to improve some statements. After following the suggestions of experts regarding the instrument, the questionnaire was ready to be administered. An Instrument Development Pilot Study was conducted with a sample of 30 students drawn from one university, International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI). The participants involved in the pilot study were excluded from the final data collection. The purpose of instrument development pilot study is to test and refine the measurement tools (questionnaires, surveys) used in the study. It involves administering the instruments to a small sample to identify and address any issues with clarity, wording and response options.Self-developed questionnaire consisted of 39 items and Cronbach Alpha .850 shows that questionnaire was highly reliable.

FINDINGS

This study's major goals were to find out how students view WhatsApp as a social media platform, comprehend its key applications and look at usage variations between undergraduate and graduate students. The survey asked about WhatsApp's ease of use, usefulness for staying connected, ease of use for academic engagement and efficacy in sharing information in order to address the first study question. The results demonstrated that WhatsApp was highly regarded by respondents as a useful tool for exchanging up-to-date information and for being incredibly simple to use. They overwhelmingly agreed that WhatsApp was useful for academic pursuits without time limits.

The study inquired about a variety of WhatsApp uses, including gathering information, gaining knowledge, growing social networks and entertaining people. The respondents said WhatsApp made it easier for them to enjoy their free time, make new friends and feel good about sharing content. A lot of people used WhatsApp because their friends did and they saw it as a way to showcase themselves in social situations. In order to make users feel more engaged and active, the app was also used to share images and videos. Though some respondents had a neutral opinion, the majority of respondents believed that WhatsApp helped them feel less bored and happier.

The study concentrated on WhatsApp's educational advantages, including how it enhances learning, shares course materials, makes learning more fun and develops learning abilities. According to the findings, participants thought WhatsApp was a useful medium for sharing course information and gaining access to subject resources in particular. It was also observed that supervising educational activities via WhatsApp with colleagues enhanced social connections and promoted personal growth. Some respondents, nevertheless, weren't as sure that WhatsApp improved their drive, enthusiasm in their academics, or attentiveness in class. A few others expressed no opinion about whether WhatsApp enhanced their ability to learn or made learning more fun.

The majority of university students generally agreed with the bulk of survey questions, demonstrating favourable opinions of WhatsApp's contribution to social contact and education. The results also showed that there were no significant differences in WhatsApp usage between

students. Similar goals and usage patterns were displayed by the all students, demonstrating WhatsApp's broad acceptance and usefulness across a range of academic levels.

University students view WhatsApp as a flexible and useful tool for social engagement, communication and academic help. Although it has certain drawbacks, such as not greatly boosting a student's desire or interest in their studies, its advantages in fostering relationships, disseminating knowledge and strengthening academic tasks are well known. These findings can assist educators and policymakers in improving the remote learning experience through the strategic integration of WhatsApp.

CONCLUSION

The study comes to the conclusion that WhatsApp is a useful instrument for social contact and education, satisfying a number of requirements mentioned in the satisfaction theory, including affective and cognitive demands. WhatsApp is especially well-liked among university students, who use it for socializing, information sharing and academic participation. It improves their relationships with others and offers a forum for peer-to-peer interactive learning. WhatsApp's importance as a communication and information-sharing tool is highlighted by the app's broad appeal among Pakistan's youth, yet users should exercise caution while sharing content due to social, cultural and ethical concerns. The results also emphasize WhatsApp's contribution to users' improved communication and sociopolitical knowledge. It is preferred because it makes organizing academic tasks and obtaining educational resources easier. Nonetheless, users must to be aware of WhatsApp's larger goal and think about how their material affects the community at large. WhatsApp can help with education and social contact while encouraging responsible and polite online behaviour if these factors are recognized and taken into account.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study align closely with recent research on WhatsApp's role in social interaction and education. A similar study, was carried out by Palupi et al. (2023) and examined students' perceptions of WhatsApp and its uses in educational environments. Their results support ours, showing that students place a high value on WhatsApp's usability and efficiency as a means of information exchange. Furthermore, WhatsApp's influence on social engagement among college students was investigated by Zahra et al. (2022), who discovered that it greatly improves communication and encourages peer interaction—a finding that is consistent with the opinions shared by study participants. Additionally, WhatsApp's educational benefits were examined in the Alasmari (2019) study, which focused on how helpful it is for sharing course materials and encouraging collaborative learning. Their results confirm our conclusion that WhatsApp is a useful tool for academic activities, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and encouraging individual development via strengthened social ties. The results of our study also align with the larger body of research on social media and education. For instance, Anderson (2019) discovered that WhatsApp significantly contributes to the collaboration and communication between students and teachers. Our claim that WhatsApp can enhance remote learning experiences is further supported by Dahdal's (2020) emphasis on the app's potential as a tool for increasing involvement and engagement in online learning environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Universities may consider integrating WhatsApp into their official communication channels. This could involve using WhatsApp for distributing course materials, scheduling reminders and facilitating group discussions to enhance academic engagement and peer collaboration.
2. Educational policymakers might look into developing guidelines for using social media tools like WhatsApp to ensure that their use remains focused and productive. This could include best practices on privacy settings, group management and ways to integrate these platforms with traditional learning management systems.
3. Teachers and educators are encouraged to utilize WhatsApp to create interactive learning experiences. They can use the platform to host live discussions, share quick updates and provide personalized support to students, fostering a more engaging and responsive educational environment.
4. It would be beneficial for institutions to conduct workshops or training sessions for both students and faculty to maximize the educational benefits of WhatsApp. These sessions could cover topics like effective communication strategies, managing digital wellbeing and ensuring cybersecurity on social media platforms.
5. Given the broad use of WhatsApp among students for social purposes and its potential risks, it's important to educate them about responsible use. This includes understanding the influence of their online behaviour on their personal and professional lives and how to maintain appropriate boundaries between academic and social interactions.
6. Encourage students to form study groups on WhatsApp where they can share resources, collaborate on assignments and support each other's learning. This peer-to-peer interaction can enhance understanding of the material, build a sense of community and make the learning process more dynamic and engaging.

Recommendations for future Researches

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of using WhatsApp in distance learning environments. This could involve tracking students' academic performance, social interactions and overall satisfaction over an extended period.
2. Conduct qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences and perceptions of using WhatsApp in distance learning. This could involve interviews, focus groups or case studies to explore the subjective experiences and underlying motivations of students who use WhatsApp for academic and social purposes.
3. Examine how WhatsApp affects learning outcomes for students, such as retention rates, academic accomplishment and critical thinking abilities. To determine whether WhatsApp use and learning results in remote learning environments are causally related, this could entail experimental research or quasi-experimental approaches.
4. Examine the ethical and privacy implications of utilizing WhatsApp in educational environments. Examining concerns about consent, data privacy and security risks connected to sharing private information on a third-party platform may be part of this.
5. Examine WhatsApp's efficacy in comparison to other educational social media platforms and communication tools in order to pinpoint best practices and maximize the incorporation of digital tools into learning settings.

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