

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Staff Reflection on the Effectiveness of Whatsapp Usage for Organizational Communication: a Study in a Private Malaysian Medical School

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Recently mobile communication technology had tremendous advances and became the priority for most of the users with some opponent opinions that highlight the accountability and the privacy issues in using these messaging applications. WhatsApp is scored to be the first top used messaging application worldwide that is used in 180 countries by about 1.5 billion population. This research aims to determine the staff reflections regarding the WhatsApp usage for organizational communication. **Methods:** This study is implied among the staff at the medical and health life science cluster, Management and Science University (MSU), Malaysia. A questionnaire was distributed to all the staff through an online google form. Responses were analysed by the 'Statistical Package for Social Sciences' (SPSS) Version 24.0. **Results:** Results showed that all the staff responded (100%) are using WhatsApp for organizational communication with variable degrees of satisfaction; 8.1% are extremely satisfied, 61.3 % are satisfied, 12.9% are not satisfied and 16.1 % are extremely not satisfied. Their level of satisfaction is significantly affected by the respondent's age, benefit of usage, and the time of messaging. **Conclusion:** To ensure effectiveness of communication through WhatsApp, it should be through official groups and the organization should put specific announced rules for the time of usage and the content of messages to be posted to all members.

**Keywords:** WhatsApp, Organization, Communication, Medicine, MSU, Malaysia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a vital role in the survival of any organization. Knowing how to communicate and the best way to relay a message is the key to achieve the desired outcome. Communication is need-based within the organization. The majority of the communication needs are met through digital communication platforms and knowing how to use them for the good of the organization becomes paramount (1). The emerging new discoveries in the growing field of mobile technology and the introduction of advanced network

services are articulating to make mobile communication a competitive achievement (2). Many communication platforms worked to have the advantages of the developed mobile communication technology. WhatsApp is one of those platforms that is rapidly and greatly grown since starting 2009 till now to have around 1 billion users spreading along about 180 countries (3). Its widespread use is attributed to the view that the application is appealing as it offers cheap and affordable means of sending information worldwide (4). In addition to its subscriber base growth, the tremendous growth in network coverage forms part of the reason why the mobile smartphone digital communication is appealing to a large population (2).

On the other hand, many issues have been associated with Whatsapp usage. WhatsApp has been cited to

have privacy issues, for example, the contacts are able to see if messages are delivered and read as well as the time of last access worldwide (4). Although users have the option of privacy settings, the voluminous incoming messages and the extent of interruption they cause often force them to put the phone on silent mode (4), which may hinder effective communication within the network. In addition, the platform requires one to have internet so as to use it and one can only chat with friends who have smartphones and WhatsApp installed (5). This research aims to determine the staff reflections regarding the WhatsApp utilization as organizational communication platform.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is implied among the staff at the medical and health life science cluster, Management and Science University (MSU), Malaysia. A questionnaire was used to collect the participants' responses. Out of 300 population at the medical and health life science cluster, only 124 respondents have filled up the survey (response rate 41.3%).

The reliability of the instrument is good with Cronbach Alpha for section C1: motivation to use WhatsApp consists of 15 items is 0.939 and Section C2: needs from WhatsApp usage in the organizational communication consists of 11 items is 0.944. However, the Cronbach Alpha for Section D1, questions on response to a WhatsApp message sent by a colleague consists of 4 items is 0.488 lower than section C1 and C2 but still within the acceptable range. The questionnaire was distributed to all the staff through an online google form. Responses were analysed by the 'Statistical Package for Social Sciences' (SPSS) Version 24.0. The descriptive statistics were presented as percentage (%) for categorical data, mean and standard deviation for continuous data. The comparison of mean score for each item with sociodemographic data (age group, gender, marital status, educational level and working experience) was analyzed using independent sample t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test.

## RESULTS

The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in table 1. Sixty-eight of the participants were at the age between 20-40 years and 53.2% of them were female. Most of respondents were married and majority of them were of master holders. Around 40.3% of the respondents are using the WhatsApp for 2-6 hours daily on average (Table I).

Results showed that all the staff responded (100%) are using WhatsApp for organizational communication with variable degrees of satisfaction. Their satisfaction varied from extreme satisfaction and satisfied (8.1% and 61.3 % respectively) to not satisfied and extremely

not satisfied (12.9% and 16.1 % respectively) (table 6). The significance of WhatsApp in organizational communication than other tools of communication e.g., email was studied and results showed that most of the respondents consider WhatsApp significant and extremely significant (27.4% and 53.2 % respectively) more than other tools of communication (Table VI). Their level of acceptance is affected significantly by their point of view regarding the role of WhatsApp in enrichment of the work process and their satisfaction about age, benefit of usage, and the time of messaging (Table V). Obtaining information related to the organization using WhatsApp was found to be useful by the respondents. Eighty four of them consider WhatsApp to be a fast-alternative way of passing information among colleagues compare to other channels like email. In comparison to other age groups, respondents at age 20-40 years significantly expressed their preferences to use WhatsApp as fast alternative way compared to the email (p. value 0.002) (Table II). Regarding the usefulness of using WhatsApp for organizational communication, the respondents have different views e.g., 51.6% agreed that it is a good tool to stay in touch with colleagues, 48.4% agreed that it let them feel involved with what happens with others, 59.7% agreed that it let them stay informed of events in the organization, beside other benefits as informing superiors about work-related issues, acquire top-down information relating to the organization and acquire work-related knowledge (Table III)

The respondents showed variable reaction toward the WhatsApp group organizational communication. 12.9% report that they never Comment on other's post in group conversation, 66.1% sometime comment, 17.1% comment most of the times and 1.6% stated they may comment weekly approximately. For the replay to group WhatsApp message, 56.5% of the respondents said that they may replay in private message. 41.9% report on tasks by group WhatsApp communication and 35.5% may share a joke or funny items in the organization WhatsApp group (Table IV)

About sixty four percent of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that WhatsApp usage is enriching the work process (Table VI). Regarding workgroup conversation, 12.9% never comment on others' posts in group conversation and 35.5% never to share jokes in group conversation (Table IV).

On studying the effect of demographic data of the respondents on the respondents' acceptance to the usefulness of the organizational WhatsApp communication, the age of the respondent was found to be significant factor regarding the share of information with colleagues (p 0.006) and participation in discussions (p 0.043). Gender and educational level of the respondent were found to be significant factor regarding the perception of WhatsApp group to be entertaining (p 0.002 and 0.001 respectively).

Educational level was found to have a statistically significant effect on the mean score for motivational use of Whatsapp to Have fun ( $p=0.013$ ), use of Whatsapp is to be entertained ( $p=0.001$ ), responding to colleagues by private (not group) message ( $p=0.022$ ), and sending a joke or funny item to colleagues ( $p=0.004$ ). The working experience of the respondent were found to

**Table I : Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents**

Variables	124 (100%)	
Age (Years)	20 – 40	68 (54.8%)
	40 – 60	42 (33.8%)
	>60	14 (11.4%)
Gender	Male	58 (46.8%)
	Female	66 (53.2%)
Marital Status	Married	100(80.7%)
	Single	22 (17.7%)
	Widow/ Divorced	2 (1.6%)
Education	University	20 (16.1%)
	Master	58 (46.8%)
	PhD	46 (37.1)
Working experience	< 5 years	76 (61.3%)
	5-10 years	40 (32.3)
	10-15 years	6 (4.8)
	15-20 years	2 (1.6)
Average hours of using Whatsapp per day	<2 hours	18(14.5%)
	2-6 hours	50(40.3%)
	6-12 hours	32(25.8%)
	>12 hours	24%(19.4%)
Onaverage, which hour of the day do you anticipate to find friends online on WhatsApp?	All days	64 (51.6)
	Morning hours	20 (16.1)
	Afternoon	10 (8.1)
	Evening	20 (16.1)
	All night	10 (8.1)

**Table III : Usefulness of WhatsApp in organizational communication according to the respondents point of view**

Items	Strongly disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly agree N (%)
Stay in touch with colleagues	8 (6.5)	8 (6.5)	16 (12.9)	64 (51.6)	28 (22.6)
Talk about my office problems	12 (9.7)	26 (21.0)	36 (29.0)	36 (29.0)	14 (11.3)
Feel involved with what happens with others	12 (9.7)	10 (8.10)	26 (21.0)	60 (48.4)	16 (12.9)
Stay informed of events in the organization	8 (6.5)	4 (3.2)	12 (9.7)	74 (59.7)	26 (21.0)
Relax from pressure	32 (25.8)	30 (24.2)	32 (25.8)	24 (19.4)	4 (3.2)
Collaborate with my colleagues	14 (11.3)	0 (0.0)	18 (14.5)	66 (53.2)	24 (19.4)
Obtain information related to the organization	10 (8.1)	4 (3.2)	18 (14.5)	54 (43.5)	38 (30.6)
Inform my superiors about work-related issues	8 (6.5)	10 (8.10)	16 (12.9)	62 (50.0)	26 (21.0)
Share my achievements with others	14 (11.3)	14 (11.3)	52 (41.9)	34 (27.4)	10 (8.1)
Acquire top-down information relating to the organization	12 (9.7)	4 (3.2)	32 (25.8)	52 (41.9)	24 (19.4)
Acquire work-related knowledge	24 (19.4)	6 (4.8)	10 (8.1)	52 (41.9)	32 (25.8)

**Table II : Usefulness of WhatsApp according to the respondents point of view**

Items	Strongly disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly agree N (%)
Share information with my colleagues	4 (3.2)	4 (3.2)	16 (12.9)	62 (50.0)	36 (29.0)
Have fun	14 (11.3)	10 (8.1)	48 (38.7)	38 (30.6)	12 (9.7)
Learn new things	12 (9.7)	14 (11.3)	32 (25.8)	46 (37.1)	18 (14.5)
Know about my colleagues better	16 (12.9)	14 (11.3)	32 (25.8)	46 (37.1)	14 (11.3)
Be entertained	16 (12.9)	14 (11.3)	50 (40.3)	34 (27.4)	8 (6.5)
Participate in discussions	6(4.8)	8 (6.5)	22 (17.7)	64 (51.6)	20 (16.1)
Communicate with many people at the same time	8 (6.5)	4 (3.2)	12 (9.7)	64 (51.6)	34 (27.4)
Obtain social support	14 (11.3)	12 (9.7)	28 (22.6)	60 (48.4)	8 (6.5)
Pass time and unwind	14 (11.3)	12 (9.7)	28 (22.6)	60 (48.4)	8 (6.5)
See other people's profile (photo and status)	22 (17.7)	14 (11.3)	50 (40.3)	28 (22.6)	6 (4.8)
Share my photos, videos and other interests	18 (14.5)	28 (22.6)	50 (40.3)	20 (16.1)	6 (4.8)
Obtain gossip and rumors	12 (9.7)	30 (24.2)	32 (25.8)	40 (32.3)	8 (6.5)
Add information about myself	38 (30.6)	26 (21.0)	30 (24.2)	22 (17.7)	6 (4.8)
Check out friend's updates and add a comment	26 (21.0)	30 (24.2)	46 (37.1)	16 (12.9)	2 (1.6)
Get entertained in the office setup	16 (12.9)	24 (19.4)	40 (32.3)	38 (30.6)	4 (3.2)
Other opinions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Sometime disturb</li> <li>2) We could communicate with superior, colleagues and inferior easily for official work.</li> <li>3) It affecting our life negatively, its been abused by the management to text us after working hours and even midnight time and weekends. Should have a limit.</li> <li>4) Too much messages make me disturb, unhappy and annoyed.</li> <li>5) Get information faster.</li> <li>6) Useful</li> <li>7) Email is still the best for official purposes.</li> <li>8) Mostly communicate in work basis.</li> <li>9) Sometime disturb.</li> <li>10) Could communicate with superior, colleagues and inferior easily for official work.</li> </ol>				

**Table IV : The respondents' reaction to WhatsApp group organizational communication**

Items	Never N (%)	Sometimes N (%)	Most of the time N (%)	3-5 days a week N (%)
Comment on other's post in group conversation	16 (12.9)	82 (66.1)	22 (17.7)	2 (1.6)
Send a private message	10 (8.1)	70 (56.5)	40 (32.3)	2 (1.6)
Report on a task	8 (6.5)	62 (50.0)	52 (41.9)	0 (0.0)
Share a joke or funny item	44 (35.5)	72 (58.1)	6 (4.8)	0 (0.0)
Other opinions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) I do not like WhatsApp to be used for office work</li> <li>2) I use groups only for family and relatives</li> <li>3) Just to mention "Noted"</li> <li>4) Answer only to superiors' feedback, questions, or tasks.</li> <li>5) It is useless</li> <li>6) Turn-off the phone because it is too irritating.</li> <li>7) Nothing.</li> </ol>			

**Table V : The effect of demographic data of the respondents on their perception to the usefulness of the organizational WhatsApp communication**

	Share information with my colleagues	Have fun	Learn new things	Know about my colleagues better	Be entertained	Participate in discussions	Communicate with many people at the same time
Age group <sup>(a)</sup>	0.006*	0.697	0.239	0.803	0.507	0.043*	0.368
Gender <sup>(b)</sup>	0.130	0.286	0.163	0.918	0.002*	0.913	0.226
Marital status <sup>(a)</sup>	0.126	0.476	0.016*	0.151	0.397	0.007*	0.212
Educational level <sup>(a)</sup>	0.856	0.013*	0.238	0.055	0.001*	0.079	0.697
Working experience (years) <sup>(a)</sup>	0.009*	0.133	0.031*	0.004*	0.513	0.060	0.009*

a=One-way ANOVA, b=independents sample t-test,\*significant at p<0.05.

**Table VI : Staff reflection about WhatsApp usage**

Items	Strongly disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly agree N (%)
Satisfied about work-related usage of WhatsApp	20 (16.1)	16 (12.9)	2 (1.6)	76 (61.3)	10 (8.1)
WhatsApp is more significant than other means of organizational communication e.g., e-mail	24 (19.4)	6 (4.8)	10 (8.1)	52 (41.9)	32 (25.8)
WhatsApp enrich the work process	16 (12.9)	12 (9.7)	18 (14.5)	58 (46.8)	20 (16.1)

be significant factor regarding the share of information with colleagues (p 0.009), learning new things (p 0.031), knowing colleagues better (p 0.004) and communication with many people at the same time (p 0.009) (Table V).

## DISCUSSION

There are massive choices of Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) applications on smartphones such as WhatsApp, Line, WeChat, iMessage, Viber, Skype, Facebook Messenger, KaKao Talk and Telegram. Being independent of the network provider, these applications are called Over The Top (OTT) applications (6). WhatsApp use as communication tool has proliferated globally and in the last few years to become the most popular all over the world (3). Yet there are some opponent opinions that highlight the accountability and the privacy issues in using these messaging applications. This research aims to determine the staff reflections regarding WhatsApp usage as organizational communication platform. Results showed that all the staff (100%) is using WhatsApp for organizational communication with variable degrees of acceptance. Using WhatsApp as fast alternative way compared to the email found to be statistically significant in respondents with age category between 20-40 years compared to other age categories. Their level of acceptance is affected significantly by age, benefit of usage, and the time of messaging. Obtaining information related to the organization using WhatsApp

was found to be useful by the respondents. Eighty four of them consider WhatsApp to be a fast-alternative way of passing information among colleagues compare to other channels like email.

A previous study showed the association of employee engagement with the usage of WhatsApp. Moreover, WhatsApps can be used as an effective work communication tool for sharing and propagation of information (7).

Group-based web interaction has been used to enable planning, sharing and discussion (8). WhatsApp is more direct compared to text messaging applications like Short Messaging System (SMS) (4). WhatsApp users exchanged messages with their contacts; either friend, family members, co-workers, or their managers. The group members can discuss work-related issues, share knowledge easily and quickly. Group discussion allows engagement of the group members as all the contributions or ideas are visible to all group members.

According to a United Nations (9), about 6 billion populations have cellular phones. Accordingly, business modes and practices have been modulated for millions of employees everywhere (10) that led to a problem about how to put boundaries between work time and non-work time (11).

In the current research sixty-three percent of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that WhatsApp usage is enriching the work process. Interestingly, there was a significant difference according gender for WhatsApp usage for enriching the work process. A previous study has shown overall medium and positive correlation between WhatsApp usage and employee engagement, sense of belonging and organizational social support (7). On the other hand, bulk messages and automated behavior can be recognized as WhatsApp abusing behavior that WhatsApp is putting strategies to fight (12). Besides, the mobile group communications adopt the idea of “continuous presence” (8).

The current study showed that the response to workgroup messages is significantly affected by the respondents' characteristics. Educational level was found to have a statistically significant effect on the mean score for motivational use of Whatsapp to Have fun, use of Whatsapp is to be entertained, responding to colleagues by private (not group) message, and sending a joke or funny item to colleagues. In another study, most respondents declared that they do not want to be in the WhatsApp Group together with their manager or supervisor. Not enough data to conclude such intention; however, the assumption maybe they are not happy or maybe they are not comfortable to be in the same WhatsApp Group with their manager or supervisor. Since this study was conducted online, received an email from a respondent stated that WhatsApp as communication application is only meant for personal communication and not for work or office-related (7).

The evidence suggests that Mobile information technology devices (MITDs) can affect the employees' work-life balance (WLB) and may lead to conflict due to improper usage (13). However, new technology tools have strengthened work – capital relation with stress on the flexible work and avoidance of bureaucracy (14). So it can be concluded that the acceptance of WhatsApp group messages is mostly dependent on personal acceptance. Some employees define the limitation for their work-life while others integrate the non-work and work life (15). This depends on the subject preferences, occupation, and work environment (16).

The effectiveness of group messages is affected by the type of message exchanged, frequency of usage and the emotional feeling towards the group. Usually, those groups with more emotional attach and feeling are personal type of groups like family members or friends. The closeness of group members will make more emotional attach the group will be. That is why the management should tackle the individual differences among employees to reach the optimum level of their engagement (4). In fact it should be dedicated that the relation between WhatsApp usage and employee engagement can be a unilateral relationship; meaning that the more the employee engagement, the more WhatsApp usage will be but not vice versa meaning that WhatsApp usage has no such effect on the employee engagement.

## CONCLUSION

To ensure the effectiveness of communication through WhatsApp, it should be through official groups and the organization should put specific announced rules for the time of usage and the content of messages. It is important that the policy-makers look at the needs behind WhatsApp usage and ensure that those needs are clear to the users, also to ensure formal usage through formal groups and at the specified working hours with

training of the staff regarding the responsible official usage of the platform.

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