RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE: WHATSAPP A THREAT TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have revolutionised the way individuals interact, communicate, and share information. These platforms "have been taken up around the globe at an unprecedented speed, revealing the extraordinary nature of the social media phenomenon" as traditional media's power declines. With their ease of accessibility and user-friendly interfaces, these social media platforms facilitate instant communication, information sharing, and networking opportunities. Little attention has been paid to the rise of social media in the digital age as a threat to effective communication. Therefore, the overarching problem to be addressed in this research is to examine how the rise of social media in the digital age poses a significant threat to effective communication. Technological determinism theory formed the basis for the study and focus group discussion was used for data gathering, with thirty (30) participants selected purposively from each department in the eight faculties to serve the purpose of this study. Also, eight (8) focus group interviews were conducted at Redeemer's University. Findings revealed that WhatsApp is a good primary mode of communication and using WhatsApp daily often gives room for both personal and professional communication. Further findings shows that WhatsApp is integral to daily interactions, allowing respondents to connect with friends from different parts of the world effortlessly. Hence, this study concluded that WhatsApp undoubtedly offers unparalleled convenience and connectivity in the digital age, yet its widespread usage raises pertinent concerns regarding effective communication.

Keywords: Communication, digital, technology, social media, WhatsApp

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of the digital age, the rise of social media platforms has revolutionised the way individuals interact, communicate, and share information. While hailed as a tool for connectivity and global networking, the pervasive presence of social media has raised significant concerns regarding its impact on effective communication (Alrajabi, 2024).

Information exchanged to convey meaning is called communication. The technology used in communication, the traits of the information transmitter and receiver, their cultural norms and communication protocols, and the extent of the communication process all define the communication process. However, communication has emerged with the development of the so-called Web 2.0 and Web 3.0, or the cluster of technologies, devices, and applications that support the proliferation of social media spaces on the Internet. According to Alenezi(2020), in the last decade, social media has become an integral part of everyday life, having tremendous economic, political, and societal implications. Social media platforms "have been taken up around the globe at an unprecedented speed, revealing the extraordinary nature of the social media phenomenon" as traditional media's power declines. Media users have

appropriated new forms of communication. They have built their systems of mass communication via WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter and the like. Global communication depends on social media, and the public's need for more seems unquenchable (Karpeh & Bryczkowski, 2017; Onyebuchi et al., 2023).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn have become ubiquitous tools for connecting individuals across the globe. With their ease of accessibility and user-friendly interfaces, these platforms facilitate instant communication, information sharing, and networking opportunities. However, amid the apparent benefits, concerns have been raised regarding their impact on the quality and depth of communication.

The premise of this research is rooted in the observation that social media, despite its connectivity-enhancing features, may impede effective communication through various mechanisms. One such mechanism is the phenomenon of "digital distraction," wherein individuals become engrossed in the constant stream of notifications, updates, and multimedia content, diverting their attention away from meaningful, face-to-face interactions (Mark et al., 2019).

Moreover, the curated nature of social media content, characterised by selective self-presentation and filtered narratives, can contribute to the distortion of reality and the proliferation of misinformation, hindering authentic dialogue and understanding (Vraga& Bode, 2017). The prevalence of online echo chambers and algorithm-driven content curation further exacerbates this issue, reinforcing existing beliefs and polarising discourse (Barberá et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the brevity of communication afforded by platforms like Twitter and Snapchat may undermine the development of nuanced understanding and critical thinking skills, as complex ideas are condensed into bite-sized snippets for mass consumption (Tandoc et al., 2018).Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to critically assess the implications of social media's ascendancy for effective communication in diverse contexts, including interpersonal relationships, professional settings, and civic engagement initiatives. By elucidating the challenges and opportunities inherent in this digital paradigm shift, this research endeavors to inform strategies for mitigating the negative effects of social media while harnessing its potential as a tool for constructive dialogue and collaboration.

Social media platforms, characterised by their instantaneous and widespread reach, have become fertile grounds for disseminating misinformation and fake news. With algorithms often prioritising engagement over accuracy, users are frequently exposed to misleading or outright false information, leading to a decline in trust and credibility within online discourse (Bakir & McStay, 2018). This phenomenon not only undermines the reliability of information but also hampers the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the pervasive use of social media has been linked to a decline in traditional face-to-face communication skills. The convenience of digital interaction often supplants genuine interpersonal exchanges, leading to a reliance on abbreviated forms of communication and a diminishing capacity for nuanced expression (Turkle, 2011). This shift affects personal relationships and extends to professional environments, potentially hindering collaboration and productivity.

Moreover, the echo chamber effect prevalent in social media environments exacerbates societal polarisation and ideological divides. Filter bubbles created by personalised content algorithms reinforce pre-existing beliefs while marginalising dissenting perspectives, fostering an environment conducive to entrenching extreme viewpoints and breaking constructive dialogue (Pariser, 2011).

Therefore, the overarching problem to be addressed in this research is to examine how the rise of social media in the digital age poses a significant threat to effective communication. By exploring the mechanisms through which social media platforms influence communication dynamics and assessing the

implications for individuals, organisations, and society, this study aims to provide insights into mitigating these challenges and fostering healthier communication practices in the digital era.

Theoretical Framework

Technological determinism theory proposed by Marshall McLuhan served as the foundation for this research work. Technological theory explains how media technology influences how individuals think, behave, operate and communicate during transitions from one technological era to another. According to the hypothesis of this theory, people communicate, learn, think and feel the way they do because of the media messages they take via the available technologies in the society. This thinking made Marshall McLuhan submit that "the medium is the message".

According to Griffin (2010), a medium has a greater impact on individuals than the messages it conveys. He also predicted that the digital age would create a revolution connecting people globally, overcoming space and time barriers to communicate through technology such as television, computers, and jets. This would result in a single global village where people are brought together instantaneously." (Griffin, 2010).

Hence, social media is a natural and inevitable result of technological progress in this digital age, and it is a positive development that has brought people closer together and increased access to information and communicate. However, it is also important to acknowledge that social media has its downsides, such as the potential for misinformation and the erosion of privacy.

MacLuhan piped into the future of media technology and declared that "we shape our tools, and they, in turn, shape us". This is because the emergence of new media technologies has significantly transformed individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural patterns. For example, the book (print) is said to be an extension of the eye.

According to Marshall McLuhan, the wheel is a technological extension of the foot, while clothing is an extension of the skin. Marshall McLuhan believed that electronic technologies, such as computers and the internet, are extensions of the central nervous system. The theory holds that through these extensions, media technology increases our capacity for communication and productivity and serves as a filter to categorise and make sense of the social world. According to the notion, technology is the main force behind social and cultural change. This concept underlines how technology affects and modifies society's structure and interpersonal relationships. The invention and use of social media have greatly impacted how people connect and communicate when this theory is applied to social media use. Through social media, people may now communicate in ways that were before impossible and connect over great distances. Thanks to the rise of social media, people now have a powerful platform to voice their opinions and participate in public conversation in a previously unimaginable way (Okoro et al., 2019). According to the viewpoint of technological determinism, the creation and usage of social media in education is a normal and unavoidable outcome of technology growth. The technological determinism theory can be used to support the use of social media in education since it is a natural and inevitable result of technological advancement, which has changed how students learn, connect with their peers and teachers, and access educational resources. However, it is crucial to be aware of the potential drawbacks of using social media in education, such as distraction and abuse risk, and to work towards reducing these dangers.

The Concept of Social Media: WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook

Technologies began to change rapidly in the 20th century after the first set of supercomputers was created in the 1940s; engineers and scientists began to think of ways to create networks between computers. The earliest form of the Internet is CompuServe, a primitive form of email developed in the 1960s. In 1979,

UseNet allowed users to communicate through a virtual newsletter. The first recognisable kind of social media site was known as "Six Degrees", which was created in 1997. It enabled users to upload profiles and make friends with other users, and in 1999, the first blogging site became popular. After the invention of blogging, chatting sites began to expand, bringing about MySpace and LinkedIn in the early 2000s (Hendricks, 2013).

The term social media was first used in 2004, and since then, social media use has increased and become a term used more often than any other word among teenagers and youths, with most people becoming more attached to it than ever (Anderson & Jiang 2018).

According to Manning (2014), social media is a new media form that involves interactive participation. This definition simply says that social media is a new platform that aids quick interactions of participants with information to pass across to one another. Social media is an electronic form of communication used by different users to create online communities for sharing messages, ideas, and information, communicating with one another, and creating other content such as videos (Webster 2014).

Social media is "a group of Internet-based applications built on technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows for creating and exchanging user-generated content (Andreas & Michael, 2009). Danah and Nicole (2007) define social media as "web-based services which allow individuals to have a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system and then bring together a list of other users with whom they might share a connection". According to Ella and Daria (2016), social media is defined as virtual communities whereby users create individual profiles, interact with others and also have the opportunity to meet new friends based on similar interests.

Robert and Moira (2016) define social media sites as entities that allow users to create a profile on any platform, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a relationship and navigate between their lists of connections created by other users on the same system. These social networks allow users to create profiles or connect with others and send private messages, but they vary in their work (Robert & Moira, 2016; Matyek et al., 2022). Though some social media platforms are designed to foster communication and connection across geographical and other means, some social networking sites are designed for certain religions, sexual orientations, ethnic, or other categories (Robert & Moira, 2016). Besides information, entertainment, and education access, social media also creates inspiration, fostering creativity and self-expression (Notley & Tacchi, 2005).

The spread of the Internet, wireless communication, digital media, and social software toolslike (WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook) have created horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in a predetermined time in this digital age.

Social media has significantly impacted society by affecting public opinion, spreading knowledge and communicating with one another. However, social media has developed greatly over time, especially since the digital age.

Ayushshegaonkar (2023) social media platforms enable effective communication, advocacy, and self-expression. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enable people to express themselves, engage in public discourse, and support social issues. However, spreading fake news and misinformation on these platforms has led to worries about public perception and faith in traditional media sources.

Furthermore, social media facilitates the development and maintenance of relationships. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enable us to connect with people we may not meet.

According to Widastuti (2018), networking allows us to reconnect with old acquaintances, make new ones, and connect with professionals in our field.

Social media allows people to communicate with friends, family, and others worldwide. According to Handayani (2016), users can communicate privately, discuss ideas through status updates or posts, and participate in group chats. Social media enables two-way communication, allowing users to respond, comment, and like content others share. In addition, Anindya and Kurniawan (2019) opines that social media allows people and groups to express themselves. Individuals can express their interests, abilities, and personalities through several art forms, including photography, videos, and writing. Social media allows content creators, including vloggers, bloggers, and influencers, to share their work and gain a following.In other words, social media enables individuals who struggle with face-to-face communication to engage in social relationships. Online platforms can improve communication and inclusion for individuals with disabilities, mobility limits, or social situations.

WhatsApp a Threat to Effective Communication

WhatsApp is social media platform that enables users to make phone conversations, send and receive text messages, and exchange videos, audio messages, and photographs over the internet. According to Karpeh &Bryczkowski (2017), with over 1 billion users, the WhatsApp has become one of the most widely used apps available today, only surpassed by its parent corporation, Facebook, in terms of user base.

WhatsApp is a mobile application that allows users to share information, messages, and ideas and post pictures and videos on their status. The status is a 24-hour post, after which it expires. Other people can view and comment through private messages in response to these posts. It is a fast, simple, and convenient way for family and friends to chat, create texts, share photos and videos, send and receive documents and engage in private, secure conversations anytime they want. This is what people call privacy (Deshpande, 2018).

WhatsApp is one of the first applications to offer users a free internet-based messaging feature. It relies on a WiFi connection to send and receive phone calls from family and friends. Its main advantage is that it allows for sending and receiving messages and connecting with people worldwide. With WiFioraninternet connection, you can get closer to anybody globally (Goodwin, Business Insider, 2020). People utilise this application due to its low cost, the possibility of having a smooth conversation, having a sense of belonging to a group, which may sometimes create a feeling of community and family, and the privacy maintained, unlike other social media platforms.

The main attraction of WhatsApp is that it allows easy to send and receive calls and messages through an internet connection. Signing up does not cost any fee or consume too much data like other social media platforms used as communication and information-sharing tools (Jackie et al., 2022). WhatsApp allows for voice and video calls, secure messaging, and sharing of videos, pictures, and important documents. It also permits WhatsApp businesses dedicated to a particular business account primarily designed for entrepreneurs to showcase their products and connect with their customers on a convenient platform (Jackie et al., 2022). Communication is still constantly changing as new technological devices are invented. The advance of these new technological tools improves and makes communication easier between two or more persons.

According to WhatsApp (2024), with over 2 billion users worldwide, WhatsApp has emerged as a dominant force in the realm of digital communication While its popularity continues to soar, questions arise regarding its effects on effective communication. The incessant stream of messages on WhatsApp can lead to information overload, impairing the ability to prioritize and process important communication (Krasnova

et al., 2017). Constant notifications and group chats inundate users with a barrage of information, often resulting in cognitive fatigue and decreased attention to meaningful interactions.

Erosion of Face-to-Face Interaction

The convenience of instant messaging on WhatsApp has led to a decline in face-to-face interaction, diminishing the richness of interpersonal communication (Dhir et al., 2018). As individuals increasingly rely on text-based conversations, nuances such as tone of voice and body language are lost, hindering effective communication and empathy.

Methodology

To gather important information for this research, the utilisation of focus group discussions (FGD) was employed. According to Brandl et al. (2018), focus group discussions (FGDs) have several benefits, including being an affordable technique, encouraging the disclosure of specific information that cannot be acquired through surveys, and providing the opportunity to gather attitudes and opinions.Focus groups have the advantage of being a socially conscious environment that encourages conversation and interaction between its members. At Redeemer's University, eight group interviews were done using the cluster sampling technique. The eight groups that make up this department are Management Sciences, Natural Sciences, Law, Humanities, Social Sciences, Basic Medical Sciences, Built Environmental Studies, and Engineering. These groups are named after the eight faculties.The population for the study are Thirty-two students from 8 departments at Redeemer's University. Thirty-two respondents were chosen by simple random sampling from eight departments: Nursing, English, Mass Communication, Banking and Finance, Biochemistry, Law, Computer Science, and Estate Management. Five participants represented each department.The goal of the study and its objectives were thoroughly communicated to the respondents during the focus group discussion's introductory sessions. The focus group meetings lasted between forty and forty-five minutes and were conducted in English.

Measurements

The methods for data analysis used for this study is thematic analysis.By implementing a structured FGD guide, the focus group sessions were standardised with a consistent framework. The article's supplementary material includes a set of crucial inquiries. The moderator initiated the interview by asking the respondents about their frequency of using WhatsApp. The purpose of this question was to encourage discussion among all participants and gain a general understanding of how they utilized WhatsApp. The intention was to exclude this particular question from the study; however, a general introductory question was posed to the participants to elicit their reasons for using the WhatsApp application. The purpose of this question was to ensure that the respondents had a clear understanding of the study topic.

Data analysis

After looking over the transcripts, two researchers decided that the data was saturated. The researchers identified each response supplied by the respondents and assigned each response with a code using an open coding process. The researchers then used their thematic commonalities to link the many codes discovered during the coding procedure. Through discussion, the researchers identified recurring themes from the data connected to the study's goals. The codes were organised based on several thematic areas that could address the study objectives. After that, the transcripts of each focus group discussion were reread to ensure that each response had been correctly coded. The data in the results below are presented following how respondents felt about the rise of social media in the digital age: a threat to effective communication

Ethical procedures

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Respondents were given a fact sheet with more details about the objectives and methods of the study before the interview. The researcher briefed the students on the information contained in the fact sheet and underlined that their participation was optional, that they were not required to respond to all of the researcher's questions, and that they might leave the interview at any time. The processing of the students' responses was guaranteed to remain anonymous.

Result

How often do you use social media?

The first common theme from the focus group conversations was that respondents make use of WhatSapp as a medium to communicate and keep up with friends. According to the respondents, they basically make use of WhatsApp to keep in touch with friends to chat and communicate, while some make use of WhatsApp maybe once or twice a week, mostly to keep up with what my friends are doing.

But some confessed of not really buying into Snapchat.

> **F6R1:** I use WhatsApp almost every day! It's my go-to app for communicating with my friends and keeping in touch with them.

> **F1R1:** Personally, I use WhatsApp almost every day to keep in touch with my friends and share updates about my life.

> **F2R4:** I would say I use WhatsApp multiple times a day, as I enjoy snapping photos and videos on WhatsApp throughout the day and sending them to my friends.

> **F7R4:** I try to limit the way I use WhatsApp, but I don't have a choice, especially when I receive notifications from my friends or when I want to post something.

> **F1R1:** I can't do without WhatsApp, so I use it regularly to stay connected with my friends.

> **F8R2:** To be honest, I find myself using it for several hours a day, I usually enjoy watching my friends status

> From the discussions, respondents revealed that they do make use of WhatsApp. Aside some respondents that seems to differ from the most of the respondents.

> **F8R3:** Honestly, I don't use WhatsApp very often. Maybe once or twice a week, mostly to keep up with what my friends are doing.

> **F5R3:** I'm not so into WhatsApp, so I don't use it very often.

The extent to which WhatsApp usage influences Coomunication among Redeemer's University undergraduates.

From the focus group conversation, the respondents often make use of WhatsApp to communicate and stay connected to family and colleagues. Respondents indicated that using WhatsApp often gives room for both personal and professional communication.

> **F1R4:** I use WhatsApp daily for staying connected with friends and family, sharing updates, and coordinating plans.

F3R4: WhatsApp is my primary mode of communication, so I use it multiple times throughout the day to chat with friends, colleagues, and family members.

F2R4: I'm not a heavy WhatsApp user. I use it occasionally, maybe a few times a week, mostly for quick messages or checking in with people.

F2R3: I use WhatsApp quite frequently, usually every day. It's convenient for keeping in touch with friends, especially those who are abroad, and for group chats.

F6R1: I hardly use WhatsApp. Maybe once a week or even less. I prefer other messaging apps or simply calling people directly.

F5R2: WhatsApp is my go-to messaging app, so I use it very often, practically every hour. It's convenient for both personal and professional communication.

F7R1: I use WhatsApp sparingly, mostly for urgent messages or group conversations. Maybe a couple of times a week at most.

To further know the extent of WhatsApp usage, from the discussion respondents used WhatsApp sporadically for social media communication. Respondents further stated that it's integral to daily interactions, allowing them to connect with friends from different parts of the world effortlessly.

F5R4: Yes, I have communicated on social media using WhatsApp. It's one of my primary means of staying in touch with friends, family, and colleagues. WhatsApp's ease of use and wide availability make it a convenient platform for both personal and professional communication.

F4R3: Absolutely, WhatsApp is my go-to messaging app. It's simple, secure, and offers a variety of features that enhance communication, such as voice messaging, video calls, and group chats. I use it daily to connect with friends, coordinate with classmates, and even communicate with clients for work.

F8R1: No, I haven't used WhatsApp for social media communication. While I understand its popularity and utility, I prefer to limit my social media interactions to platforms like Facebook and Instagram. I find WhatsApp's interface a bit cluttered, and I'm comfortable with the features offered by other platforms for my social needs.

F6R1: I've used WhatsApp sporadically for social media communication. While I appreciate its convenience and widespread usage, I tend to rely more on traditional texting and phone calls to stay in touch with friends and family. WhatsApp is handy for group chats and quick messages, but it's not my primary means of socializing online.

F3R4: Yes, I use WhatsApp extensively for social media communication. It's integral to my daily interactions, allowing me to connect with friends from different parts of the world effortlessly. The platform's encryption features also give me peace of mind regarding privacy. From sharing updates to planning events, WhatsApp plays a crucial role in maintaining my social connections.

F2R2: I've tried WhatsApp for social media communication, but it didn't quite suit my preferences. While I acknowledge its popularity and functionality, I found the constant notifications overwhelming. I prefer platforms with more customizable notification settings and a less intrusive interface for my social interactions.

The effect of WhatsApp usage on Redeemer's University undergraduates.

F1R1: Absolutely, WhatsApp is a fantastic channel of communication. It's user-friendly, widely accessible, and offers a variety of features like text, voice messages, video calls, and even document sharing. It's become an integral part of how we stay connected with friends, family, and colleagues. Plus, the end-to-end encryption provides a sense of security for our private conversations.

F3R1: I have mixed feelings about WhatsApp as a communication channel. While it's convenient and widely used, I'm concerned about its privacy and security issues. There have been instances of data breaches and controversies regarding data sharing with parent company Facebook. So, while it's convenient, I'm always cautious about what I share on the platform.

F2R2: WhatsApp is definitely a good channel for communication, especially in today's fast-paced world. Its simplicity and wide adoption make it easy to connect with people from all walks of life. However, I do think it has its limitations, especially when it comes to professional communication or sharing sensitive information. For casual conversations and quick updates, though, it's hard to beat.

The respondents have varied opinions regarding WhatsApp as a communication channel. While some respondents see it as excellent due to its accessibility and features, another express concerns about privacy and security. While the other respondent acknowledges its convenience but also points out its limitations, particularly in its privacy and security issues which has remained a point of contention for some users.

F6R4: Well, WhatsApp definitely has its pros and cons when it comes to communication among undergraduates. On one hand, it provides a convenient platform for quick exchanges of information, group discussions, and sharing of resources which can enhance collaboration and communication among students. However, on the flip side, the constant notifications, group chats, and the informal nature of communication on WhatsApp can sometimes lead to distractions and a lack of focus on more meaningful discussions. So, while it can facilitate communication, it also has the potential to hinder effective communication if not managed properly.

F7R3: In my opinion, WhatsApp does have a negative influence on effective communication among undergraduates. The ease of sending messages instantly often leads to shallow and hasty conversations, which can detract from meaningful dialogue. Moreover, the informal nature of communication on WhatsApp can blur boundaries between personal and academic discussions, leading to confusion and misunderstandings. Overall, while WhatsApp has its benefits, it can impede effective communication among undergraduates if not used judiciously.

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F1R4: From my experience, WhatsApp has both positive and negative effects on communication among undergraduates. On one hand, it allows for quick and convenient communication, making it easier for students to coordinate group projects and stay connected with peers. However, the constant bombardment of messages and notifications can be overwhelming, leading to information overload and distractions from more important tasks. Additionally, the informality of communication on WhatsApp can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of messages, which can hinder effective communication among undergraduates.

F1R3: I believe WhatsApp does have a negative influence on effective communication among undergraduates. While it offers convenience and accessibility, it often promotes shallow interactions and discourages face-to-face communication. This can hinder the development of strong interpersonal skills and the ability to engage in meaningful discussions. Moreover, the prevalence of group chats on WhatsApp can sometimes result in exclusionary behavior or cliques forming, further exacerbating communication barriers among students. Overall, while WhatsApp has its benefits, its impact on effective communication among undergraduates cannot be overlooked.

From the discussions, respondents revealed its convenience and facilitation of communication, they also expressed concerns about its potential to foster shallow interactions, distractions, confusion, and exclusionary behavior. While others revealed that WhatsApp offers advantages in communication, its drawbacks can impede effective communication among undergraduates if not managed appropriately.

WhatsApp a threat to effective communication or otherwise

From the discussions, respondents revealed that WhatsApp can indeed pose a significant threat to effective communication among undergraduates. While they were initially designed to facilitate quick and easy communication

F2R3: Social media platforms like WhatsApp definitely have the potential to pose a threat to effective communication among undergraduates. While they offer convenience and instant connectivity, they can also lead to distractions and superficial interactions. It's easy to get caught up in endless messaging threads and lose focus on meaningful face-to-face conversations or academic pursuits. Plus, the constant notifications can be disruptive to studying or engaging in productive discussions. So, while WhatsApp can be a useful tool, it's important for students to be mindful of its impact on their communication habits.

F4R3: From my perspective, social media platforms like WhatsApp can indeed pose a significant threat to effective communication among undergraduates. While they were initially designed to facilitate quick and easy communication, they have evolved into platforms where messages can be misinterpreted, and conversations can become fragmented. This can lead to misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication, particularly in academic settings where clarity and depth of communication are crucial. Additionally, the constant influx of messages can be overwhelming and distracting, making it difficult for students to focus on their studies or engage in meaningful discussions. Therefore, while WhatsApp can be a convenient tool for staying connected, it's essential for students to be aware of its potential drawbacks and to use it responsibly.

Discussion

The first objective examined the prevalence of WhatsApp usage amongst Redeemer's University undergraduates. Findings revealed that use of WhatsApp to keep in touch with friends as well as chat and communicate. According to findings respondents revealed that they use WhatsApp multiple times a day, and enjoyed snapping photos and videos on WhatsApp throughout the day and sending them to my friends. While, some revealed that they try to limit the usage of WhatsApp, but don't have a choice, especially when notification is received from friends. The findings from this study agreeswith Karpeh &Bryczkowski (2017), that says WhatsApp has become one of the most widely used apps available today.

Furthermore, the second objective examined the extent to which WhatsApp usage influences Communication among Redeemer's University undergraduates. Findings revealed that WhatsApp is a good primary mode of communication and using WhatsApp daily often gives room for both personal and professional communication. Futhermore, findings shows that WhatsApp is integral to daily interactions, allowing respondents to connect with friends from different parts of the world effortlessly.The findings from this study corroborates with that of Widastuti (2018) who noted that WhatsApp allows users to reconnect with old acquaintances, make new ones, and connect with professionals.

The last objective investigated the effect of WhatsApp usage on Redeemer's University undergraduates.According to findings, respondents revealed that WhatsApp is a communication channel because it is user-friendly, widely accessible, and offers a variety of features like text, voice messages, video calls, and even document sharing. While some respondents express concerns about privacy and security. For instance, there have been instances of data breaches and controversies regarding data sharing on WhatsApp which folds the arms of some the respondents to be cautious always about what will be communicated on WhatsApp. To futher investigate if WhatsApp is truly a threat to effective communication, respondents revealed that WhatsApp present both convenience and challenges for effective communication. The repondents posits that WhatsApp offer instant connectivity, they can also lead to distractions and shallow interactions, diverting attention from meaningful face-to-face conversations and academic pursuits. The constant notifications can disrupt studying or productive discussions. However, the influx of messages can overwhelm students and hinder their ability to focus on studies or engage deeply in discussions. Thus, while WhatsApp facilitates connectivity, students need to navigate its potential drawbacks responsibly to maintain effective communication. Technological Determinism Theory supports the idea that the introduction of new communication technologies like WhatsApp fundamentally changes how people connect. In this case, WhatsApp enhances connectivity among students, making it easier to share information, collaborate on projects, and maintain social relationships. In line with technological determinism theory, the theory aligns with the observation that the constant stream of messages can overwhelm students. As technology becomes a central aspect of daily life, it can dominate and reshape behavior and priorities. For students, the pervasive nature of WhatsApp means they are frequently interrupted by notifications, which can lead to distractions and hinder their ability to concentrate on studies or engage deeply in discussions.

Conclusion

WhatsApp undoubtedly offers unparalleled convenience and connectivity in the digital age, yet its widespread usage raises pertinent concerns regarding effective communication. Privacy breaches, information overload, and the erosion of face-to-face interaction are among the multifaceted challenges posed by this ubiquitous messaging platform. The study revealed that students frequently use WhatsApp throughout the day, which can lead to distractions and affect their academic performance. It is therefore recommended that the university should implement digital well-being programs that educate students on managing their screen time and notifications. Workshops on digital detox techniques, setting boundaries

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for app usage, and promoting the use of Do Not Disturb modes can help students balance their online and offline lives, reducing the negative impact on their studies and face-to-face interactions.

Some students expressed concerns about privacy and security issues related to WhatsApp usage, including data breaches and data sharing controversies. It is therefore recommended that the university can collaborate with cybersecurity experts to offer tips on protecting personal information, understanding WhatsApp's privacy settings, and recognizing phishing attempts. This will empower students to use the platform more securely and responsibly.

While WhatsApp is integral to daily interactions and offers various features, its use for academic and professional communication can sometimes be counterproductive due to distractions and the influx of non-academic messages. Therefore, the university should promote the use of dedicated communication platforms like Microsoft Teams, Slack, or academic forums for educational purposes. These platforms can provide a more structured environment for academic discussions, reducing distractions and helping students focus better on their studies. Additionally, establishing guidelines for appropriate use of communication tools in academic settings can further enhance their effectiveness.

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