

WhatsApp in University: Friend or Foe

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ABSTRACT

Amid technological advancement, the global internet market has gone beyond 3G. Recent transformation of internet speed to 5G has driven the youth fanatical towards applications available on internet for mainly two purposes, entertainment and education. Winning the race of popularity among the commonly used communication applications, WhatsApp has been fulfilling the needs of many people in the community, including both social and educational purposes. It is utilised to send or share text messages, Portable Document Format (PDF), contacts, slideshows, picture images, status, video and voice calls, documents and user location. Being so much resourceful, youngsters have started using WhatsApp popularly for both entertainment as well as education. School, college and university students started making use of WhatsApp for communications between them and their instructors by forming WhatsApp group, with their focus on transferring and mediating data among the group members and to help explain things to those in need.

Keywords: Demerits, Educator, Merits, Students

INTRODUCTION

We are in the 21st century. Technology has become an integral and indistinguishable part of our daily life. Connectivity to any part on this planet is now realistic and practical for human race which is gifted from mankind to humanity, by creating 'Internet'. It is internet which has given people easy and affordable mode of communication. Internet can be used via different modes such as smart mobile phone, desktop computer and laptop, etc. Among these three, smart mobile phones made it to victory in terms of quantity and quality due to its advantages of small size, availability from low to high price and low weight that makes it easily accessible all time and everywhere. There are numerous software available to accentuate and accelerate communication such as WhatsApp, Viber, LINE, Hangouts, Messenger, We chat, Tango, Skype, IMO, Instagram etc. Each of the above digital communication has distinctive characteristic suitability [1]. Among these, currently WhatsApp is used by around one billion people in over 180 countries. It was founded by Brian Acton and Jan Koum [2]. WhatsApp can be used via all softwares like, I Phone, Android, Windows, Blackberry, Nokia, Samsung, Micromax and Huawei [3]. It enabled people to communicate to any part of the world without any barriers in existence. WhatsApp entered mainstream with the aim to send or share text messages, PDF, contacts, slideshows, picture images, status, video and voice calls, documents and user location [4,5]. Over a period of time it became widely used messaging service among youngsters with the popularity of smart phones [6]. So, as WhatsApp became popular among youngster for entertainment, simultaneously the school, college and universities students started making use of WhatsApp for communications between them and their educators by forming WhatsApp group. The collaboration between the students and their educators on WhatsApp developed with the aim to transfer, mediate and educate members associated to the group.

When any technology is used over a period of time, it comes with certain merits and demerits. As WhatsApp became integral part of student's life, it is evolved with certain merits and demerits.

Merits of WhatsApp in Education

1. Formation of class/batch group.

This helps to:

- Promote unity among batch mates.
- Understanding of difficulties experienced by different members of the group.

- Transfer immediate information to educator via group leader in context to any members of a group.
- 2. Spread awareness among students of the group.

This goal is achieved by:

- Transfer of important notes to all members in the group.
- Organising of urgent student-teacher meeting.
- Rescheduling of timing for lectures and practicals.
- 3. Distribution of tutorial.

This purpose is full filled by:

- Distribution of tutorial in the form of documents, texts, notes (lecture and practical's), pictures, PDF and slide shows which can be communicated from the educators directly to the leader of the group, who with a click of button can transfer the same to all members in the group. Files up to 100 MB can be transferred at one go [7].
- 4. Urgent transfer of information from educator to students.

This helps to inform all students:

- Regarding information for day/date/time and venue for an urgent meeting.
- Important notes to be delivered to all members of the group made on WhatsApp are beneficent in performing the same.
- 5. Accelerate connectivity by overcoming any distance.

WhatsApp is practical as:

- No matter any member of a group is far from other on a weekend, there is a connection which still keeps them in touch, i.e., there WhatsApp group. So, any information reaches even if they are miles away from each away.
- 6. Maximum benefits at minimum cost.

This signifies:

- WhatsApp, which is a service that is totally free of cost. It is just that an individual needs an internet connection. So, if carefully and effectively used only for gaining knowledge, a descent value pack of internet can be used for couple of days. Hence making it affordable and easy on one's pocket. Thus, it enables the students to save lot of money which earlier was spend when messages was sent via SMS and multimedia.
- 7. Provide respect towards privacy.

- WhatsApp has an encryption code, which does not allow a third party to access to its text messages and conversations etc.
- 8. Easy to use.
- Once after download, WhatsApp is easy to use in practical life. If a student misplace his phone, after purchase of new handset the student can easily rejoin the same WhatsApp group.
- 9. Convenience in communication for introverts.
- People with shy nature, feel easy and comfortable in sharing their thoughts, expressions and feelings on WhatsApp as compared to verbal communication when in physical contact.
- 10. Facilitation of educational non-commercial promotion.
- WhatsApp does not allow commercial advertising. Educators for educational purpose can send messages, PDF, slideshows and documents with details regarding registration/day/date/venue/timings/speakers/schedule/sponsors/invitee talks and panel discussion etc., information regarding symposium, workshop and conference to administrator of the group headed for distribution to the students.
- 11. Facilitate unbiased teacher-student communication.
- WhatsApp group in educational setup works on teacher-student communication, so all students in a group with high, moderate or low Grade Point Average (GPA) score get same level of information without any biasing from their educators.

Demerits of WhatsApp in Education:

1. In WhatsApp group, only the group administrator referred as 'group admin' can add a new member in the group.
2. WhatsApp works only with internet connection, so some underprivileged students might find it over demanding and adding financial burdens to them as they have to timely recharge their internet pack which increases load of expenditure on their pocket that would be thought to be more valuable for some other uses.
3. Students always look for free internet accessibility. So, unconditionally any member in a group might miss important text or message transferred to him/her due to unavailability of internet which is of prior importance at that particular time.
4. At times WhatsApp which started with aim of student-teacher communication gets transformed to only a social relationship and fun arena between members of the group without any educational productivity.
5. Dependency on WhatsApp for all activities associated between students and their educators.

6. In the name of WhatsApp group made for education, few students use it only for disturbing others associated with the group, thus reflecting negative attitude towards peer group.
7. Watery eyes and neck pain are common complaints received from students.
8. Sleep deprivation is commonly seen in college going students due to excess use of WhatsApp.
9. Pain and inflammation of tendons of the wrist and thumb [8].
10. Forward head posture by keeping head angled down to type text messages.
11. As students become addictive towards WhatsApp, they unknowingly use it even while driving, which is extremely dangerous and an open invitation for road accidents [9-11].

CONCLUSION

WhatsApp when used in education has equal merits and demerits. Students should make healthy and productive use of WhatsApp. If required, students should be counseled to make use of it in the best possible approach, by drawing a line which prevents them from entering the demerit zone associated with WhatsApp.

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