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## WHATSAPP GROUPS AS A SOURCE OF BREAKING NEWS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: CASE OF MOSHI CO-OPERATIVE UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

Social media groups like WhatsApp groups are becoming the fastest way of disseminating information. These media use internet to send messages, images, audios, videos and locations to mention just a few. They also provide users with features like group chatting and voice messages. The University students are among the group of people whose circumstantial evidence shows that they are subscribed to WhatsApp groups. But it is not known to what extent these groups are used as a source of breaking news by students of Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU). So this paper was aimed at answering this question. To accomplish this, a sample of 348 students from certificate, diploma and degree programmes were selected as a representative. The sample was studied and findings showed that more than 89% of all students get breaking news from WhatsApp groups. Moreover, findings showed that, the most shared breaking news were national breaking news (62.6%), international breaking news (28.2%), change in time table (57.5%), excuse from lecturers (90.2%) and emergencies within the University (56.9%). In regard to these findings, it was recommended that, Universities should encourage students to have smart phones and to join various social media groups including WhatsApp groups so as to be in a good position of accessing breaking news.

**Keywords:** WhatsApp, WhatsApp groups, Source of Breaking News, Breaking News, University Students

**Paper type:** Research paper

**Type of Review:** Peer Review

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the rapid changes in technologies in both developed and developing countries. These rapid changes in technology have resulted into numerous number of social media networks and apps (Trisha, 2012; Manoj, 2017; Alfred, 2018). Currently, there are many social media networks and apps which include WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Linked, WeChart, QZone, Tumblr, Instagram, Google+, Skype, Baidu Tieba and Viber to mention just a few (Research and Market, 2017). The uses of these social media to get news and share information are continuing all over the world and have become part of almost everyone's life especially those who own smart phones. Social media like WhatsApp groups are becoming the fastest way of disseminating information (Nilanjana and Anupam, 2018). WhatsApp groups have become part of University students' life. They have also become a communication portal that university students find it difficult to be without (Levent, 2017).

University students use WhatsApp groups to get in touch with classmates as well as for fulfilling their entertainment, information and educational purposes. These groups provide users with group chart as well as ability to send messages, audios, documents and locations. They also provide unlimited voice and video calls; emoji's to make the conversation fun and interesting as well as security by giving end-to-end encryption

(Benjamin, 2016). Moreover, WhatsApp groups save money and time by reducing normal text and multimedia message. They also work without sim card data where there is wireless connection (Rachael, 2018). WhatsApp group enables members to get and disseminate information easily since it is possible for members to hear alert and detect when there is a new message in the group in comparisons to radio and TV which needs your presence and it must be turned on. The uses of WhatsApp groups among University and college students in dissemination of information have been reported in several studies.

The study by Adhi (2014) reported that WhatsApp groups have transformed the way people share and access breaking news by becoming the communication portal. The study by Muhamad and Ammaarah (2017) reported that, more than 85% of Abu Dhabi University students use WhatsApp groups as a supplement source of accessing different news. The study conducted by Michael (2016) reported that, university students are use WhatsApp groups for accessing most news which occur within and outside the university. Their groups have helped them to save time especially when lectures are postponed. According to Anand and Gururaj (2015), in India, the university students use WhatsApp groups not only for accessing breaking news but also for academic and research purposes. Moreover, the study by Shanmugapriya and Priya (2016) of India revealed that students are using WhatsApp groups for accessing news and as a stress reduction portal. They added that, students are considering WhatsApp groups as stress absorbers. Some of the students use these groups when they feel that they are bored and stressed. The study by Pedro et al, (2017) disclosed that, University students are using WhatsApp groups to improve communication with their classmates. Jisha and Jebakumar (2014), revealed that most university students stay online for almost 16 hours a day on WhatsApp groups for communication and exchanging news with their friends. This finding is in line with the findings by Johnson (2014) who reported that, students are using most of the time on WhatsApp groups reading news and socializing. According to Bernard and Patience (2018), students are using WhatsApp groups for sharing information and building relationships among themselves. The study on perception of using WhatsApp groups as a source of information by Joicy and Ally (2018) shows that 85% of all students use WhatsApp groups as a tool of communication. As it was found from the literatures that WhatsApp groups are becoming the fastest way of disseminating information but it is not known to what extent these WhatsApp groups are used as a source of breaking news by students of Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU). So this paper was aimed at answering this question which is to what extent WhatsApp groups are used as a source of breaking news by students of MoCU. Specifically, this study investigated how WhatsApp Groups are used as a source of breaking news by students of MoCU so as to explore the importance of these groups to students.

## **2.0 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Study Area**

Although there are five higher learning institutions in Kilimanjaro, MoCU was chosen based on three criteria which were number of students, location of researcher and budget. MoCU has 3,670 students (MoCU Admission Book, 2017/18). The rest four Universities which are College of African Wildlife Management, Kilimanjaro Christian Medical University College, Mwenge Catholic University and Stefano Moshi Memorial University College has less number of students when you compare to this of MoCU. The researcher is employee of MoCU so it was easy for him to access the respondents who were the students of MoCU. The budget was not enough to allow researcher to visit and collect data from other Universities which are located in different areas.

### **2.2 Research Design, Data Sources and Data Collection**

The study applied a descriptive research design. This type of research design involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). This

descriptive research design enabled the researcher to describe on how WhatsApp groups were used as sources of breaking news among university students. Sources of primary data were students who were studying at MoCU. Questionnaires were distributed to selected students to collect data on how WhatsApp groups are used as sources of breaking news.

### **2.3 Sampling, Sample Size and Data Analysis**

The study included respondents from three programmes which were degree, diploma and certificate. Since this population was not homogenous, the stratified random sampling was employed whereby the population was stratified into three strata which were degree, diploma and certificate. After that, the simple random sampling was applied to select representatives from each stratum. A total of 348 students who own smart phone and subscribed to WhatsApp groups were selected from these three strata whereby each stratum was represented by 116 students who picked randomly. This means that each stratum was represented by equal number of respondents. The formula proposed by Kothari (2004) was used to find the sample size. This formula was selected due to fact that MoCU has a finite number of students. According to MoCU Admission Book (2017/18), the university has a total of 3,670 students. The sample size for this study was computed by using the formula below and a total sample of 348 students were used as representatives for the study.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot q \cdot p \cdot N}{e^2(N-1) + Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

Where by

n = sample size

N= size of population

Z= is the score for confidence level 95% which is 1.96

p = sample proportion

e = Sampling error

q= 1-p, where q=0.5

Since MoCU has 3670 students, when we substitute in the above formula we get

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 3670}{(0.05)^2(3670-1) + (1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}$$
$$n = 348$$

The collected data from 348 respondents were entered into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for analysis to determine descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages.

## **3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **3.1 Sources of Breaking News**

Students were asked on one source among several media presented in which they normally get breaking news. The findings show that 89.37% of all students normally get breaking news from WhatsApp groups in which they are subscribed to. It was also revealed that a few number of students (1.15%) get breaking news from Newspapers. Moreover, as shown on Table 1, TV and Radio are not good sources of breaking news to students as it was discovered that only 3.16% of all students get breaking news through these sources. The findings also show that 4.31% of all students get breaking news from their friends. Students who get breaking news from other social networks are only 2.01%. These findings indicate that, WhatsApp groups are of great importance to students as they enable majority of the students to get breaking news easily from different corners of the World.

**Table 1: Sources of Breaking News**

News type	Frequency	Percent (%)
WhatsApp groups	311	89.37
Newspaper	4	1.15
TV and Radio	11	3.16
Other social network	7	2.01
Friends	15	4.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>100.00</b>

### **3.2 Number of WhatsApp groups possessed by students**

Most university students are subscribed to more than one WhatsApp group. Findings on Table 2 show that, students who are members of three to four groups were 235 (67.5%) out of 348 students. Students who belong to five to six WhatsApp groups were 98 (28.1%) while those who belong to a maximum of two groups were 7 (2.1%). The higher number of students who belong to a maximum of four WhatsApp groups indicates the higher chances of being reached by breaking news than those who belong to few groups. This is due to the fact that as you join into many groups, you wide the range of network (Stéphane, 2016).

**Table 2: Number of WhatsApp groups possessed by students**

Number of WhatsApp groups	Frequency	Percent (%)
1-2 Groups	7	2.1
3-4 Groups	235	67.5
5-6 Groups	98	28.1
More than 7 Groups	8	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>100</b>

### **3.3 Breaking News shared on WhatsApp groups**

WhatsApp groups are of greater importance in disseminating and sharing breaking news among university students. Findings from Table 3 show that, students share various breaking news via WhatsApp groups. One of the breaking news which is shared via WhatsApp groups is change in time table. Abrupt change in the time table is not a normal; it is breaking news to students who were previously provided with full semester's time table. Out of 348 surveyed students, 200 (57.5%) said that they use WhatsApp groups to share any abrupt change in time table. Unplanned excuses from Lecturers are also taken as breaking news in university campuses. It was found that 90.2% of all students at MoCU use WhatsApp groups to inform others on any excuse from Lecturers. Emergencies within university are breaking news which is always shared by university students. Responses from respondents show that 56.9% of all students get news on any emergencies within the University via their WhatsApp groups.

**Table 3: News shared by students on WhatsApp groups**

News type	Frequency	Percent (%)
Change in Time Table	200	57.5
Excuse from Lecturers	314	90.2
Emergences within University	198	56.9
Release of UE results	348	100
National Breaking News	218	62.6
International Breaking News	98	28.2

National and international breaking news are also shared via WhatsApp groups among university students. More than 62% of the respondents said that they share National breaking news in their WhatsApp groups. International breaking news which is taken from different sources like online TVs and other sources are also shared via WhatsApp groups. Hence making these groups acts as sources of breaking news. University examination results are also taken as breaking news to university students.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **4.1 Conclusion**

The Circumstantial evidence shows that students of MoCU own smart phones and they are subscribed to different social Media groups including WhatsApp groups. They use these WhatsApp groups to access, share and disseminate different news. To find out these, this study investigated on how these WhatsApp groups are used as a source of breaking news among university students. Since MoCU has an enrolment of about 3670 students and interviewing each student is difficult and time consuming, the researcher took a sample of 348 students to represent others. The representative students were studied and findings show that more than 89% of all students get breaking news via WhatsApp groups. The study also revealed that, students are subscribed into many WhatsApp groups as 235 (67.5%) out of 348 students were members of three to four groups. Generally, the study found out that joining into these social Media groups is of great importance since it enables students to be updated on what happened and happening in the World.

##### **4.2 Recommendations**

The contribution of WhatsApp groups in sharing, accessing and disseminating breaking news among university students cannot be over-emphasized in this digital era. The study has shown the gap in accessing breaking news between students who are members of WhatsApp groups and those who are not members of WhatsApp groups. It is obvious that students who are members of different WhatsApp groups are in a good position to be updated on what happed on the World than those who are not joined in any groups. Those who are not members of WhatsApp groups will probably get news from their colleagues. In regard to these, we recommend the following:

- i) Universities should encourage students to have smart phones and to join into several social media groups including WhatsApp groups so as to be in a good position of accessing breaking news.
- ii) Universities and colleges should establish strong and reliable internet with enough internet access points for students to connect their mobile phones online.
- iii) As it is noted in Tanzania that, most mobile network companies are providing special bundle for university students, Universities should acknowledge all mobile network companies which provide special bundles for university students and encourage them to continue providing that service. This will

encourage those companies to continue offering good bundles to university students hence enable them to connect to social media groups in reasonable and affordable prices.

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