



Atıfta Bulunmak İçin / Cite This Paper: Ersöz, S. (2019). "Understanding Whatsapp Parent Groups' Dynamics: Group Communication and Information Sharing", *Manas Sosyal Arařtırmalar Dergisi*, 8 (Ek Sayı 1): 1136-1152
Geliř Tarihi / Received Date: 26.09.2018 **Kabul Tarihi / Accepted Date:** 02.01.2019

Arařtırma Makalesi

UNDERSTANDING WHATSAPP PARENT GROUPS' DYNAMICS: GROUP COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

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Abstract

This paper presents a study of WhatsApp group communication through a case study which is not searched scholarly yet, thus plans to contribute to this recent area of WhatsApp studies. WhatsApp is a widespread mobile messaging application, which changes the way that people communicate with each other. The instant messaging tool allows users to send messages not only in text forms but also in the video, audio and picture forms. Particularly it has become quite common to create groups for informal purposes among friends or for more formal purposes among colleagues. Recently WhatsApp parent groups have turned out to be a popular subject but yet only been discussed widely in popular media environments such as daily newspapers or in some blogs or online forums. This kind of group can be considered as an informal group where the determination of coming together is a mutual interest.

This research aims to widen the academic study area of WhatsApp by analyzing the dynamics of group communication through this application. To this end, firstly the development of WhatsApp groups and its characteristics and the differences between offline informal groups and online informal groups in terms of effective communication, peer relation and decision making will be interrogated. Then taking into account the social presence theory and the idea of being aware of communicating with somebody; WhatsApp parent group will be analyzed from the point of view of establishing a personal connection. As the research part of this study collected 6578 messages from a WhatsApp parent group will be evaluated by using content analysis. The results will be stimulating to understand and to explore the dynamics of WhatsApp parent group with regard to group communication and information sharing.

Keywords: Group Communication, Whatsapp Studies, Information Sharing.

WHATSAPP EBEVEYN GRUPLARININ DİNAMİKLERİNİ ANLAMAK: GRUP İLETİŐİMİ VE BİLGİ PAYLAŐIMI

Öz

Bu makale, henüz bilimsel olarak arařtırılmayan bir vaka aracılıđıyla WhatsApp grup iletiőimi hakkında bir çalıőma sunmaktadır ve WhatsApp çalıőmalarına katkıda bulunmayı planlamaktadır. WhatsApp, insanların birbirleriyle iletiőim kurma Őekliini deđiőtiren yaygın bir mobil mesajlaŐma uygulamasıdır. Anlık mesajlaŐma aracı, kullanıcıların yalnızca metin formlarında deđil, video, ses ve resim formlarında da mesaj göndermelerini sađlar. Özellikle arkadaşlar arasında gayri resmi amaçlar için veya meslektaşlar arasında daha resmi amaçlar için gruplar oluőtürmek oldukça yaygın hale gelmiőtir. Son zamanlarda WhatsApp ebeveyn grupları popüler bir konu haline gelmiőtir ancak yalnızca günlük gazeteler gibi popüler medya ortamlarında veya bazı bloglarda veya çevrim içi forumlarda bu konu tartiőtılmaktadır. Bu tür ebeveyn grupları, bir araya gelme kararının karŐılıklı çıkar iliŐkisine dayandıđı gayri resmi gruplar olarak görülebilir.

Bu çalışmada, grup iletişiminin dinamiklerini analiz edilerek WhatsApp'ın akademik çalışma alanını genişletmek amaçlanmaktadır. Bu amaçla öncelikle WhatsApp gruplarının gelişimi ve özellikleri ile çevrim dışı resmi olmayan gruplar ve çevrim içi resmi olmayan gruplar arasındaki etkin iletişim, akran ilişkisi ve karar verme farklılıkları sorgulanacaktır. Daha sonra sosyal bulunuşluk teorisini ve biriyle iletişim kurmanın farkında olma fikrini dikkate alarak; WhatsApp ebeveyn grubu, kişisel bağlantı kurma üzerinden analiz edilecektir. Bu çalışmanın araştırma bölümü için bir WhatsApp ebeveyn grubundan elde edilen 6578 mesaj, içerik analizi yöntemiyle değerlendirilecektir. Sonuçlar, WhatsApp ebeveyn grubunun grup iletişimi ve bilgi paylaşımı konusundaki dinamiklerini anlamak ve araştırmak için teşvik edici olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Grup İletişimi, Whatsapp Çalışmaları, Bilgi Paylaşımı.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, communication technologies have changed the way people communicate, both locally and globally. Online communication technologies and the availability of a network connection everywhere have prompted users to create a rapid increase in usage. Especially with the invention of the mobile instant messaging programs such as WhatsApp, Viber or Line that make not only one to one but group communication available, the dynamics of messaging has changed. Since the mid-2000s, online communication has been supported by group communication. In this regard, group communication dominates today's mobile communication on the occasion of the mobile instant messaging programs.

WhatsApp is the most popular mobile instant messaging program in the world. According to some statistics, WhatsApp is also showing us the importance of the medium in terms of communication. Conferring to Statistica, as of April 2018, mobile messaging application proclaimed 1,5 billion monthly active users (Statistica.com). One of the most important features of WhatsApp is that it allows mobile users to send real-time text messages to individuals or groups of friends at no cost. On the other side, many types of research have shown the decline in the usage of SMS (Okazaki, Taylor, 2008) due to this kind of free applications. Particularly it has become quite common to create WhatsApp groups for informal purposes among friends or for more formal purposes among colleagues. Different kinds of WhatsApp groups have been analyzed for diverse objectives. The literature has shown that one of the most central studies aims is to search the interaction between teachers and students (Bouhnik, Deshen, 2014; Almekhlafy, Alzubi, 2016; Chokri, 2015; Bansal & Joshi, 2014; Pinar and Pinar, 2017), the impact of the tool on language learning (Bere, 2013; Church, 2013; Nouwens et al., 2017) and the healthcare communication amongst surgical team (Johnston, et al., 2015; Boulos et al., 2016; Emre et al., 2017). All these research focus on the advantages of the application and it is enabling quick, fast communication and making people stayed connected. Yet WhatsApp has been subject to research about citizen journalism (Kahraman and Önder, 2017) and political participation (Sanchez et al., 2018).

The fast and widespread expansion of the WhatsApp program allows its users to interact with each other in spite of the distance fact. Yet the cost and rapidity of communication via the internet are far less comparable with other communication tools. This orients most of the people to use this technology for their subjective purposes. Especially WhatsApp becomes a meeting point where people are profoundly practicing network socialization. Moreover, the application is being used by business objectives either individually or corporately. What seems original with the application is that it provokes the emergence of elements of transformation which concern not only the human communication but also the transmission of the information.

One recent popular group that is using WhatsApp very actively is the parent's groups. This kind of group's togetherness is attached to a purpose or a mutual interest. However, unlike more informal groups like family or friends, WhatsApp parent groups are not easy to categorize as formal or informal. Customarily, the group starts as an informal one, but with the continuity of the communication activity, they turn out to be quasi-informal groups. The message exchange dynamics in parent's group differ from other groups in terms of interaction and communication. Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyze the messaging patterns of such a parent group from the perspective of social presence theory. To this end, firstly group communication in online environments and the features of such communication will be discussed. The second part of the paper will reflect on the WhatsApp, mobile instant messaging program and its contribution to group communication as well as its side effects in the interpretation of the messages. Finally in the last part, collected 6578 messages from a WhatsApp parent group will be evaluated by using content analysis.

2. OFFLINE AND ONLINE GROUP COMMUNICATION

This part of the paper is dedicated to explaining the differences in communication between online and offline groups. The basic definition of group communication is "a dynamic process where a small number of people engage in a conversation" (McLean, 2005). If this engagement occurs in an online environment, we might consider this as an online group communication. There are many different types of communication tools through online environments. Group communication vary according to the specialty of the online environment such as engaging in a conversation during an online game, e-mailing, sending text and or video and pictures via social media. Group communication via using the smartphone applications is not diversified than any of the listed. Therefore the characteristics of group communication where members are communicating in real time, by not being together physically, can form some common properties. Nevertheless, those common properties are slightly or completely

different according to the context of the communication when we take into consideration the offline group communication.

The literature about the group communication attributes much attention to some concepts such as group norms, group interaction and group relationships. Group norms are customs, standards, and behavioral expectations that emerge as a group forms (Schmitz, 2012). Every group either formed offline or online, has its own norms and those norms are usually completing each other. The reason behind this is that we are not only part of online groups but everybody is also part of offline groups. Consequently, we tend to transform our offline group behaviors to online environments such as greetings. Each online group develops its own norms but the claim here is that those norms are compatible with the offline communication norms. According to Myers and Anderson (2008) there are three kinds of norms that are task norms, procedural norms and social norms. (Myers, Anderson, 2008). Different online groups develop a selection of norms particular to the objective of the group. For example, a WhatsApp group formed for business purposes can have different types of task, procedural and social norms than a WhatsApp group formed amongst friends. The power and status relations should be more definite for the first group as a result, task and procedural norms could be imposed more. As for the second group, social norms that determine the engagement in interpersonal communication could be more visible. Online group members behaviors are shaped by these norms and the norms improve and become more mature over time that helps to put an order online group relations (Walther, Burgoon, 1992).

Another important issue about group communication is interaction. According to Mclean (2015) the interaction is defined as “the context of the communication interaction involves the setting, scene, and expectations of the individuals involved”. The main difference in terms of interaction between an online and offline environment is “asynchronous communication”. An asynchronous communication is practiced when the participants are not physically together thus the interchanges do not occur at the same time. Email communication, social media interactions as well as mobile technology-enabled communication such as SMS or WhatsApp communication might occur asynchronously. The group size is another important feature impacting the concept of interaction. The research has shown that the online groups can be excessive in terms of members compared to offline groups and the more crowded the groups were, the less the interaction was (Jones, et al., 2004). Even though online group communication gives the impression of advantageous to all of its members, the research has shown that there is very little online interaction for group members (Galston, 2000).

From the perspective of the research on group interaction, an important question on whether the groups that are formed via mobile applications have characteristics in common with the online groups has to be asked. It is also important to understand how the mobile messaging groups function and if the interaction amongst group members can be characterized as group communication in its classical perception.

An additional important aspect of group communication is the relations that are exercised through power, control and status. At the basis of relationships within groups lies the idea of group size. McLean (2003) and Harris & Sherblom (1999) noted that possible interactions and relations increase according to the number of group members. Online and mobile groups, as marked above, could be very large in size so that the possible relations and interactions could also be large in numbers. Nevertheless online group communication via social media channels has to be analyzed differently than the mobile groups that are formed for information sharing. The number of people that are followed on the social media accounts is not necessarily the evidence of a formed relationship. On the contrary, many research showed that the relationship is inversely proportional to the number of friends and/or followers (Frampton & Child, 2013; Croom et al., 2015; Lönnqvist, & Deters, 2015). In this respect, mobile application based groups are different in terms of relationships where the membership signifies the implementation of social interaction.

3. WHATSAPP GROUPS, INFORMATION SHARING AND SOCIAL PRESENCE THEORY

WhatsApp Inc. was founded in 2009 by Jan Koum and Brian Acton in Santa Clara, California as an alternative to short messaging service. It had started as an iPhone application, later expanded its usage for Android, Windows Phone, BlackBerry, and Nokia. Facebook Inc. has bought WhatsApp for 19 billion USD in February 2014. It's very easy to start using WhatsApp because downloading is free and does not require complicated registration. The application spontaneously recognizes users based on their phone numbers. Moreover, contacts that are on the smartphone and that are WhatsApp users, are combined with the application's contact list. With the new features added to the application such as voice message and desktop version, the usage popularity gained steam. Additionally, the group chat number has been increased to 256 rather than 100 (Independent, 2016). With all these developments, the usage ratio of the application has soared up. The figure 1, on the share of the population in selected countries who are active WhatsApp users as of 3rd quarter 2017, is showing us the penetration of the applications worldwide. According to the statistics, Saudi Arabia is to have

the most active users for WhatsApp, with a population share of 73 percent followed by Malaysia 68% and Germany 65%.

The group communication feature of the application since then also gained popularity due to its simplicity and user-friendly format. A group can be created by an administrator and the users can join the group after the invitation of an administrator. Any group member can see the full group chat transcript and can leave the group without any technical difficulties. Although it is only the group administrator that has the right to change the name or the image of the group. Moreover, the blue ticks that are activated when the message is read by the other side, made available on group communication as well. This means that whenever somebody from the group sends a message, the sender can easily see who reads the messages.

WhatsApp groups can be founded for different objectives amongst colleagues, family members or friends. One popular type of WhatsApp group gained importance recently which is the parent groups. This kind of groups is formed between the parents whose children are classmates and are going to the same school. WhatsApp groups compared with the online groups are more dynamic in terms of interaction while these groups have the similar features with the offline

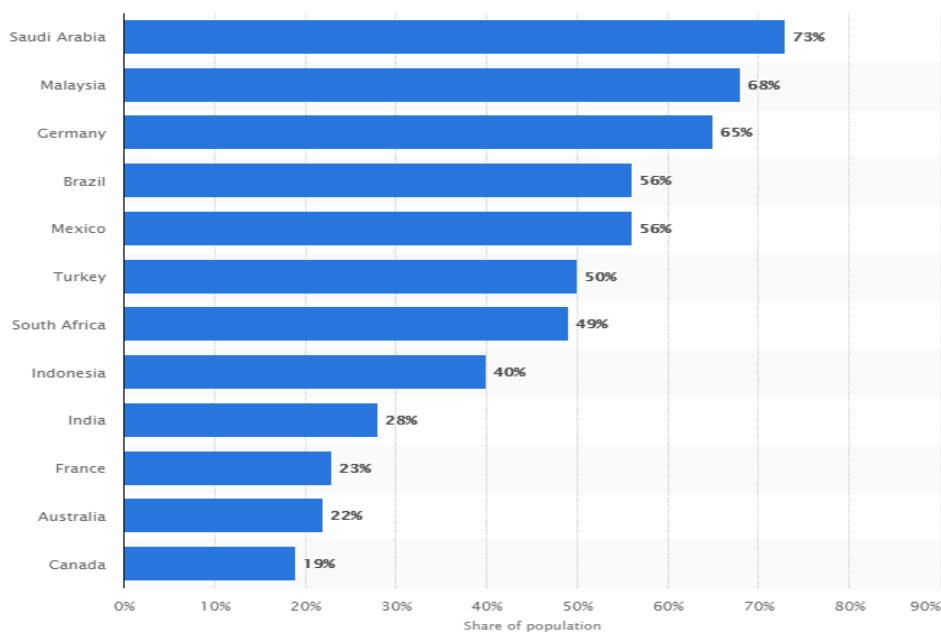


Figure 1. Share of Population in Selected Countries Who are Active Whatsapp Users as of 3rd Quarter 2017

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/291540/mobile-internet-user-whatsapp/>

groups as mentioned above. This could be explained by the shift from face to face communication to online communication (Zhao & Rosson, 2009). Yet there is an increasing

tendency to be connected via mobile phones rather than traditional computing platforms. Therefore, mobile-based interactions are taking the form of offline interactions. On the other side, there lies a massive literature on the link between social presence theory and computer-mediated communication. The theory first developed by Short et al. (1976) and defined as “the degree of salience of the other person in an interaction”. According to the social presence theory, the communication environment is effective when it has the appropriate social presence for the level of participation required for a task. With the development of computer-mediated communication, social presence started to be seen by means of how individuals are interacting in their online environments (Walther, 1992). Social presence is shown how messages are sent and how these messages are interpreted by others in online environments and also the theory identifies how members of the online environments communicate with each other which influences the efficiency of communication (Kehrwald, 2008). Social presence theory is commonly employed in the research related to online learning and high social presence is found to be substantial for enhancing an effective education (Gunawardena, 1995). Tu and McIssac (2002) noted that social presence effects online learning positively but the regularity of involvement does not conclude with a high social presence. The mentioned researchers focused on searching the connection between the quality of online learning and social presence in online learning environments by taking into considerations the concepts such as social context, online communication and interactivity.

Recently Tu et al. (2012) studied mobile, online and network social presence in an online learning environment and proposed a model for an effective mobile learning strategy. According to this model; the interactions within the mobile social presence is taking the form of personal control, context-awareness, location-based, augmented reality (Tu et al., 2012). Apart from the research on online learning environments and social presence, interpersonal communication has also been analyzed by employing social presence theory. According to the work of Gooch and Watts (2015) “a given communication technology is evaluated and found to be associated with high levels of Social Presence, our data indicates that said communication technology would also support the relationship through increasing feelings of closeness”.

4. RESEARCH SCOPE

The research part of this study focuses on WhatsApp groups' communication patterns through a content analysis of the social presence and participant observation. The said WhatsApp group in this research is a group of parents composed of the mothers whose children are

classmates. WhatsApp parent groups are dissimilar to other kind of groups in their nature, given the togetherness in such a group is not formal nevertheless is mandatory. WhatsApp parent group in this study is taken as a case and the results will be instructive for the further research as such a group communication has not been analyzed yet. As a result, the main contribution of this paper is offering a theoretical background for WhatsApp group communication by conducting a research on the content analysis of social presence. Thus not only social presence on computer-mediated communication but also WhatsApp group communication and its level of social presence can be introduced as an area for the future research.

4.1. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to define the level of social presence of a given WhatsApp group and to state the characteristics of such a group communication. One of the questions that guided this research is whether WhatsApp groups are effective in terms of forming interaction, tasks and norms. This question is analyzed by participant observation and the existence of some of the main features of group communication, which are listed above, is interrogated. The second question is over the level of social presence of the WhatsApp group messages and this is explored by implementing the content analysis of social presence based on the Model and Template for Assessment of Social Presence developed by Rouke et al. (1999). These content analyses help us to classify the WhatsApp messages under three categories which are affective, interactive and cohesive.

4.2. Study Participants

The participants of this study are composed of 23 mothers that are members of a WhatsApp group for the purpose of information sharing and the pursuit of their children school activities including the homework. The history of the group dated back to September 2016 when the children started the primary school. Since then group members are actively using WhatsApp for any related issues. Using group chats via WhatsApp is quite easy and for researched WhatsApp group, one of the group members is the admin and only the admin has the right to remove and add people. All participants have the right to send messages anytime and the replies for those messages, which are either in question forms or information based, come both synchronously or asynchronously.

4.3. Data Collection

The data are collected in two different ways. For the first research question, not only the sent messages are taken into consideration but offline casual conversation with the group members and direct observation are included. Direct observations are conducted when the group

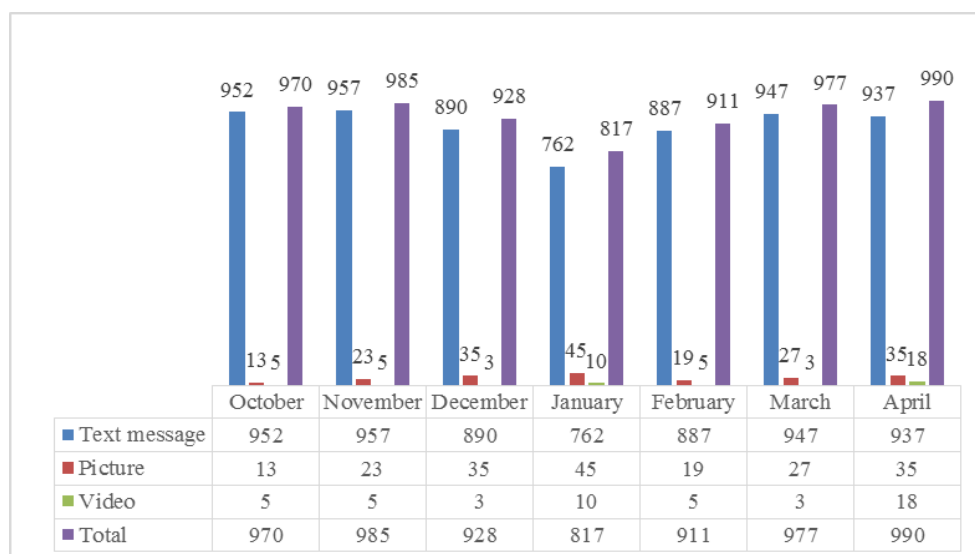
members come together for special occasions such as birthday parties or school shows. For the content analysis of social presence, 6578 messages dated between 1st of October 2017 and 30th of April 2018, are collected through the desktop version of the application and categorized as a text message, picture and video. No voice message is recorded during the research.

4.4. Data Analysis and Findings on Group Communication

First, the collected data are categorized according to the number of messages monthly. As shown in table 1; the distribution of text, picture and video messages are showing similarities in terms of numbers each month. Fewer messages are being shared during the month of January with a total number of 817 due to the two weeks of semester holiday. During the holiday period, no messages are shared amongst the group members. On the other hand, maximum number of video and pictures with a total number of 55 are shared in January. This could be explained by having the report card day on the 19th of January when all the mothers go to school and take a picture with the teacher. Eventually, those pictures and videos are shared on the group. The monthly average number of messages is 930 including both video, picture and text and the average number of daily messages reach 31.

The analyzed WhatsApp group has got task, procedural and social norms as any type of offline group. Those norms are formed respectively after the group members become more familiar with each other. One of the main subjects of the group conversation is the homework such as everyday one of the members is asking about the homework. Within time, four group members decide to send homework regularly by taking photos from the book pages. It has developed to be their task to convey the message about homework. Social norms are also quite compatible

Table 1. Monthly Distribution of Whatsapp Messages October 2017-April 2018



with the offline groups' social norms such as "get well soon", "happy birthday" and all sorts of thanking messages are matching with the exact use of the those patterns in offline world. Within time, members get used to sending those kinds of text when it is necessary as these are representing the group norms. If such a social norm message is sent, other group members feel like sending same kind of text. This is also showing how strong the social norms are within such a group although face to face conversations are limited. When it comes to the relationships that are exercised through power, control and status; the group has got its boss by default. As explained before, there is an official representative of the group who is responsible for sharing the information. As this member is kind of a boss figure, other group members usually ask opinions of the representative on any sorts of issues. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that, this is not a professional working group but a group of people that come together for a specific purpose. Therefore all the members feel freer to either obey or disobey the group's norms. For example, if the representative asks a help over an issue, this is usually done in a request form and not that other members feel obliged to help.

Interaction is another important element of the group and it is related to the group size. The bigger the group is, the less participatory the interaction is. In this case of WhatsApp parent group, the group is composed of 23 people which may cause an interaction problem in offline groups. On contrary, it is giving a more equal chance to its members in terms of sending messages. But then again, not all the time group members are interacting equally with each other and some members prefer to stay silent or some members get silent after not receiving any messages to their comments or questions. This issue can be explained by the offline acquaintance of some members. If members are also interacting offline, their interaction seems to be higher compared with others. Interaction in such an environment is also quite related to roles. Like in an offline group, the members of the WhatsApp group has got some roles associated with the member's profession. For example, if there is an issue related to law, the opinion of the professional lawyer of the group is asked or the English teacher of the group is ever been questioned about the English lesson or homework. This is showing us that professional occupation of the members is affecting the status and power much more than the group's representative.

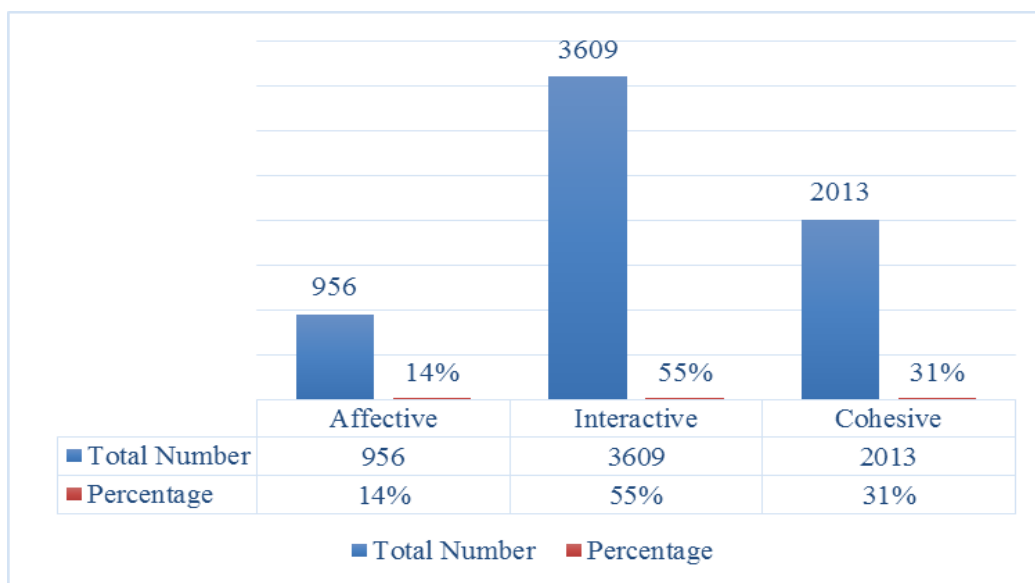
The overall communication in the group is quasi-formal and usually carrying the characteristics of an informal communication. Yet some members don't feel comfortable to address each other informally and use quite a formal language. As a result, while some of the features are showing similarities with the offline groups, some do not. Interaction seems to be a more complex issue than the norms and relationship in such a context since it is linked to

group size. For some aspects, it works better than the offline group communication, however, the case of WhatsApp group communication is missing many of the verbal communication aspects such as mimics, gestures and indirect expressions. Consequently, the group communication does not actualize as it has to be.

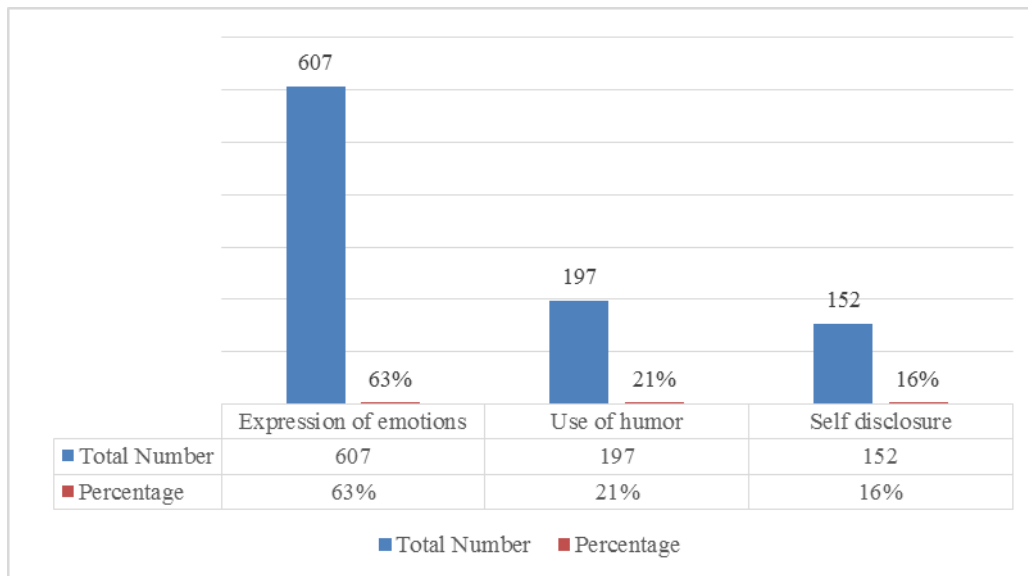
4.5. Data Analysis and Findings on the Level of Social Presence

The second part of the research consists of a content analysis of social presence based on the Model and Template for Assessment of Social Presence (Rouke et al, 1999). All the collected messages are studied for affective, interactive, or cohesive components of social presence. It has to be noted that, while all the messages are being evaluated, they are counted only for one type of level of social presence. It means that if the message carries both affective and interactive components, the dominant component is taken into consideration and classified according to the overriding element. That is why the total sum of the categorized messages are not overlapping each other. Table 2 is showing the types of messages according to social presence.

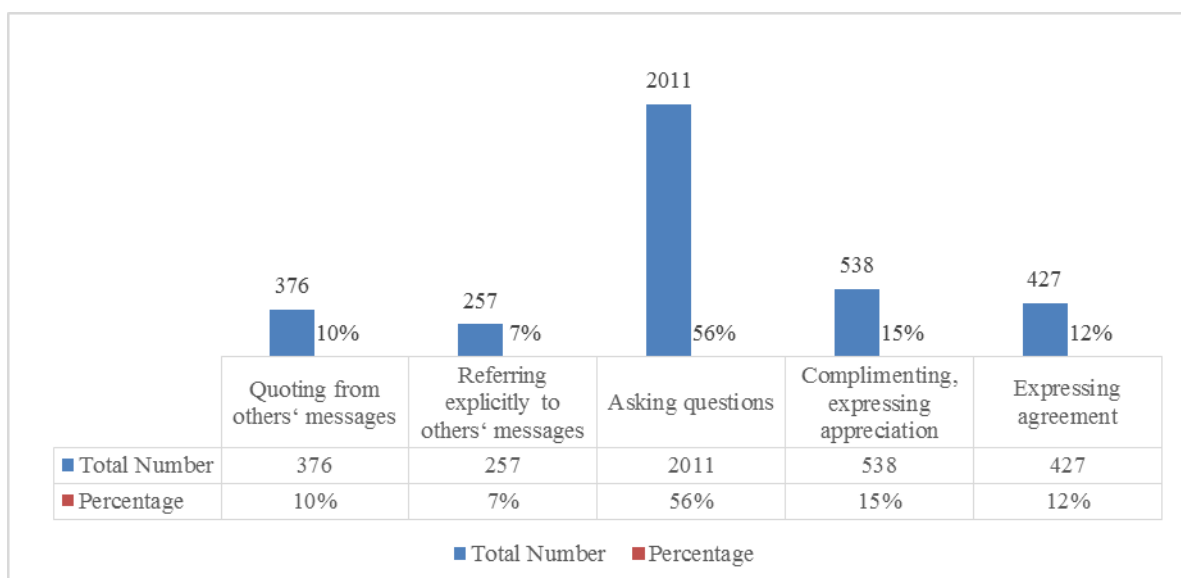
Table 2. Distribution of Messages According to Social Presence



Interactive messages have the highest ratio of 55% followed by cohesive messages with 31% and lastly affective messages with 14%. Table 3 below is indicating the distribution of messages for affective category. Model and Template for Assessment of Social Presence, Rouke

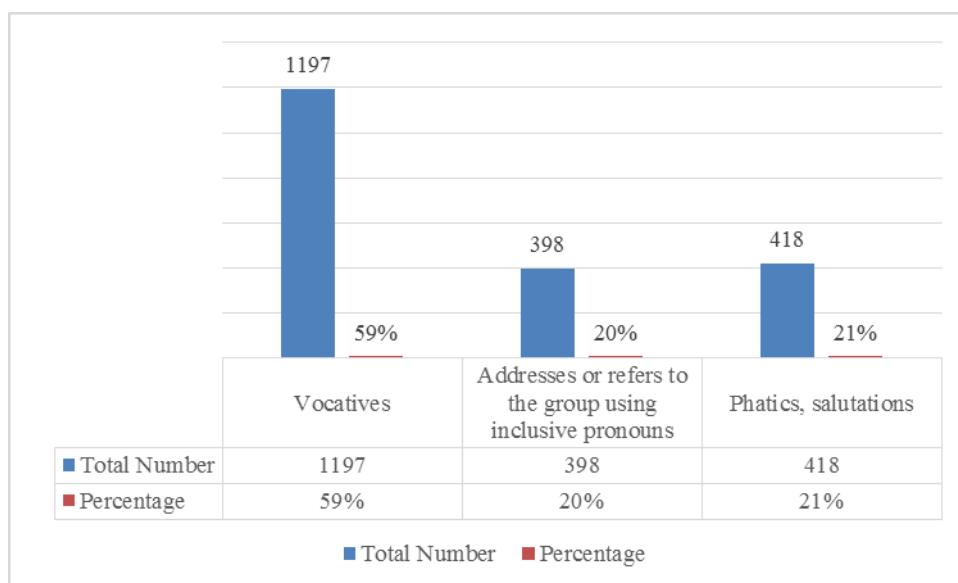
Table 3. Distribution of Affective Category Messages

et al. (1999) classified three sub-categories which are an expression of emotions and use of humor for affective category. In this study, affective category is composed of 956 messages and expression of emotions with 63% is the highest in this category followed by 21% use of humor and 16% self-disclosure. To have the least type of self-disclosure messages appears to be meaningful with the objective of the group. As explained before, the group is quasi-formal in communicating and the main aim is to get information related to children and school. That explains why the overall sum of affective messages is also lowest. Use of humor is not preferred too much amongst the group members. Table 4 is resuming the interactive category messages under 5 sub-categories. Rouke et al. (1999) in their work classified six sub-categories to evaluate interactive messages. One indicator cannot be evaluated which is continuing a thread.

Table 4. Distribution of Interactive Category Messages

The same finding is noted by Robinson et al. in their publication on WhatsApp “similarly, the way that messages are posted onto WhatsApp also makes the “reply rather than start new thread” indicator redundant because there is no hierarchy or topic categorization; all messages appear in chronological order” (2015). On the other hand, Robinson et al. categorized “quoting from others” as a missing data as well (2015). Nevertheless, quoting from others as an indicator is present in this study. This feature of WhatsApp is a recent one from 2016 and it reduces the confusion in group chats by letting users attach the original message to their new message. The studied WhatsApp group is composed of 23 users and sometimes it becomes quite necessary to quote the message that a user is replying. The overall usage percentage of this feature is 10. Asking questions has the highest number of messages with 2011 out of 3609. The number of complimenting and expressing appreciation messages is 538 and these are expressed mainly towards the group members who accomplish a service for the class such as bringing to the class something to eat. Sharing the daily homework is the role of admin and such an act is usually resulted by expressing an appreciation from others. Expressing agreement is done when users are asked to do so. For example, if there is not a consensus on an issue, the users are asked to approve or disapprove the issue so the decision is taken by the majority. Table 5 below is showing the distribution of cohesive messages. 59% of the cohesive messages are classified as vocatives. Vocative is defined as addressing or referring to participants by name

Table 5. Distribution of Cohesive Category Messages



(Rouke et al, 1999) and as it is mentioned above, the group members mainly addressing each other by names except three members of the group. Those three members are relatively older than the other members and are being addressed as Mrs. Only 20% of the cohesive category messages

refer to the group using inclusive pronouns which may indicate the nature of such a group as a secondary group. People prefer to refer to the primary groups that they belong, using inclusive pronouns such as friends and family. The third indicator of the category is phatic and salutations, which are mainly greetings and salutations, is evaluated as 21% of the overall cohesive category. The specialty of WhatsApp messages are their asynchronous forms and conversations may start and end without salutations or greeting. Particularly, the group chats are not convenient for salutations and greetings given the impossibility of all members greet or salute each other.

Table 6. Social Presence Categories, Definitions, and Examples from The Analysis

| Category | Indicators | Definition | Examples |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| Affective | Expressions of Emotion | Conventional expressions of emotion or unconventional expressions of emotion, includes repetitious punctuation, conspicuous capitalization, emoticons | “Wishing everyone a great semester holiday... You will be missed ” |
| | Use of humor | Teasing, cajoling, irony, understatements, sarcasm | “I want to thank my daughter who told teacher that her mother would be more than happy to make a cake for everybody for tomorrow” |
| | Self-disclosure | Presents details of life outside class or Express vulnerability | “For tomorrow’s picnic, I cannot prepare anything because of my health problems. Please accept my apologies” |
| Interaction | Quoting from others’ messages | Using software features to quote others entire message or cutting and pasting selections of others’ messages | Is there music class tomorrow? Yes there is. |
| | Referring explicitly to others’ messages | Direct references to contents of others’ | “As you said, tomorrow’s homework is from Math book, pages56-59” |
| | Asking questions | Students ask questions of other students or the moderator | “At what time does the ceremony start tomorrow?” |
| | Complimenting, expressing appreciation | Complimenting others or contents of others’ messages | “Dear X, it is so nice of you to send pictures while kids are playing in the garden” |
| | Expressing agreement | Expressing agreement with others or content of others messages | “I agree that instead of folk dance class, kids should have robotic coding class” |
| Cohesive | Vocative | Addressing or referring to participants by name | Can X get the money from by boy’s bag tomorrow” |
| | Addresses or refers to the group using inclusive pronouns | Addresses the group as we, us, our, group | “We, as class of 2-E will be attending the end year show” |
| | Phatic, salutations | Communication that serves a purely social function; greetings, closures | “Get well soon, kisses and hugs” “Hi everyone” “Thank you so much” |

Table 6 demonstrates the examples of messages for each category adapted from Rouke et al. (1999) model of assessment for social presence. For each indicator, an example is provided.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The first part of the research is done to find similarities and differences between an offline group communication and an online group communication. According to the research, it is found that WhatsApp groups take after offline groups in terms of norms, relationships and interactions. Although some dissimilarities are noted such as the role of the group leader. However, the unlikeness is attached to the nature of the group. WhatsApp parent group is not like professional working group, therefore, rules and the authority of the leader is not dominant over the group. Norms and customs are borrowed from the offline life of the members and related behaviors are developed. On the other side, the size of the group is relatively large for a group communication consequently some members prefer not be interactive as others do.

The second part of the research is realized to measure the level of social presence. Hence the components of social presence are searched. The group communication via WhatsApp is supportive of the social presence level. This can be explained by the mobile social presence since the communication is evolving through mobile phones rather than a computer-mediated communication platform. The interaction via mobile technology is supporting social presence better than any other online tool. The results of the content analysis also show that interaction messages are highest amongst the others. The distribution of the other categories is at a high ratio as well, which is showing that not only interaction messages but affective and cohesive messages are conveyed. The users do not have any difficulties to transmit those messages.

The literature until now focused on social presence theory from the perspective of online learning and class interactions. This study aims to explore the WhatsApp groups' communication dynamics and level of social presence. As a case, a parent group of primary school kids is analyzed. Collected 6578 messages dated between October 2017 and April 2018 are evaluated according to the model of assessment of social presence. The findings show that all three categories are found and most commonly the messages are grouped under interactivity category. It is notable to say that interactivity as a concept works well for such a medium. Another important point about the research is the differentiation in the environment. While previous research investigates computer-mediated environments and communication, this study uses mobile communication application as a base. WhatsApp communication platform has got many advantages over the other types of online platforms. The user-friendly interface of the application, the availability of many possible communication styles from images to voice messages and immediacy make WhatsApp suitable platform for group communication. The claim of the study is that WhatsApp as a platform not only facilitates the communication and creates a social presence for online learners, but it facilitates any type of group communication.

Further research, any type of the group communication via WhatsApp can be interrogated. This study's example group is neither business oriented nor social oriented. However, communication among 23 people can easily be achieved. Even the members of the group claim that not any other platform can provide such a fast communication but that the platform establishes a truly personal connection. Face to face communication is an essential need but the groups that are after fast and immediate communication can benefit from this platform. It even offers an equal chance for everybody for their voice to be heard in numerically large groups.

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