MOBILE INSTANT MESSAGING APPS: THE NEW CO-PARTICIPANTS IN FACE ENCOUNTERS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

MOBİL MESAJ UYGULAMALARI: GÜNDELİK YAŞAMDA YÜZ İRTİBATLARINDA (KARŞILAŞMALAR) YENİ ORTAK KATILIMCILAR

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ABSTRACT

The existence of smartphones has certainly transformed the way individuals interact with each other in everyday life. This transformation is also evident in face encounters in public space where participants co-exist and interact with their mobile devices while they communicate with others. In this new social environment that intersects with the digital ecology that individuals belong to result in new patterns of behaviour that also change the nature of face encounters today. This study aims at exploring how WhatsApp, as the mostly used mobile instant messaging platform impact the way people interact with each other and how the social rules of conduct are constructed in the existence of continuous flows of information and content leaking into face encounters. The data was obtained from semi-structured in-depth interviews with 25 undergraduate students in Türkiye. The results showed that WhatsApp messages are irresistible during social gatherings, which has led to a new set of social rules of conduct, a new working consensus among interactants in everyday life.

Keywords: Mobile Instant Messaging, Face-to-Face Communication, Face Encounters, Everyday Life, WhatsApp

ÖZ

Akıllı telefonların varlığı, bireylerin günlük yaşamda birbirleriyle etkileşim kurma biçimlerini önemli ölçüde değiştirmiştir. Bu dönüşüm, kamusal alanda yüz yüze karşılaşmalarda da kendini gösterir. Bireyler kamusal alanda mobil cihazları eşliğinde bulunuşlarının yanında bu cihazlarla da etkileşim içindedirler. Bireylerin ait oldukları dijital ekolojinin kesiştiği bu yeni sosyal ortam yeni davranış kalıplarının doğmasına neden olurken aynı zamanda günümüzün yüz irtibatlarının (karşılaşmalarının) doğasını değiştirmiştir. Bu çalışma, en çok kullanılan mobil mesajlaşma platformu olan WhatsApp'ın insanların birbirleriyle etkileşimlerini nasıl etkilediğini ve yüz yüze karşılaşmalara sürekli sızan bilgi ve içerik akışının varlığında sosyal davranış kurallarının nasıl inşa edildiğini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın verileri, Türkiye'deki 25 lisans öğrencisiyle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmelerden elde edilmiştir. WhatsApp mesajlarının yüz irtibatı (karşılaşmalar) sırasında karşı konulmaz güçte olduğu ve buna bağlı olarak yeni bir dizi sosyal davranış kuralları ortaya çıkarken bu kurallara dair gündelik yaşamda etkileşimde bulunanlar arasında bir mutabakatın oluştuğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mobil Mesajlaşma, Yüz Yüze İletişim, Yüz İrtibatı (Karşılaşmalar), Gündelik Yaşam, WhatsApp

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of mobile phones in daily life was a turning point in the field of communication. However, the development of mobile technologies enabling individuals to access to various communication channels in every sphere of everyday life has significantly transformed not only the way people communicate with each other in everyday encounters but also the structure and norms of such social gatherings. In pre-digital face encounters, Goffman (1963) in his work titled *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* refers to the necessity of "agreement concerning perceptual relevancies and irrelevancies" and "a working consensus" that requires "a degree of mutual considerateness, sympathy, and a muting of opinion differences" in face-to-face gatherings (pp. 95-96). It is this principle of 'mutualness' that lies in the essence of social interactions and thus the maintenance of social order. However, in the presence of smartphones today, it is easy to observe that this mutual contract is broken several times during the day when participants of a face encounter are disrupted by notifications that pop up on their screens, which they cannot help checking. Gergen (2002) refers to the individuals who are physically present but actively engaged in technological devices as "absent present" and argues that as the domain of absent present expands even more with smartphones, the importance that is attributed to face-to-face interactions is prone to decrease, which has consequences for cultural life.

In everyday communication, Goffman (2019) addresses to the possibility of temporary talks to individuals who are 'bystanders' out of the social gatherings where a conversation is held among the participants in face encounters. He refers to the possibility of this kind of a cross-talk like an instance of asking an address in the street or a chat in a party. Nonetheless, with the emergence of wireless digital technologies in everyday communication practices, among many signals that show loss of cognitive and visual attention today is 'digital' cross-talks, which refer to "a form of interaction that occurs during an encounter when one member of a *with* partnership engages in

conversation or conversation-like activity" (Ictech, 2019, pp. 34-35) through mainly smartphones. Kneidinger-Müller (2017) call Goffman's cross-talk "parallel communication" referring to the physically present people's usage of smartphones in face-to-face interactions to communicate with physically absent ones, the invisible 'withs.' Goffman (1963) takes newspapers or magazines as "portable source of involvement" and also "substitute companion when eating alone without the cover of conversation with an eating partner," (p. 52) because they help the vulnerable *single* in public seem engaged and protect himself from others. When the participant is engaged in an encounter where there are *withs*, the individual can still use a newspaper or magazine to exclude himself from the encounter without losing his face. Smartphones today not only function as the instruments of involvement like newspapers and magazines, but also become the companions to individuals as their withs in face-to-face communication.

During the early years of mobile phones, digital cross-talks emerged as phone calls, e-mails and text-messages in public places, whereas today, such cross-talks have expanded in different forms. Before social platforms like Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp were launched, within the scope of the *Apparatgeist* theory that sees the devices the symbol of groups' social and behavioural norms, Katz and Aakhus (2002) address to the developments in telecommunication technologies and predicted that mobiles with Internet connection would enable users to contact with anyone regardless of time and place, access to vast amount of information, document their lives, watch videos of joy and sorrow. As foreseen, today computer-mediated messages leak into face encounters through different channels like social platforms, e-mails, web notifications, or mobile instant messaging (MIM) apps promoting engagement in different modes of interaction. Humphreys (2005) asserts that people in public space often check their mobiles not to make calls but rather check if it is on or off or check messages which causes public spaces to be privatised and atomised because mobiles block out others

nearby. Among all these channels, MIM apps are the ones through which multimodal messages, or 'bystanders,' seem to leak into face encounters far more frequently than others. This interaction between absent presents in face encounters and invisible withs cause the social and cultural norms of face-to-face communication evolve.

There is extensive research that concentrates on MIM applications, primarily WhatsApp. WhatsApp enables users to share not only verbal-text messages but also images, videos, files across numerous digital platforms with single users and groups, which creates a transformative effect in different spheres of communication. Research shows that among different functions of smartphones in everyday life, WhatsApp is a powerful driving force that keep individuals engaged (Montag et al., 2015), and users mostly share private and inconsequential everyday information, which is often true and quite helpful in handling many of the chores they often encounter in everyday life (Martínez-Comeche and Ruthven, 2023). Despite not being designed for education, there is considerable research that explores WhatsApp as a tool and resource for education (Suárez-Lantarón et al., 2022). It is found that online bonding established through WhatsApp was positively related with psychological well-being, self- esteem and social competence (Kaye & Quinn, 2020). Research also suggests that through chat groups on MIM apps, the communication among family members improved the family relationships among both the elderly and the younger adults (Zhao et al., 2021). However, there is no considerable interest in exploring how individuals' use of MIM during face-to-face interactions; that is, the inquiry into understanding how face-to-face communication has changed today in the presence of MIM platforms being used simultaneously is often neglected. The aim of the present study is to explore absent present interactants' purpose of using WhatsApp in face engagements and the factors which make this instant messaging application so attractive for users who venture the mutual working consensus during conversational engagements together with users' approach to and experience in their

digital groups regarding the codes of conduct that individuals comply with.

The study seeks answers to the following research questions in this study:

1. What is the primary purpose of using instant messaging in face engagements?
2. What is the attitude of users toward instant messaging during face engagements?
3. What are the new social rules of conduct in face engagements in the presence of instant messaging?

1. RESEARCH ON MIM

The everyday communication has transformed dramatically with the advent of social platforms. Among such platforms, MIM applications have contributed to a drastic transformation in everyday communication. While the popular social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat offer users MIM services (direct messaging – DM), other MIM applications like WhatsApp, WeChat, Telegram, Line, Viber enable individual users or groups to not only text but also share diverse types of content like videos, files, web links, or voice messages. People are engaged in different communication patterns and participate in various personal networks through MIM systems which excel in enabling instantaneous communication between users, transcending geographical barriers and time zones. Consequently, today MIM applications have become critical communication channels that are used at different spheres of everyday life such as business and marketing (Presti et al., 2021; Safieddine and Nakhoul, 2021; Ferraz et al., 2023), education (Tang and Hew, 2017; Klein et al., 2018; Bere and Rambe, 2019), crisis communication (Lin et al., 2020; Roitman and Yeshua-Katz, 2021), and health communication (Giordano et al., 2017; Ezra et al., 2020; Martinengo et al. 2020).

The demand in MIM that enable continuous flow of information to meet individuals' personal and professional communication needs has increased. Contrary to the arguments that the use of IM apps was controversial due to causing disruptions in work places, research proved that the benefits of MIM overwhelmed the interruptions in professional life (Hurbean et al., 2023) and increase professional

knowledge exchange and team performance (Ou et al., 2010), job performance, job satisfaction, and relational satisfaction (Sheer and Rice, 2017). The enforcement of remote working during COVID-19 pandemic urged all professionals to use MIM apps for effective interpersonal and team communication. These applications became even more crucial in everyday communication as individuals needed instant communication more than ever in lockdowns. While the contribution of face-to-face communication to building social connectedness is never neglected, under circumstances like Covid-19 lockdowns, MIM brings opportunities to individuals to stay connected with social contacts (Yenilmez Kacar, 2023). Hence, the academic interest in MIM, primarily WhatsApp as the most widely used platform globally, thus, accelerated after 2019 and 82% of WhatsApp literature emerged between 2020 and 2023 (Verma and Yuvaraj, 2023). Research has investigated different aspects of this service in various areas. MIM apps potentially contribute to the mobilisation of certain groups with shared interests and goals (Bonini et al, 2023; Soares et al., 2021). There is significant research that explores the constructive role of MIM in education (Coetzee et al., 2023; Tang and Hew, 2022; Tang and Bradshaw, 2020) and also specifically language education (Jia and Hew, 2022; Kartal, 2022; Soria et al., 2020). Similar to all other social platforms, MIM plays a major part in political communication for the dissemination of news as an asset of democracy (Vermeer et al., 2021) and election campaigns where the political actors need to reach masses in order to transmit information regarding the election programme (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2022).

2. THE USE OF MIM IN TÜRKİYE

Türkiye is a country where 95.5% of households have Internet access from home, and the proportion of Internet usage is 87.1% for individuals between the ages of 16 and 74 (TÜİK - Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). The Internet users spend 7 hours 24 minutes online on average and 73.1% of population in Türkiye are active social media users in every 60 seconds 18.8 million text messages are sent (Mobisad, 2023).

Among all social media platforms, surveys demonstrate that WhatsApp is the most popular app among Turkish users. WhatsApp ranks the top among the leading social networks in Türkiye as of the third quarter of 2021 with 93.2% and Instagram follows with 92.5% (Statista, 2022). According to the survey on information and communication technology usage in households conducted by Turkish Statistical Institute in 2023, WhatsApp ranks the top social media and messaging application by individuals with 84.9% (TÜİK - Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). While this can be taken as an indicator of how frequently users prefer communicating via texting, which is mostly through WhatsApp as the most preferred MIM platform in use, academic research also addresses to WhatsApp as users' most preferred digital communication platform (Yazıcı, 2015; Balcı and Kaya, 2021; Yaşar and Uğurhan, 2021) and they prefer it for its availability for socialisation (social interaction), practicality, multimedia (convergence), professional needs and entertainment and it is free of charge (Göncü, 2018). University students, who were most concerned about the processing of personal data and violations of privacy in their use of WhatsApp refused to delete the app which indicates a considerable habit development towards using WhatsApp after its contract change (Çubukçu and Aktürk, 2021). WhatsApp reduces face-to-face communication in family communication though as research suggests (Gülnar and Öztat, 2020). There is a significant amount of research that concentrates of how WhatsApp contributes to the educational settings as a teaching and learning tool, especially in language teaching (Şahan et al., 2016; Şen Yaman, 2016; Çetinkaya and Sütçü, 2019; Kartal, 2019; Göçer and Karadağ, 2020; Ergün Elverici, 2021). Çelik and Arslan (2023) conclude that WhatsApp fosters subject-related communication among students and teachers out of school, which contributes to their learning. Research demonstrate that WhatsApp is an effective tool of communication in building solidarity, organising voluntary deeds and minimise the influence of disinformation as the last Kahramanmaraş earthquake demonstrated (Şen and Koç Akgül, 2023). Despite a considerable amount of research dedicated to exploring the use of Whatsapp in Türkiye, the role of WhatsApp in everyday face-to-face communication and the consequent new social rules and norms are neglected. Thus, taking WhatsApp as the main communication channel for everyday conversational engagements and the primary attractor taking interactants' focus away from the conversations

in public spaces, this study will contribute to the field of study in Türkiye as well.

3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research is conducted following the constructivist paradigm which enables the researcher to construct concepts utilizing the research participants' life experiences that they themselves try to express and comprehend (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). From this perspective, the researcher aims at understanding the world and people's different social experiences in relation to their use of WhatsApp in face engagements. As Creswell (2003) states, the different multi-meanings that people attribute to their experiences are limited to their subjective evaluation of them, which urges the researcher "to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 8). It is, hence, through the in-depth semi-structured interviews that the researcher explores participants' approach to WhatsApp, practice of face engagements and perceptions of rules of conduct today in social encounters where smartphones and social media platforms are simultaneously used during face-to-face interactions. The reason why semi-structured interviews are preferred in the study is that the participants are expected to explain their ideas and actual experiences within the scope of the study but allowing them to express themselves further but certainly keeping them focused. For the interview, open-ended questions are prepared to enable the participants reveal more of their thoughts, feelings and ideas. The interviews are designed as semi-structured, which means all participants are addressed the same questions, but in order to enable the participants to elaborate more some additional questions are also put to reach any meaningful data in the study.

The researcher used convenience sampling (also called accidental sampling or grab sampling) for the semi-structured in-depth interviews. As the research did not require a specific population with certain features, being an undergraduate student who was actively using a smartphone and WhatsApp in the daily routine in public spaces makes a candidate an appropriate participant. Moreover, while WhatsApp is used by people from all ages and socio-economic classes, the participants were limited to university students at specific age range so that the sample could be homogeneous. 25 participants (13 male and 12 female) between the ages of 19-25 took part in the interviews held between October 2019 and March 2020 on the university campus. The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

1. Which platform do you use most for instant messaging?

2. How often do you text on WhatsApp? Why do you prefer it?

3. What kind of information/content do you send on WhatsApp?

4. Are you in WhatsApp groups? Do you think these groups are useful? / Why do you prefer to be in WhatsApp groups?

5. Have you ever had any negative experiences in WhatsApp groups?

6. Does it bother you when others see your WhatsApp content?

The participants were coded as P1, P2, P3, and so on for the confidentiality of their identities. The interview transcripts were first processed in order that thematic analysis could be made through creating data-driven codes. The researcher followed the 5-step process of developing coding: "(a) reducing the raw information, (b) identifying themes within subsamples, (c) comparing themes across subsamples, (d) creating a code, and (e) determining the reliability of the code" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.45). To complete this process, the researcher first randomly chose 3 transcribed interviews and read through each transcript that she transcribed from the recordings herself several times until she was sure that she felt confident that she got fully familiarised with the data. Then, the researcher highlighted words, phrases, chunks, and clauses that were meaningful in the study concerning the research questions. She highlighted phrases like "social rules," "useful for," "leave the group," etc. Then, the researcher

noted down descriptive codes to summarise the main topic of the excerpt in the transcript next to the highlighted parts. Finally, the researcher came up with the themes that emerge from the descriptive codes. The main themes were identified as *purpose, factors that make it attractive, approach and experience, leaving the group,* and *privacy,* and the data was classified and grouped under each theme.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Using WhatsApp in Face Encounters

RQ1: What is the primary purpose of using instant messaging in face engagements?

In the present study, all participants made unapproving remarks regarding individuals' screen engagement in face encounters but confessed that they do so due to 'exceptional' conditions. They all stated that the notifications from social platforms like Instagram, X, Snapchat, and so on were not strong drives that encouraged them to get engaged in their screens during face engagements; nevertheless, WhatsApp was exceptional for them. Overall, the results of the study demonstrated that WhatsApp caused users to develop the strongest motivation for screen engagement despite being in company with others. They all accepted that the constant flow of messages from both their closest social circle of users (i.e. the family members, friends) and the furthest (i.e. peers, acquaintances, business associates, etc.) turned their attention to screens in face engagements during the day.

The participants expressed various purposes of their WhatsApp use during face engagements. The study initially revealed that WhatsApp was actively used to send and receive photos, numbers, location, social media posts, etc. and also documents such as class materials, slides, quizzes, assignments, etc. For the participants, this was part of their daily communication. "P19" admitted using WhatsApp "all the time during the day" and takes this practice as something common and added "this is general information that we find funny or we want to share together, or we share academic notes with each other. And it's normal conversation in general" (personal communication, February 27, 2020). Similarly, "P18" stated that they shared a lot like "lecture notes," "funny photos," and "photos of each

other" during the day and "it is always WhatsApp" (personal communication, February 27, 2020).

"P9," who actually had doubts about the security and privacy of the platform, expressed that WhatsApp was the main channel through which communication was maintained:

> WhatsApp… just WhatsApp… Well, from WhatsApp… I mean daily messages… school-related things… WhatsApp… now everybody shares things in groups on WhatsApp. Photos, videos, voice messages… In fact, we share various types of info in both personal and business or school life on WhatsApp. Actually, we shouldn't because you know it is monitored (personal communication, November 26, 2019).

Participants mainly found WhatsApp practical and convenient as it enabled them to interact with multiple participants simultaneously, which also contributed to their coming to terms when they were in a discussion.

> If we are like four people, it is difficult to communicate with each separately. But on one single platform, four people can easily read the messages and comment on them, and this really speeds up the process. Then it also minimises the disputes. It is like we tend to attune to each other's requests more. To something that I would say no under normal circumstances, when other three say yes, I say yes, OK then ("P1", personal communication, October 26, 2019).

"P12" also believed that it was "easier to talk to more than one person simultaneously" and "also to say an opinion to everyone one by one." Moreover, "it is useful and easy to reach everyone at one time" (personal communication, November 30, 2019). "P18" also agreed that WhatsApp made it "easier to get organised" and "to exchange information" (personal communication, February 27, 2020).

The results further showed that the availability of WhatsApp for multiple users eased communication not only with friends but also with people who they did not know personally in larger groups. The participants declared that they participated in large groups for classes or student clubs where they could interact with people who had shared interests. In such

groups, they believed that they also got the opportunity to widen their network because it enabled exchange of information across groups.

> I use it generally to be informed, especially in club groups. Similarly, in the school, former school groups, it's the same, to get some news, to maintain communication with people. I am in touch with people who I would not contact personally ("P13," personal communication, December 3, 2019).

> Not to miss anything important or anything I would like. Let me give an example. I'm in the management club's WhatsApp group. But there are people who are at the same in other different groups. Someone who was in the group of modern art club at the same time announced that their club was organising a trip to an exhibition Sabancı Museum and asked if we wanted to join or not. I did, for example. Then, I joined the modern art group, followed the occasions. It can work across groups and it's so interactive ("P15," personal communication, December 9, 2019).

Finally, the results revealed that WhatsApp was convenient because it brought users more to-the-point or refined content. Thus, it was purposeful and functional in everyday life.

> In some groups, some specific concerts, notifications, I don't know it's more specific. In a group, you are a community. Well, it is something that is specific to you. That community could give something to you… they are more refined notifications in WhatsApp ("P10," personal communication, November 30, 2019).

4.2. WhatsApp: A Transmitter or an Impediment?

RQ2: What is the attitude of users toward instant messaging during face engagements?

Overall, the results of the present study revealed that participants had a positive attitude towards using MIM during face engagements. They in general took such interactions with WhatsApp for granted when they were in face-to-face communication based on the legitimate purposes that they put forward.

The results demonstrated that during social encounters, while they believed that they could resist

social platforms like Instagram, X, Snapchat, etc., participants could rarely ignore the notifications from WhatsApp because it was the main communication channel through which they got in touch with others during the day. The possibility of receiving information and updates from the groups that had been created for specific purposes were the main motives that kept users engaged in WhatsApp even while they were interacting with people in face-to-face encounters. Using WhatsApp, thus, had become habitual for the participants. "P12" stated, "I can say that 80% of my conversations with my friends are on WhatsApp on a daily basis. You know, if the phone is in my hand for 8 hours, if I'm going to talk to a friend like that, it's always via WhatsApp" (personal communication, November 30, 2019). "P11" also stated that WhatsApp use was "very often, very often" and added, "especially if I'm back from school, all my work is done, if I'm at home, if I have nothing else to do, I guess I'll talk to my female friends from the group until I go to bed (personal communication, November 30, 2019).

In such a continuous flow of text messages during the day, the results showed that screen engagements observable in public space were devoted predominantly to WhatsApp as "P25" admitted being "definitely into WhatsApp" in face encounters (personal communication, March 5, 2020) and similarly "P5" declared, "when I am with others, I use WhatsApp the most. I'm replying to someone's message… most often (personal communication, November 9, 2019).

"P17" explained that in his daily routine, he commonly used WhatsApp in public space as the messages were unpredictable during the day.

> The normal routine is to communicate via WhatsApp. After all, it is not clear when the message will arrive, or when you will need to reply to someone, when you need to ask someone something. That's why I usually use WhatsApp more (personal communication, February 17, 2020).

Based on the data obtained, WhatsApp was the most common reason that caused intermittent screen checks and consequent leaks into conversational engagements.

> Here maybe someone wrote something to WhatsApp, 30 notifications come in a row like this, then I look at… the gesture you showed

[referring to the on/off gesture] this is how I look at the side to see what happened. Okay, this is the class group, not a big deal, then I continue. Of course, while I'm doing this, I say sorry for a second and look at it ("P8," personal communication, November 23, 2019).
I'll keep it (smartphone) on the table. This is actually something from my childhood because when my parents call me, I am expected to pick up the phone. It can also cause anxiety when I don't [laughs]. That's why I usually keep it on the table. But instead of looking at the notifications from social media, I can look at personal messages and say sorry I need to respond to this and take care of it ("P2," personal communication, October 26, 2019).

According to the results of the study, WhatsApp was found to be useful and convenient means of everyday interaction which users could not risk missing the flow of information during the day. Whether the messages were from friends, family, or school-related groups, the participants could not resist the incoming messages. Nonetheless, this caused potential problems for the participants. The first problem that the participants of the study addressed to was that too many notifications during the day caused frustration and disruption.

So many people and I don't think I can handle that much information. Incredible chitchat is going on there and I'm a little obsessed. I feel I'm missing something constantly when I catch a conversation at one point but not reading the messages sent before ("P14," personal communication, December 5, 2019).

So now there are a lot of people in the groups. 80 people, 100 people. Each of them can ask the same question again and again. It's impossible to read them all. That's why I mute it. It may vibrate constantly while driving for example. Notifications come while using navigation on the car. That's why I mute it ("P24," personal communication, March 5, 2020).

Having stated that WhatsApp also provided participants with effortless and fast communication, the speed in WhatsApp altered communication behaviour in everyday life as the results suggested. This caused the participants reveal their negative approach to the app while stating that they could not help it. The study revealed that WhatsApp had brought the obligation of

being accessible and reachable at all times during the day, which caused impatience in daily communication, and this was draining for the participants at times during the hectic flow of various responsibilities in everyday life.

Other than WhatsApp no other social platform is obligatory to me. It's OK if all others aren't available but WhatsApp is indispensable. WhatsApp is a platform for instant responses. After all we're not sending letters or e-mails, but we want responses instantly. This brings us a kind of impatience ("P16," personal communication, February 13, 2020).

It's not important in fact, but you know there used to be no mobiles once, and people don't have to be reachable at all times. But you know they have become impatient. Why don't you check... say you don't respond for 10 minutes, people are like don't you use WhatsApp online, why don't you check it? I did not see it! ("P3," personal communication, November 2, 2019).

Generally, our families have started to use WhatsApp a lot. That's why something like this happens to me... I go offline, but then she sends me an SMS asking me to check my WhatsApp, for example (laughs). That's why sometimes I must connect ("P15," personal communication, December 9, 2019).

Finally, the participants stated that WhatsApp groups put pressure on them to respond to messages instantly, and if they did not, problems in daily communication arose.

I think people get upset when you read what everyone says and then leave without responding. They feel annoyed. Why didn't you reply? He read everything, especially if there was a rumour being discussed, he read everything and left, he didn't reply kind of reaction. I think they are getting upset... If he leaves WhatsApp without replying to messages...why did he do such a thing, why didn't he reply? I think they are like that. Because of this I do something... I put something there, at least an emoji or something. You know, I'm here too, just to say "Okay, I saw you, you're fine, you're nice" and then do something else ("P8," personal communication, November 23, 2019).

Let's say I didn't check my mobile for 3 or 4 hours... not wondering if I received a message, but now... people are waiting to hear from me. They expect me to respond. Not being able to write is something... it's like a responsibility... I don't have to write anything, but it is my responsibility... Such a problem... ("P16," personal communication, February 23, 2020).

This means that according to the results of the study, the positive sides of the app for the participants outweigh the negativity caused in everyday life; thus, they continue using it.

4.3. The New Rules of Conduct in Face Engagements

RQ3: What are the new social rules of conduct in face engagements in the presence of instant messaging?

The results demonstrated that WhatsApp use in everyday life had led to a change in the existing codes of conduct in face engagements and further contributed to the construction of social codes of conduct on the platform.

Some things have already changed and the societal rules will change anyway. I mean it's not looking at each other face-to-face. Maybe in 10 years' time, it won't be inappropriate to look at the mobile (looks at his mobile) and talk to someone. It's not already seen inappropriate in our generation though... not much. ("P12," personal communication, November 30, 2019).

Initially, WhatsApp functioned as the involvement shield to avoid interaction in face engagements.

I think it's a tactic to drop our gaze you know. For example, if you don't want to maintain eye contact with someone continuously, well... to avoid the eye contact, you know not to upset that person. For example, while talking to you, if I look over there (looking up the ceiling), you would say what the hell. But, while talking to you, if I take my mobile and (imitating looking at his screen) then I am back, there won't be a problem most probably ("P20," personal communication, March 3, 2020).

WhatsApp had been tolerated and taken for granted in face engagements. The results revealed that participants looking at their screens and using WhatsApp did not always disturb others, nor did they cause any signs of discomfort in social conduct unless that participant was entirely concentrated on the screen.

While we are having a good time, right from the start if someone texts... texts, texts, texts, and then does Instagram, I consider if they are bored of us. Well, because I also do it, but I join the conversation at some point. But if one is entirely alien to us... texting others, you know I reckon if he's bored and this irritates me ("P6," personal communication, November 9, 2019).

I check my screen to see if someone has texted. It's like there're say 30 notifications coming one after another. Then, I check my phone very shortly, I make it on and off instantly. I look at the screen to see what's happened, then I say oh OK this is not the class group, nothing important, and then I move on. Of course, while doing this, I say wait a second. It's not OK you speak, I'm on this kind of situation ("P8," personal communication, November 23, 2019).

Moreover, they tended to empathise with the participant and tolerated their use of WhatsApp in face engagements. "P15" approached others who are into WhatsApp in face engagements with understanding and assumed that he was possibly "expecting an important message" and he could be checking it to see if it was there or not (personal communication, December 9, 2019).

The study also showed that the emergence of MIM technology had replaced phone calls in public space. Thus, it appeared as the major digital cross talk in public space. The participants preferred texting to making phone calls in face engagements because of its convenience. As "P8" stated, "if there is something that I cannot talk about with mum, I text to say I can't talk to you now" (personal communication, November 23, 2019).

MIM, on the other hand, might not be preferred due to the absence of non-verbal cues in texting when there was something important to communicate. Then, talking on the phone was preferred to WhatsApp.

But I think there is a problem especially with communicating via WhatsApp or texting in general. When I talk to someone on the phone,

I can reflect the emotions of the content of what I am talking about along with my tone of voice. But when it's on WhatsApp, I cannot convey exactly how I feel and think to the other person. I feel like this obstructs communication a little bit. That's why, when it comes to a serious issue, I generally prefer to talk face-to-face or on the phone rather than WhatsApp ("P2," personal communication, October 26, 2019).

It was also observed that compared all other activities on screen in face engagements, participants found WhatsApp messages on their screens intimate and private thus to be avoided from others.

I avoid people reading my chats in public. They're strangers. It's not a problem with people I know. They (friends) can have a look at the screen except for WhatsApp. They already see similar content on Instagram, but I avoid opening my WhatsApp chats when I'm with others ("P6," personal communication, November 9, 2019).

Similarly, "P18" declared that others could look at his screen, but WhatsApp was exceptional. To him, texting was "different" (personal communication, February 27, 2020), and "P3" stated that he could show "everything" on the screen to others in face encounters but not WhatsApp (personal communication, November 2, 2019). The results also showed that participants showed respect to others' privacy when it was WhatsApp. As "P22" stated, when there were notifications for WhatsApp messages on others' screens, it was something to avoid (personal communication, March 4, 2020).

Participants also stated that conflicts that they had on WhatsApp could influence their face-to-face relations. "P2" explained that while working on a project, they had a conflict while making a schedule on WhatsApp. Then, when some participants started using humiliating and rude language, she decided to leave the group. She stated that she had no social contact with those people with whom she had the conflict, and she said she even ignored them on campus. Similarly, "P17" stated that when the nature of the interaction on WhatsApp was potentially threatening for their face-to-face relationship, she felt she needed to end the conversation on the platform:

Personally... I had an argument, an argument with a close friend. In order not to continue that argument, because I know it will continue, I left there in order not to be offended even more. In the end, my friendship continued because of this (laughs). We still see each other (personal communication, February 17, 2020).

The results of the study addressed to the issue of the absence of non-verbal language which could cause misunderstandings and consequent conflicts. "P5" stated, "you are also misunderstood because you are not face to face. You only communicate via text. You cannot always do everything with the same emphasis. That's why I don't prefer it (personal communication, November 9, 2019). "P20" also addressed to the same issue and indicated that it was only his "close circle of people" who he could send fun pictures, news of things happening, or arrangements for social gatherings (personal communication, March 3, 2020).

Participants declared that they might decide to leave the group when there was a conflict or ongoing arguments among others. "P8" disclosed that when there was "a constant fight," that was so unpleasant that made him leave the group (personal communication, November 23, 2019). Also, "P7" stated, "when there is a fight in the group, everyone suddenly wants to leave. Because something negative is happening. I wanted out too" (personal communication, November 23, 2019).

Leaving the WhatsApp group was generally a serious decision to make when the group was of no importance to them as it was before, and it was also possible that participants were hesitant to leave a group even if participants were not that active any more.

What if something happens in that group and I cannot be informed? I will leave now, but I will not receive messages from them later. I always want to be the last one out [laughs with an expression of anxiety]. Let me know if something happens [laughs]. That's partly why ("P6," personal communication, November 9, 2019).

So, when you leave the group, it seems like people can think that you are or anything... So, for example, there is a dysfunctional group, and there are many groups far below your list. I can leave, but if I don't leave, maybe no one will

care, but when you leave, there is a possibility that they will think like this. Well, it means he doesn't want to meet with us anymore or something unpleasant definitely happened [laughs] ("P13," personal communication, December 3, 2019).

Leaving the group is kind of like a betrayal or something [laughs]. Do you understand? This is really interesting. For example, I want to leave this group, but I couldn't [shows a group on his phone]. I don't know. Look, we can really talk about this [laughs]. Well, this is a very serious issue. Let me see how many groups there are that I would like to join. [Looking at groups on his phone]. There are roughly three groups, two groups. I want to get out of here... Actually, if we think about it... if we think about it honestly... I don't know, yes, I don't know the people, but I guess it's like some kind of social fear... I guess. You know, monkeys also have fear of being left out ("P10," personal communication, November 30, 2019).

According to the results, depending on the nature of their relationship among the participants, both the content shared and the language used varied.

> For example, what you write to your family is different from what you write to your friends. So, you talk differently in WhatsApp groups where there are friends. Or you speak differently in a work group. That kind of a thing... For example, if I'm surprised by something, someone wrote something somewhere, I say to my parents' group, "Oh, look what he wrote," but to my friends, I might write it like "Damn, what did he write?" So it's the style... mostly in terms of language features. Language changes. Yes, the content also changes... So, for example, I send my mother's photo to the family group, a photo of me without her knowledge, saying we are together, etc., but I do not send these to my friends, family photos or vice versa ("P3," personal communication, November 2, 2019).

> While I can easily talk about all kinds of offensive or dark humour in groups with my close friends... because no one will show any offense or anything. This is of course because of the closeness of people to each other. So, while I can laugh at anything, I cannot send such a meme or anything to an academic... well, for example, mechanical engineering

project group. I should be more careful about my tone while speaking there. Whether it's the language I use, slang, or the way I address to people... ("P14," personal communication, December 5, 2019).

This caution shown by individuals could also depend on who the participants were in WhatsApp groups. As "P9" pointed out, when academics or any "different people" were in the groups, they had to pay more attention to their language and had to speak with respect (personal communication, November 26, 2019).

Finally, the participants stated that the purpose of the groups determined the language and manner used in interactions. When the group was aimed at communicating the activities of a student club or the course materials and course-related information, the participants were careful with what they wrote in the group keeping the social distance with other members of the group. However, when it was a group with friends or family, the rules of conduct were different.

> And they (the rules) may even vary depending on the type of group. The group dynamics may change or the purpose of the group may affect this significantly. If it's a little more crowded and, you know, a more formal group, people are more careful about what they say, and they even write their messages using semicolons (laughs). That's exactly what I do. When I give news, I write it in a very polite manner. But with our slightly closer circle... this could be family, close friends... we can behave a little more comfortably in such groups ("P13," personal communication, December 3, 2019).

In groups, when participants violated these rules of conduct, participants might feel uncomfortable and irritated, and this could even cause them to leave groups.

> You know... sometimes they are too casual. Like this... okay... Even people you haven't met before are sometimes sort of too friendly. I don't know, if I don't have any personal relations and how do they say it? I mean boundaries of respect... something limit ("P10," personal communication, November 30, 2019).

> In a group I was a member before, there was a lot of conversation that I found uncomfortable.

At first, I didn't participate in the discussion and thought maybe they would understand that I was uncomfortable, but when the same thing recurred, I expressed my discomfort and left the group ("P22," personal communication, March 4, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Burchell (2015) explains "within a single glance at a mobile phone, numerous actions and interactions from countless others cannot only be observed but are also potentially interacted with, as individual activities intertwine with networked connections and the possibilities for interruption and contingency they bring" (p.37). Among various apps accessible on screens, MIM platforms are the ones that foster continuous communication in everyday life thus considerably interruptive. They provide users a convenient and fast channel for communication when they need to reach others or share various content with them any time during the day, and the availability of such platforms to convey messages to multiple-users makes such platforms charming for them (Montag et al., 2015; Martínez-Comeche and Ruthven, 2023). The current state of these platforms makes them irresistible for users in fulfilling the chores in everyday life, which eventually alter the ways that individuals interact with others in face encounters due to intermittent engagements in the MIM apps. The present study contributed to the field where how patterns of behaviour and social norms in face encounters could differ in the presence of smartphones and access to MIM apps, which has been neglected. The results of the research demonstrated that in the presence of mobile devices, the patterns of behaviour that individuals demonstrate in face encounters in public spaces are different from those observed in the pre-digital age, which at the same time resulted in new social codes of conduct that are compromised in society.

This study identified two main everyday communication purposes for using MIM; socialisation and disseminating work-/school-related information, which align with the two dimensions out of five uses of MIM that Ardèvol-Abreu et al. (2023) defined. Firstly, it enables users to socialise one-to-one or in large groups, chat, stay in touch with family members and friends during the day and even connect with people who used to be in their social circle in the past like high school or childhood friends. Furthermore, they give users the opportunity to organise social events and occasions more easily and faster than contacting people one by one in person, via texting or calling. MIM is also functional for young people who want to reach and disseminate mainly school-related and also work-related information especially for the ones who work/serve their internship.

While there is significant interest in exploring politeness mainly in student-teacher/instruction communication on digital platforms and detailed analysis of politeness strategies in the field of pragmatics of language (Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez, 2018; Shalihah and Zuhdi, 2020; Nurdiyani and Sasongko, 2022), this study also revealed users' knowledge of *register*, how a user uses language in different circumstances differently, that they adapt to WhatsApp groups to maintain the social distance between other users. Similar to verbal inter-personal communication, the language and content that interactants prefer vary depending on the nature of social distance among them and the instances of inappropriate language and content share make users leave the groups. This means that the *register* in face-to-face interactions is the same as the one on WhatsApp. Moreover, similar to face-to-face interactions, users cut the communication channel while the sense of belonging to such groups is quite high, and it is a serious decision to make whether to stay or leave the group under normal circumstances.

The convenience of such platforms makes them frequently utilised during the day even in face encounters where individuals have social contacts face-to-face but cannot resist the continuous flow of messages, which has also transformed the nature of face encounters in the digital age. The results demonstrate that texting on the MIM applications, specifically on WhatsApp in this study, appears to be irresistible for the participants, which is a far more common cross-talk than speaking on the phone in public spaces today, which aligns with the previous research (Humphreys, 2005; Kneidinger-Müller, 2017; Ictech, 2019). Such cross-talks emerge silently without other participants realising the breaching messages to the front performance. While individuals used to concentrate on what participants were actually doing in face encounters before the digital age, it is important that today we need to take into account the

contributions of the invisible participants to the front performance in the presence of the MIM platforms actively used despite being in company of others; in other words, "parallel communication," as Kneidinger-Müller (2017) puts it, must always be considered. This means everyday communication today is beyond the actions that are observable to researchers. It is crucial to consider the fact that there are messages, audio-visual content sent and received, the participants at the other end of the devices that contribute to the talk in different ways that attract the participants who are often carried away in face encounters.

The pervasive use of the MIM platforms has shaped its own norms and rules of conduct among users who have become members of micro-communities where they actively interact with each other during the day. This new ecology of everyday communication could be reckoned to be disruptive and frustrating for individuals who could suffer from technostress due to communication and information overload (Sun and Lee, 2021); however, the present study concludes that such digital cross-talks are quite adapted into face encounters, which seems that it does not create significant discomfort among interactants. It is seen that face engagements today embrace flows of content through MIM that emerge regardless of time and space since MIM use is taken for granted and tolerated in face engagements unless other participants are completely ignored. Moreover, while they cannot resist the notifications from WhatsApp even in face encounters, the assumption that everybody is available and accessible at all times causes pressure on individuals and exhaust them. It is this pressure that might make users check their screens frequently during face engagements, and this new pattern of everyday communication that people concede could lead them to approach each other's use of screen in face encounters with understanding and tolerance. In other words, there is a mutual consensus among individuals that they may be urged to check and respond to messages in everyday encounters. It means that as long as the participants signal their existence in face encounters, others do not take it personally and choose to believe that they have something important to respond to; thus, the benefits outweigh the stress of communication overload among users.

Finally, as research suggests the privacy and security

concerns of users do not lead them to delete their WhatsApp and deals with users' privacy concerns regarding their messages on the platform (Çubukçu and Aktürk, 2021), this study handled the concerns of users regarding the privacy of messages that they need to protect against others in face encounters. While individuals are not highly sensitive about their privacy regarding others seeing their screens when they have social media feeds on, they are truly concerned about others seeing their WhatsApp messages. They believe these messages are private and they want to have the initiative to show them to others or not. It can be concluded that WhatsApp being used in public still remains a private and intimate space to be preserved for users.

The present study has certain limitations. The data in this research do not reflect the timing and content of actual interactions on WhatsApp when participants are active in face encounters but depend on participants' reports on their use, which is a limitation of the present study. The future research could explore actual communication activities and bring a consideration of the existence of digital communication in face encounters while researching everyday communication. Also, the findings are limited to young college students in Türkiye. Further study could concentrate on the use of WhatsApp during face engagements across different age groups and countries.

To conclude, everyday communication today is multi-layered where all participants are not physically visible to others in face encounters. The flow of messages and content from outside certainly has an impact on the face-to-face communication in the digital age, which results in altered patterns of behaviour in everyday communication and new codes of conduct among the participants who seem to have come to terms among each other. Thus, not only researchers but also professionals who seek effective communication need to see this new ecology of communication to understand the very nature of social interactions.

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