WhatsApp Groups in Academic Context: Exploring the Academic Uses of WhatsApp Groups among the Students

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Abstract

The present study explores the uses of WhatsApp groups in the education context. It examines utilities and burdens associated with educational WhatsApp groups. The study also explores how the presence of teachers in the groups can influence the group functioning. In the first study chats of four WhatsApp groups of one year, where two groups were included teacher and two groups were without teachers, were analyzed. In the second study, interviews were conducted with two participants from each group, a total of eight participants. The results of the studies show that the major functions these groups serve are mostly education-related. However, apart from academic uses, students do use this platform for wishing/congratulations, for extra curriculum activities as well as for entertainment purposes. In addition, the results show that the presence of the teacher influences the group conversation significantly. Though students reported that sometimes these WhatsApp groups become burden and take a lot of time, but they also believe that is unavoidable, since these WhatsApp groups not only provide them important information related to class, exam, holidays, etc., but members are also able to connect with others and involve in non-academic activities.

Keywords: WhatsApp, WhatsApp group, Social media, WhatsApp and education

INTRODUCTION

Gone were the days when individuals had to wait in order to receive the information regarding their environment. With the advancement in the field of technology and the introduction of social media, our life has become easier than ever. It takes few minutes to upload a news or any sort of information (education, crimes, business etc.) in the media and only few seconds to reach us and before we know, it's already in the screen of our mobiles, laptops, computer etc. When talking about social media, it is a platform which enable users to create and share information with other individuals and also encourages individuals to participate in the social networking. By definition, social media could be understood as a computer-based technology that facilitates sharing of ideas, thoughts and information through the building of virtual networks and communities (Dollarhide, 2019). Individuals engage themselves with social media via. computer, mobile phones, tablets etc. via web based designed software and generally uses it for messaging. Social media emerged as way to interact with family, friends, relatives etc. For example, Mark Zuckerberg (the founder and creator of Facebook) on his statement about why did he created

Facebook stated, that, when he created Facebook, he did not create it with the purpose of using it as a business tool, but as a tool to interact with the people. However, over the years businesses has adopted this field in order to take advantage of this popular and new way to communicate with the people. Social media is a powerful tool that enables people to connect and share information with anyone on the earth, or with many people simultaneously.

WhatsApp, the fastest growing social media, was founded in 2009 by Brain Acton and Jan Koum who were former employees of YAHOO!. The app is used for messaging purpose. There are various options available in the app apart from just plain texting. You can call/video call a person if you wish to. There is also option to share your stories and update your stories. The WhatsApp feature also lets you to make groups where you can share information with many people on one go. WhatsApp not only helps people to communicate but has also provided a platform to people to exchange information relating to academics, news, politics etc. In the field of academics WhatsApp plays a very important tool to exchange information regarding studies and academic events. Recently, in educational context another function of WhatsApp become very popular, i.e. WhatsApp groups. Mostly, every student has their own WhatsApp group for their batches, classes, department, etc. The present study explore the utilities and burden associated with these academic groups. It also examines how the presence of the teachers in these groups can influence the chat dynamics of them.

Social Networking Sites in Academic Context

A great number of people, especially, youths and students use social networking sites (SNS), therefore its presence and influence become inevitable in academic context. Munkail and Iddrisu (2015) have done a study on the impact of SNS related to the academic performance of students in Ghana. The result showed that student use social media for academic purpose as well as they use it for non-academic purpose. Similarly Abdullah and Al-Daboubi (2014) attempted to see the impact of social networking sites on applied science university students. The results of study showed that students spent around two to three hours per day on social networking sites. Mohamed and Sumitha (2011) investigated the perception and use of social networking sites among Indian students. They found that students used social networking sites mainly for friendly communication as well as for their academic communication and almost half of the respondent spend less than two hours in a week on social networking sites. Similarly, Ruleman (2012) in his study tried to find out the uses of social networking sites among the faculty members and students. The outcomes of the study showed that both faculty and students use social networking sites frequently.

Motiwalla (2007), in his research tried to find out the use of instant messaging for educational purposes, his study showed that students have benefits from using instant messaging as a learning devise. Similarly, Litchfield, Dyson, Lawrence and Zmijewska (2007) found that university students are positive about the use of mobile learning in educational fields. Baro, Edewor, and Sunday (2014) from their study found that most of the university students mainly use Facebook among the various social networking sites mostly for exchange of idea and for social interaction and connections. Bhatt and Kumar's (2014) research on student opinion on the use of social networking sites shows that a large number of student use social networking sites for their daily communication with their classmates.

Jacobsen and Forste (2011) indicate negative relation between exposure to various social networking sites and academic performance. Kirschner, and Karpinski (2010) found Facebook is negatively related with academic performance of the students. Another study (Paul, Baker, & Cochran, 2012) which not only focuses on Facebook but other online social networking sites like-

Myspace, Twitter etc., found that time spent on these online networking sites negatively influence the academic performance of participants. But researchers like, Yu, Tian, Vogel, and Kwok (2010) found Facebook usage not only directly influence students learning as an outcome but also helps in their socialization in college which further leads to better learning outcomes. Grosseck, Bran, and Tiru (2011) found that though university students use Facebook majorly for social functions but they also use it for academic activities like- discussion about the assignment, lectures, class notes, research resource. Kolek and Saunders (2008) found no relationship between Facebook use and GPA. Similarly Pasek, More, and Hargittai (2009) found no significant relation between Facebook usage and academic performance in terms of GPA.

Research in this line is quite divided into two groups, one which demonstrate that the uses of social media can severely hammers academics (e.g. Junco 2011, 2012; Juno & Cotton, 2011; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2015) on the other hand other group advocates positive or no impact of social media on academics (e.g. Grosseck, Bran, & Tiru, 2011; Pasek, More, & Hargittai, 2009; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010; Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Kwok, 2010). Overall, it could be concluded that, negative or positive impact on academics depends on the nature of the social media as well as it's use, but one thing is sure that today's academics are heavily affected by the uses of social media in and out the classrooms.

WhatsApp in Academic Context

Tawiah, Nondzor and Alhaji (2014) showed that students prefer to use WhatsApp application instead of mobile voice call for their day-to-day communication. Similarly, Amanullah and Ali (2014) in their study found that students of the university showed WhatsApp as the most favorable mobile messaging application. Bere (2012) tried to find out the motivational factors that affect the use of WhatsApp. He found that a majority of undergraduate preferred to learn via WhatsApp messenger specially the younger and unmarried undergraduates. Similarly El and Fattah (2015) tried to find out the effectiveness of using WhatsApp messenger as learning techniques and founded that WhatsApp technology can also be useful for students to active participation in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. Plana, Gimeno and Appel (2013) tried to find out the benefits and drawbacks of using WhatsApp messaging to read English as a foreign language. Their study revealed that a majority of students were interested in reading through WhatsApp messages.

The study done by Ahad and Lim (2014) showed that the majority of undergraduate students use WhatsApp for more than 3 hours a day. And the students found WhatsApp very useful for group discussions and interaction where as some of them found that it was very problematic for their studies. Contrast to that, Yeboah and Ewur (2014) collected data from 550 students, and their finding showed that WhatsApp had negative impact on students, with distraction from studies, problems related to spelling and grammar in language use. However, Güler (2016) showed that WhatsApp can be useful for the anonymous assessment of the students. Though, the results are mixed about the impact of WhatsApp on students academics, but theses study reveals the presence and importance of WhatsApp in educational context.

Present Study

Previous research shows that various social networking sites including WhatsApp are influencing personal, social as well as the professional lives of students in colleges and universities. The biggest advantage of WhatsApp over other app/sites is its phone friendly nature and group based communication. Using of WhatsApp group in institution becomes very important and to the some extend unavoidable, since, more and more formal and informal information are

communicated through WhatsApp. The present study focuses on importance and working of educational WhatsApp group (e.g. department, class, course) as now-a-days almost all the educational institution has their own WhatsApp group. The study has three research questions

1. What are the uses of educational WhatsApp group?

2. How does the presence of teachers influence the group conversation?

3. What makes some members more and less active in the group?

To answer these research questions two studies are conducted. In the first study content analysis of WhatsApp chats of four groups are analyzed, and in the second study interviews of the few groups' members are conducted.

STUDY 1

The first study, which is based on the content analysis of WhatsApp text, is further divided into two phases- phase 1 examines the major uses of WhatsApp educational group and the second phase examines the difference of conversation between the groups including teachers and the groups without teachers.

Phase 1

Method

Sample. WhatsApp group chats from two departments of Sikkim University were collected for the study. From each department, we selected one group that included teachers and other group without teachers. Total four group chats of the period of one year were taken.

Procedure. The group administrators were requested to allow to use the chat for educational purpose. They were assured that name or any information, which may reveal the identity, will not be given publicly. With the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, the chat history of last one year was taken from them. It was made sure that among the four groups, two groups included teachers and other two did not. Thematic content analysis was done for the chat history.

Results

The analysis of one year chat history reveals the importance and intensity of these educational WhatsApp groups. Not only these group are quite active but also these are very essential because it provide formal as well as informal information in a very fast and convenient mode. The thematic content analysis of chats showed that the conversations in these groups can be classified under six major themes namely- regular academics, exam and evaluation, wishes and greetings, extracurricular activities, entertainment, and other information. A brief description of these themes is given below and in the **Table 1**.

Table 1. Major uses of WhatsApp academic groups

Themes	Properties	Examples
Regular Academics	Regular academic information and martial seeking and sharing	Class related information, class timing, notes and materials, registration, admission notice, question, book review, books, journal and articles
Exam and Evaluation	Exam and evaluation related information seeking and sharing	Exam information, exam routine, result, term paper, presentation, syllabus, marks, submission date, sessional topic & date, practical, form fill up.
Extracurricular Activities	Information and discussion related to participation/organization various co-curricular activities	Ethnic day celebration, picnic planning, voting, election, annual fest, trip, farewell discussion, awareness program, mental health day, DR election
Entertainment	Sharing and liking of various photos and videos with the main purpose of fun	Jokes, advertisement, music, photos, video, food discussion
Wishes and greetings	Individual wishes (such as birth day, individual achievement) and group related wishes (such as festival or national day wishes)	Friendship day, Independence day, teacher's day, new year, congratulation, children day, Diwali, good morning
Other Information	Neither purely academic and nor purely entertainment information sharing, seeking and discussion.	Social issues like- Gorkha land movement, bus timing, contact number, seminar information, non-academic scholarships/fellowships, political discussion

Regular academics. The most prominent and recurring theme was related to day-to-day class and department related activities. This category includes texts of class related information, sharing of notes and materials, information about the admission, if anyone has any question to discuss, sharing of journals and articles and sometime about the registration etc. Basically, this theme includes regular conversation related to academics.

Examination and evaluation. Though this category is also related to academics but it is different from regular academic category in two ways- first it is only related to specific time and agenda, i.e. examination; secondly because of the seriousness of content these messages seek more attention and response than regular messages. This category include texts related to exam information, exam routine, result of the semester examination, class related exam like term paper, presentation, sharing of syllabus, marks of sessional examinations, assignment submission date, sessional topics, practical date etc. To the some extend we can say, this use of group is most valued and important, since many students regularly miss their classes, for them the only source of exam related information is these group. Since, these text are not related to one or few members but all, they get highest response.

Wishes and greetings. The non-academic but a social purpose of any group could be sharing feelings such as wishing each other on a festival, congratulating someone for certain achievement, etc. Though these messages have noting to do with academics but these may help in building group cohesiveness and belongingness. This category mainly includes text related to wishes like good morning, good night, friendship day wishes, independence day wishes and sharing of pictures, teacher's day wishes, new year wishes, when some student achieve certain thing then congratulation to that particular member, children day wishes and most importantly various festival wishes including- Diwali, Durga Puja, Christmas, Eid, etc. Though, the wishes are personal choices, but in group conversation some times it becomes an obligation, since every

one else is doing, one should also do that. One interesting thing regarding wishes are, particularly festivals related, members have to wish even for interreligious or intercultural festival, which they don't celebrate and which they may not want to wish but since everyone is wishing because of social convention they also have too. One major benefit of this group wishes is that they save a lot of time from wishing people individually over phone or through e-mail.

Extracurricular activities. Though the purpose of any educational institution is mainly related to academics but it also inculcate various other interest and skills in students apart from regular teaching in the forms of sports and co-curricular activities. This category include texts related to such activities, like, educational outing, picnic, ethnic day celebration, university election, voting appeal, the annual fest, farewell discussion, awareness program, mental health day preparation, election of department representative, etc. Though, these text are not directly related but students show high excitement and enthusiasm regarding these texts and therefore these are most discussed text in the group chats.

Entertainment. Apart from curricular and co-curricular activities related text, students also talk about other things with the sole purpose of entertainment and fun. This category generally include texts which serve the purpose of enjoyment, such as, sharing jokes, advertisement, music, photos, video, holidays, sometime they shared and talk about food also.

Other information. This category include texts related to information which is not directly related to academic or entertainment purpose. This includes information such as other university forms, the university bus timing, discussion social or political issues etc. Since these information may not be relevant to many students, sometime they are overlooked and receive no reply or acknowledgement.

Phase 2

The objective of the phase 2 was to see how the presence or absence of teachers in the group can change the group functioning.

Method

It follows same as phase one, except this time instead of taking one year conversation only one month conversation was used for analysis. Unlike the previous phase, where we used thematic content analysis, here quantitative content analysis was used and we used the themes emerged in phase one for the analysis purpose. We deliberately selected October month's chat for this purpose, because the month had several festival as well as exams and other curricular activities. The total number of text in four groups was 1527, out of which 123 texts were from two included teacher groups and the rest 1404 texts were from the two groups where teacher was not present.

Results

The chat is analyzed keeping in the mind six themes emerged in the phase one. These six themes were- regular academic, exam and evaluation, wishes and greetings, extracurricular activities, entertainment, and other information. The results of both types of groups are given in the **Table 2**. It shows total number of texts as well as the percentage of texts in across all six themes of both include teacher and without teacher groups. **Figure 1** also shows the percentage wise comparison of texts between with and without teachers WhatsApp groups. The result shows that when there is teacher in the WhatsApp group number of texts is very less compare to when teacher is not there in WhatsApp group. The total number of text in the month of October for the include teacher groups is 123 while the total number text for the exclude teacher group is

Table 2. Texts in six themes of both include-teachers and without-teachers groups

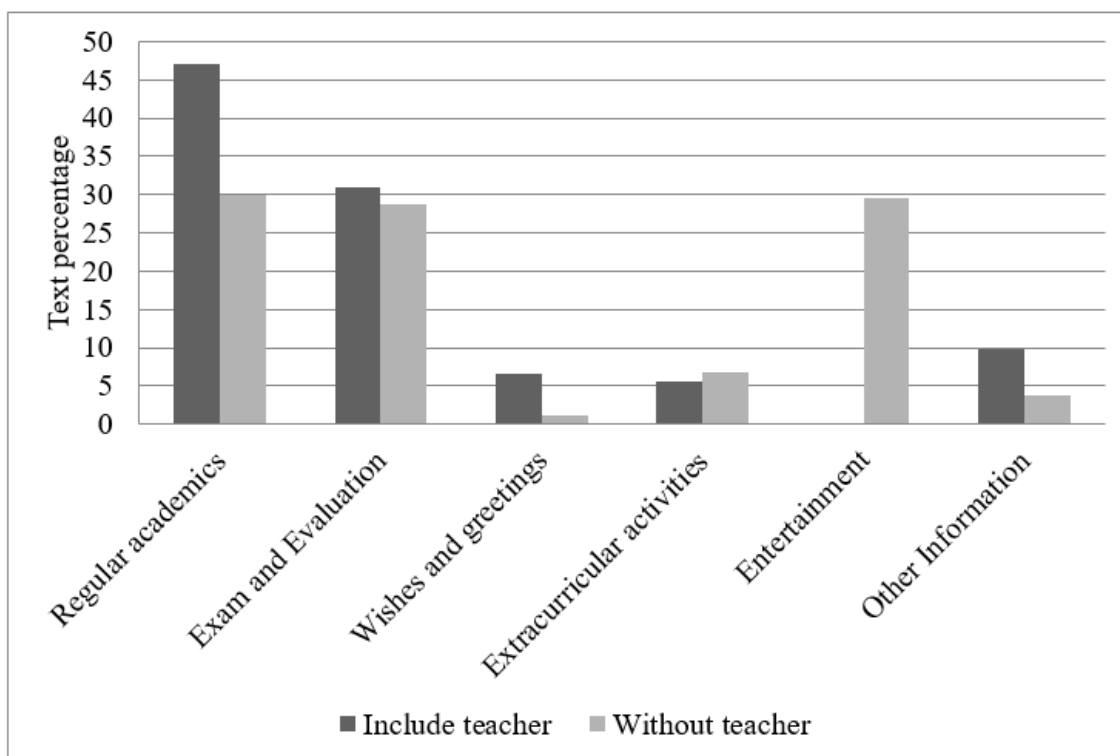| Groups		Total text	Regular Academics	Exam and evaluation	Wishes and greetings	Extra-curricular activities	Entertainment	Other information
Include teachers	Number	123	58	38	8	7	0	12
	Percent	100	47.16	30.89	6.5	5.69	0	9.76
Without teachers	Number	1404	420	403	17	96	416	52
	Percent	100	29.91	28.7	1.21	6.83	29.62	3.7

Figure 1. Percentage wise comparison of the texts in both the include teacher and without teacher groups

1404. While teacher is there in any group conversation become formal so the number of texts are less, students they can't say whatever they want as the teacher may not like the way student do conversation.

The result shows that the number of text in the education theme is 47.16 % in the with teachers group and 29.91 % in the without teachers group. The number of texts in education theme is much higher in include teacher group as compare to without teacher group, which means that when teacher is a member of the WhatsApp group, majority of the conversations are being related academics but when teacher is not there in the group that's not the case. Surprisingly, the percentage of texts of wishes is higher in include teacher group (6.5 %) as compare to without teacher group (1.21 %). The result shows that the texts related to examination theme are almost similar that is 30.89 % in the include teacher group and 28.7 % in without teacher group. This shows that presence or absence of teacher does not influence the most important purpose of these groups, i.e. exam and evaluation related information sharing. Similarly, the result shows that the number of text in the extra curriculum activity theme is almost similar that is 5.69 % in the include teacher group and 6.83 % in the without teacher group. But, most importantly the result shows that the number of text in the entertainment theme is higher in

the without teacher group that is 29.62 % but in the include teacher group is 0%. That means when teacher is there in the group students hardly do conversation which is related to entertainment or jokes. Again, the result shows that the number of text in other relevant information is higher in include teacher group that is 9.76% compare to the without teacher group that is 3.7 %. When teacher is there in the group, students get these information through teacher as well, therefore this theme percentage of text is higher in the include teacher group. To compare both the groups chi square test was done. We found chi square value is 76.015 which is significant at .001 level with 5 df. Therefore we can say that there is a significant difference regarding the texts between the include teacher and without teacher WhatsApp group.

STUDY 2

Method

The second study deploys interview method. The objective of this study was to know the views of the group members about WhatsApp uses, advantages/disadvantages, profits/burdens, inclusion/exclusion of teachers, etc.

Sample. In the second study, interview were conducted from the members of the four groups. The total number of participant were eight (three males and five females), from each of the group two members were selected for interview. These two members were the most active and the least active members of the group. The age of the participants were between 20 to 25 years.

Design and procedure. The structured interview method was used. For the interview the participants were selected on the basis of the content analysis of chats, one who is most active in the group and one who is least active in the group. The participants were approach and asked for participation. They were informed about the purpose and goal of the study. Interviews were conducted in their respective department and recoded using voice recording device. The language of interviews were English and Hindi. The interview process took around 15 to 20 minutes for each participant. The interview had following questions

- What are the main purposes of using educational WhatsApp group?

- What are the advantage and disadvantage of educational WhatsApp group?

- How WhatsApp group can be useful for education purpose?

- Is it necessary to use WhatsApp group in educational institution?

- If someone don't have WhatsApp then what could be the impact on that student?

- What are the topics mostly discuss in your educational WhatsApp group?

- Why some group members are more active and some are less active?

- What are the benefits of having or not having teacher in the WhatsApp group?

Results

There were eight participants in the interview 3 male (P2, P3, & P7) and 5 female (P1, P4, P5, P6, & P8). Based of the questions, the results are divided under various heads, such as purpose of WhatsApp, advantage/disadvantage etc.

Purpose

To find out the main purpose of using educational WhatsApp group, a direct question was asked to the participants. Their response were categories using themes emerged in Study 1.

- **Regular academics.** According to the participants the main purpose of such group is day to day updates regarding class information, class timing, which class they have, syllabus, materials, photocopies, PDF, circulation of notes. The extract from an interview reveals the theme is given by a participant was "*The main purpose of such a group is day to day updates, Communication, class information*" (P5).
- **Exam and evaluation.** Another important and very crucial category is like through the group they get information about examination, topics for examination, information about class presentation, again they got information about the sessional and assignment as well as marks. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*we got information about examination*" (P1).
- **Wishes and greetings.** Sometime through the group they can wish their friends birthday or send New Year greetings. WhatsApp has emerged one of the most economic and time saving mode to wish individuals as well as many people in one go. Though this is not the main purpose of any academic group but no one showed any problem with this kind of communication. One probable reason could be it increases the bonding between the members. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*we can wish birthday*" (P1).
- **Extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities includes both official as we as unofficial information regarding any program, outing, sports, meeting etc. The most interesting and most discussed in any group is text related to extracurricular activities.
- **Entertainment.** The participants mentioned that apart from studies sometime through these groups they share pictures, videos, jokes etc. Again if they have to make fun of their classmates they do in the group conversation only. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*if we have to make fun of your classmate we can do*" (P1).

Advantage and disadvantage

Participants mentioned following advantages and disadvantages of educational WhatsApp groups.

- **Advantage.** The participants cited lots of advantage of WhatsApp groups- it is user friendly, it is easy for communication, it provides written and stored communication, etc. Other advantages are like they can share notes, PDF, EBook, even if they are not present in class or if they want to discuss through WhatsApp they can clear their doubts. They don't need to run after teacher every time as they can get materials and information from these groups. Compare to other social sites WhatsApp group is easy to use. One of the participant said that "*compare to other social sites like messengers, WeChat etc. WhatsApp group chat is very easy and convenient*" (P1). Another advantage is that they can use emoji which are very important and the qualities are attractive compare to other application. WhatsApp also help them to recall/delete any text if they send by mistake. They can email the whole conversation, make back up of the conversations. WhatsApp groups can be used for sending location, audio, video, contact.
- **Disadvantage.** The participants during the interview also mentioned some disadvantage of educational WhatsApp group. The biggest is communication overload. Members send so many messages on any particular topic could be very distracting and irritating. Sometimes because of these kinds of distraction people use the 'Mute' option, which further can create a problem of missing any discussion or information. One of the participants stated that "*there are lots of members in one group and people ask the same things again and again so it create problem of unnecessary messages*"(P8). Sometime members send irrelevant videos for that it

became very irritating for others. Sometime because of too much messages and different opinion leads to argument and conflicts among group members.

Usefulness of educational WhatsApp group

To find out the usefulness of using educational WhatsApp group question was asked to the participants and two themes emerged. These themes explains the usefulness of educational WhatsApp group.

-   ***Interact between each other.*** WhatsApp group is useful in many ways it helps students in their regular studies. According to the participant with the use of WhatsApp group they can interact to each other. There may be some students who don't talk in the class but through WhatsApp group they can be in touch and interact to each other.
-   ***Sharing of information and materials.*** According to the participants because of the educational WhatsApp group it is very easy for them to share any information and also to get information from their classmates. If they have to give any information they don't need to inform one by one instead they can just leave a text in the group and everyone will get it. Again sharing of materials is also very easy teachers can share the materials, notes as well as the students can share materials they don't need to do photocopy of all the materials.

Necessity to use educational WhatsApp group

To find out the necessity of using educational WhatsApp group question was asked to the participants and three themes emerged. These themes explain the necessity of using educational WhatsApp group.

-   ***Technological surrounding.*** Most of the participants think that use of WhatsApp Is necessary because they are living is a technological surrounded world so it's important to use technology like WhatsApp. Because of the advancement of technology people don't prefer pen and paper they obviously prefer technology like WhatsApp, as they can get notes and materials from WhatsApp and it is not possible to carry all the materials and it is not possible to print every time. One of the verbatim to support this theme stated by a participant was "*we want technology we like technology, so we don't have any problem to use in educational purpose*" (P1).
-   ***History.*** According to the participants WhatsApp has another feature of keeping history so they can find a text or any materials even it was send six months before, until they won't delete that text they can go back and search that particular text and they can get it. One verbatim stated by a participant was *"Another main feature is history like what happened before 2 semester and what document or eBook send in that time can search and find it out"* (P4).
-   ***Dependent.*** Students are very much dependent on WhatsApp groups, for them it is the easiest way to get and transfer information and it is easily accessible. Some of the students don't like to go to library and don't like to read books also so they can get notes, materials from WhatsApp group they just have to ask. But some of the student thinks that use of educational WhatsApp groups is useful but not necessary. It's not compulsory that they have to use it. They can get materials from the teacher and they can get from books as well. The extract from an interview that reveals the theme is given by a participant was *"I got all the study materials and notification from WhatsApp only so if I won't have WhatsApp it will be very problematic for me"* (P6).

Consequences of not using educational WhatsApp group

According to some students, it is very annoying not being in the group or not having WhatsApp, they will faces many problems because they don't get information regarding class timing, similarly they don't receive notes and materials. Again they will not know the topics of assignment, due dates. Most of the participant shared their own experience like they faced this problem and missed classes, did not get materials and it is not possible to print each and every document. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was *"I was not included in the original class group until the 2nd semester, when class is cancelled we did not know about it and had to come till the department to know about it"* (P2). Again another verbatim that reveals the theme as stated by a participant was *"I did not had smartphone for a long time like one month that time I used to SMS my friend or call to ask what is going on in the class group, is there any new information and if there I asked them to mail me the notes or screenshot of the conversation through which I can read the conversation and get the idea or information"* (P1). But at the same time some participant said that it won't affect them that much as they can get information anyhow if they want to know as they also face this situation. One of the verbatim stated by a participant to counter this was "*If someone is not been able to use WhatsApp it won't affect them that much. As they can get information from their friends. Like if I need a book I can go to library and I can get it from there. Yeah it will affect little bit not that much. As I don't have WhatsApp right now I am having problem but not that much*" (P7).

Reason for more active and less active member

To find out why some members are more active and some are less active in educational WhatsApp group question was asked to the participants and five theme emerged. These themes cover why members are more active and less active in educational WhatsApp group.

- ***Information.*** The participants opinion regarding the most active members are those who has information regarding class, students who attend most of the classes will have much information to share, people who have much interest in studies they text more and try to discuss problems, ask questions, give answers. Again some thinks that if teacher will be there in the group then they will be more active as they have to give information about class and share notes.

- ***Not present in class.*** Again some participants in the interview said active members are those who don't attend class so they want to know what is going on in the class. They ask for materials, examination date though they do not come to class but they are concern about their studies. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*in our group more active are the ones who don't attend class so they want to know what is going on in the class, what was taught*" (P6).

- ***Not interest to talk.*** The participants mentioned that some members are not interested to talk with their classmates, they may think that this kind of group is not important and it is not their duty to reply every time, may be they get confuse what they have to reply. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*In my perspective some members may see the message and ignore it sometimes it happens because there are teachers so we have to think like what to reply and how to reply*" (P5).

- ***Personality.*** Personal character of one individual play a very important role, some people are very much extrovert so they can adjust themselves very easily whereas some people are very introvert so they can't be open up themselves. They may want to ignore the group conversation as they can't cop up with others. One of the verbatim to support the theme stated by a participant was *"It depends on the mood of some students also as some students are least bother about the class"* (P5).

- *Unavailability of internet.* Some participants think that more active members are those who have full access to internet. Students who have access to internet can be active in the group but without proper internet connection they can't. It is true that internet connect is not good in Sikkim. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*some of us are more active because they have access to internet, if I would have good internet connection I would have also be active in WhatsApp group*" (P8).

Involvement of teacher. To find out whether teacher should be or not in the educational WhatsApp group question was asked to the participants and most of them mentioned that there should be two groups one is with the teacher another is without the teacher.

- *Include teacher group.* When teacher will be there in a group conversation will be so formal, these kind of groups is helpful because students can take help directly from the teacher. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*Teacher are the main source to get the information related to class, notes and other educational information*" (P3). Some participant thinks that teacher should be there in the group as it is an educational group as they got every kind of help from teachers like notes, materials etc.

- *Without teacher group.* Most of the participants thinks that it is much easier to work with when there are two groups. It is the fact that presence of teacher can make the conversation very formal. They think that when teacher is not in the group students can share whatever they want, involvement of teacher in those group can hinder the freedom of the students. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*Teacher shouldn't be there as it's a personal group of the students we have all kind of chats there, as a student we have some norms like we have adjusted to certain rules or certain procedures that we follow, we may like them or we may not like them but we follow, it can hamper the conversation*" (P1). Teacher will not like the way students do conversation.

Benefits of having teacher in educational group

To find out the benefits of having teacher in educational group question was asked to the participants and three themes emerged. These themes explains the necessity of using educational WhatsApp group.

- *Direct communication.* The presence of teacher in the group help in direct communication. Students can directly take help from the teacher and the teacher also can send study materials in the group. If student have any doubt regarding study they can immediately clear out the doubts.

- *Formal communication.* The participants mentioned that when teacher is there in the group all of the members behave in a formal way, it is help full because when teacher is not there lots of unnecessary conversation happen which disturb the members.

- *Less conflict.* The participants mentioned that when teacher are there in the group they don't usually text much so there is not any problem of too much messages so there will not be any conflict and if students are doing anything wrong regarding studies the teacher can clear out immediately. One of the verbatim stated by a participant was "*Benefits will be that there won't be any fighting between classmates, we have to behave in a good way and we have to respect the teacher*" (P1).

DISCUSSION

The objective of the present research was to find out the main uses of WhatsApp group in educational context. The analysis of the study showed that there are lots of factor because of

which now a day students prefer to use WhatsApp group in educational context. Through WhatsApp group they can share information related to class, they can share study materials, etc. By the use of educational WhatsApp group they can simply ask teacher and clear out their doubts easily, and therefore no personal communication is needed with teachers. Previous studies found that university students prefer to communicate during and after the lessons via internal SMS and tend to ask more questions (Scornavacca, Huff, & Marshall, 2009). Present research also shows that students prefer to use WhatsApp group for their education purpose and to solve their problem. Gillingham and Topper (1999) suggest the positive impacts of collaborative learning through social networking (Facebook, WhatsApp etc.) and its effects on the learning process. Present research shows that apart from academic information students involve in other kinds of conversation through WhatsApp group as well, such as to wish their friends or teachers, regarding extra curriculum activities, etc. Even, they share pictures, videos for entertainment purpose, but mainly when teacher is not in their group.

The present research shows that there are several advantages of using educational WhatsApp groups. The first advantage of WhatsApp messenger is a free application and people can create group and anyone can be a member of that group, it is user friendly, it is easy for day to day communication. Tawiah, Nondzor and Alhaji (2014) in their study found is that students' prefer to use WhatsApp application instead of mobile voice call for their day-to-day communication. In the present study also students prefer to use WhatsApp messenger compare to other social sites. Students prefer WhatsApp messenger because compare to other social sites it has many features they can send audio, video very easily, even they can send their location and now a days through WhatsApp they can send documents which is very important to any student. But WhatsApp has certain demerits also, and the biggest one is over conversation. Yeboah and Ewur (2014) found that WhatsApp had negative impact on students, with distraction from studies, problems related to spelling and grammar. Members send too much massage on a particular topic that can be very distracting for other members.

Now a day each and every educational institution has their WhatsApp group. The mobile devices provide students with the opportunity to learn anywhere and at any time (Crescente & Lee, 2011). People are surrounded by technology so they want to use technology. It seems very hard to escape from the presence of technology. People are dependent on technology to passes their daily life. Church and Oliveira (2013), in their study found that people prefer to use WhatsApp for their communication as it is cost benefits. Using of educational WhatsApp group is very necessary because information passes through WhatsApp groups only and those students who are not the member of the group don't get information. So people are becoming very much dependent on WhatsApp. Even if students are not member of their WhatsApp group they don't get study materials.

Another objective of the present study was to understand why only few members highly interact on these WhatsApp groups? Who are they? How are they different from less active members? The result of the study shows that there are various reasons that some students are very active in the group where as some are not active. Ahad and Lim (2014) found that the majority of undergraduate students use WhatsApp for more than 3 hours a day. The students found WhatsApp was very useful for group discussions and interaction where as some of them found that it was very problematic for their studies. In this study result clearly shows that students who have information regarding class are the more active members. The students who regularly attend classes they have lots of information and they share that information with their classmates. Again, if they have problem related to any topic they try to discuss and solve it with their fellow classmates. Again the result shows that some students who are not regular in class but they are concern about their studies they ask question to their classmates and try to know

about the classes. In addition to that some students are very less active in the group because they are not interested in talk and particularly in written mode. They think that it is not necessary to reply in the group and sometime they get confuse with what to reply and how to reply. The result shows that more active members are those who can be friendly with everyone very easily but the introvert members they do not like to respond in the group conversation until someone will not mention their name in the chat. Results also shows that offline socially active students not necessarily be active on WhatsApp groups. Unavailability of proper internet connection is another reason that some students are not active in their educational WhatsApp group. The result shows that because of the lack of proper internet connection some members want to be a part of the conversation of the group but can't reply in their group conversation.

The last objective of the present study was to find out how the presence of teacher can influence in the group conversation. Ruleman (2012) in his study find out the uses of social networking sites among the faculty members and students. The outcomes of the study showed that both faculty and students use social networking sites frequently. Present study reveals that presence of teacher can very much influence the group conversation. When teacher become the part of any WhatsApp group, the communication become more formal and restrictive. There is a major difference between the conversation of a group where teachers are members and where they are not. The result shows that there are lots of benefits of having teacher in the WhatsApp group. No doubt the presence of teacher can make the conversation very formal but students can take direct help from the teacher. Previous research also shows that online communication among students and their instructor create an affective learning and teaching environment (Zengin, Arikan, & Dogan, 2011). Students can directly communicate with the teacher they can get their materials from the teacher. When teacher is there in the group the students behave in a gentle way so there are less chance of conflict and if anything happen teacher can resolve it very easily. The result also shows that presence of teacher also hinder the student's freedom in the group they can't post whatever they want as they have to respect the teacher and teacher will not like that kind of conversation. Therefore, presence of teacher can restrict the number of text and make the conversation more formal in teacher included group but at the same time it restrict the freedom of students and therefore many students don't want them as group members.

Conclusion

There are lots of reasons because of which now a day students prefer to use WhatsApp group in school/colleges. The most importantly student use WhatsApp group for sharing and receiving information related to academics. Through WhatsApp group they can share information related to class, study materials, exams, marks distribution, etc. By the use of educational WhatsApp group they can simply ask teacher and clear out their doubts easily. The students who regularly attend classes and who are concern about their studies they have lots of information and they share that information with their classmates and ask questions. Again, the presence of teacher can very much influence the group conversation. Presence of teacher in any WhatsApp group makes the communication more formal and controlled.

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