

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MESSENGERS ESPECIALLY WHATSAPP ON YOUTH A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of technology, life has become convenient and easier. In this dynamic and busy world staying in touch with associates is difficult. Social media has emerged as bliss in disguise and helps us to maintain and know updates from friends, family and associates. Social media is evolving in the world at very fast pace and affecting people in numerous ways. As we know today we have various social messengers like Tango, Face book, WhatsApp, Line, Yahoo, Hike, We Chat, Skype, Imo, BBM, Viber etc. which helps us to remain in touch with the society or people. In past few years, WhatsApp has become most popular medium of interaction among the people as it is convenient to use. This app can be easily downloaded and works in various electronic items such as I-Phone, Blackberry, Android, windows phone and computers. This priceless exchange of text, image, video, audio message and calling has mesmerised youths to use whatsapp. It is an incredible application and a great innovation which helps us to connect ourselves with the world. This wonderful App is an important medium of social connectivity and has its own effects (Good or bad) upon the youth or in the society. This study is an attempt to measure the impact of WhatsApp on students; with reference to the youth of Gwalior, India. In this study the researchers want to conduct a survey by using a questionnaire among the youth (students) so we can understand its impact on them. This empirical study has been conducted upon 100 people with a questionnaire, which was used as a tool of data collection for the survey.

This study has revealed that being a medium of mass communication; it also has adverse impact on the life style and culture of youth especially in their studies. It affects their (academics) language and also spoils their spelling skills and grammatical construction of sentences. They may get misleading information or fake news and concentration is more on gossips and even become totally dependent on this to get information about around the world. Youths are spending more time on these applications rather than spending quality time with their family members. Many youths are addicted to it and cannot abstain themselves from constantly chatting, replying and sharing of ideas or information, so it has become difficult to control it and needs psychotic help.

Keyword: - Smart phone apps, Whatsapp, Youth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Albert Einstein once said that our technology has exceeded our humanity. It means the world of communication is ever changing due to the developments in the field of science and technology. People feel so proud that they are depending upon technology in their day to day life. Right after getting up in the morning till their last work before sleep, they make use of technology. To fulfil their need of communication, the most often used technology driven media are computers and mobile phones. Today's generation is too much obsessed with luxury and their life is literally taken away by the use of new media. The trend of multi-tasking, an activity of instant messaging while doing homework or during class lectures has become a usual phenomenon in youngsters' life today. The trend of using new media 24/7 was a phenomenon seen in the foreign countries, but now this has become a part people in India too. Today, it's rare to see a youngster without a gadget in hand. They are completely involved in using new media in one form or the other. The performance and capability of mobile phones have changed a lot. The use of smart phones among youth in India has increased in a short span of time. The reason for this is the

element of interactivity and the varieties of application that it provides for the youth. Some of the smart phone Apps that youth uses today are games, navigation software, e-book readers, services providing news, weather feeds, and other apps that need internet connectivity like Facebook, Viber, YouTube, WhatsApp etc. Out of all these applications, WhatsApp has become more popular among youth. The current study is focused on youth in Gwalior region, a metropolis in India. Gwalior is a prominent city of Madhya Pradesh and also known as “the land of music, art and history”. Gwalior occupies a strategic location in the central region of India. The city offers the visitors a unique style of architecture. The majestic fort, considered as one of the best in the world, located at the heart of Gwalior was built by Raja Man Singh Tomar, of the Tomar dynasty. Gwalior is famous for its contribution to classical music and known for Gwalior Gharana. It is the birth place of classical Music Maestro Miya Tansen. The Gwalior Trade Fair takes place every year in the month of December-January, which is the true representation of art, culture and heritage of different states of India. Great places to visit in city are Gwalior Fort, Jai Vilas Palace Museum, Samadhi of Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sun Temple and Shivpuri Madhav National Park. Gwalior has emerged as an important tourist attraction in central India as well as many industries and administrative office came up within the city.

WhatsApp, started in the year 2009, with the tag line- “Simple. Personal. Real time messaging,” is a mobile messaging app which allows the users to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS. The WhatsApp messenger was purposely created by Brian Acton and Jan Koum (2009) to make communication and the distribution of multimedia messaging more easily and faster. WhatsApp works with internet connectivity and helps its users to stay in touch with friends and relatives in their contact list. WhatsApp has done same for messaging what Skype did for voice and video calls. By using the Internet as its communications backbone, WhatsApp has completely transformed personal communications, which was previously dominated by the world’s largest wireless carriers. WhatsApp Messenger has been around for a while but recent updates have improved the functionality of the application since its release date. The main purpose behind this application is to replace SMS with a cross platform mobile messenger that works on an internet data plan. If you have unlimited text, it is still beneficial as it is a convenient way to skip international fees that carriers may charge.. It is popular because there is no cost to message friends and family other than the internet data plan that users already have on their phones. It is easy to get started. Simply enter the telephone number of the device into the app. It then sorts through the contacts (with your permission) on the phone to figure out who else also has the app already installed. Users can then invite more contacts or go ahead and start sending messages to the ones that the app discovered. Apart from making its users getting connected with each other, it also helps them to create groups, send unlimited images, video and audio messages and even now documents upto 100 Mb.

Social media according to Andreas Kaplan refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and net work. It creates the opportunity to network with other members who share similar or common interest, dreams and goals. With the social media network like WhatsApp, an individual can initiate and build strong business partnership in any part of the world without meeting that individual in person. With whatsapp messenger, communication through mobile phones has become easier, faster and cheaper. It is less expensive as compared to the normal phone messaging. An individual can chat with friends and family overseas through WhatsApp without having to incur global SMS charges. The provision and access to learning material anywhere, anytime, and in various formats has potential to enhance deep student learning capabilities. In higher education, WhatsApp is used for the enhancement of discussions and sharing information among students and their lecturers. The reason why WhatsApp is so popular among youth is because, it allows them to send unlimited texts, pictures, videos to their friends and family members without any cost other than their internet data plan that they already uses in their smart phones. The application is so easy to use after downloading. It shows you who all are using WhatsApp in your contacts and also helps to invite their friends who are yet to download and use. Then they can start messaging, sharing audio files, video files, documents, updating status, etc. One of the biggest features of Whats app is that it does not collect personal information like your name, gender, address, or age.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are many studies done on WhatsApp and youth both in Indian and International scenarios, few of them are given here to make the theoretical framework for this study. (Yeoboah and Ewur, 2014) has concentrated on the negative aspects of WhatsApp. Their study proved that the usage of WhatsApp has impacted negatively on the performance of students in Ghana. Some of the findings of the study were the following. WhatsApp usage has led to lack of concentration during lectures, consumes study time, distracts students from completing their assignments and mostly affects their spellings and grammatical formation of sentence.

Another study entitled “Smartphone application usage amongst students at a South African University”, done in the year 2012, assesses the usage of Smartphone applications specifically social networking applications amongst the users in South African University. The study proved that students remain online for 16 hours a day and spends an average of 5 hours per day on their smart phones interacting with others through social networking applications.

An article “Indian Youth prefers WhatsApp, Facebook over SMS” published on June 16, 2013, in The Times of India Online newspaper. The survey was conducted by Tata Consultancy Services in the years 2012-2013. The study was conducted covering 17,500 high school students across 14 Indian cities. The study revealed that today’s youth are collaborating through social networking tools and building virtual communities aided by affordable bandwidth and smart devices. The survey proved that almost 70% of the students possess smart phones and have started utilizing the full potential of smart phones.

The article titled “WhatsApp could help Facebook retain youth in countries like India” published online on The Indian Express.com, dated February 21, 2014, talks about the acquisition of WhatsApp by Facebook. The reason they state in the article is increasing number of smart phone users in India and the proliferation of cheaper smart phones and data plans in India. Recent reports suggest that the youth have been moving away from Facebook. WhatsApp, on the other hand, is the fastest growing messaging app. The acquisition is a way of future-proofing growth, especially in a young country like India. Youth in India have started spending more time on messaging apps. As we see that above researches shows that smart phones and its application especially what apps is impacting the life youths and other peoples too so this study must have significance to measure the degree of impact. The research design enables the researcher to find out appropriate answers to the research questions posed. The purpose of this section is to discuss the method adopted for this study. The aim of this research is to observe and understand WhatsApp usage among Gwalior youth. The researcher made use of both primary and secondary data, gathering information from various journal articles and internet websites. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was well designed with both open ended and close ended questions. An Online survey was conducted in order to find out results.

3. OBJECTIVES

This study examines the usage of WhatsApp mobile application among the youth in Gwalior region. The objectives of this study are:-

- To investigate the intensity of WhatsApp uses among youth in Gwalior region.
- To explore the various uses of WhatsApp among its users.
- To find out the frequency and interactivity of WhatsApp among its users.
- To explore the features of WhatsApp used the most by youngsters.
- To find out whether youth is satisfied with the mobile app, WhatsApp or not?

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

On the basis of above stated objective the research question are framed as

- How frequent does students in Gwalior region uses WhatsApp messenger?
- What are the purposes fulfilled by WhatsApp messenger for students in Gwalior region?
- Whether the students of Gwalior region are happy using WhatsApp messenger in their day to day life in fulfilling their personal and academic needs or not?
- What are the features of Whatsapp that are mostly used by students?
- How is WhatsApp affecting the academic activities of the students?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Method: The study uses online survey method and is restricted to youngsters in Gwalior region.

4.2 Research Tool: A questionnaire was developed with both close-ended and open ended questions to assess the demographics of youngsters, their smart phone details, service provider details, ranking of mobile as a necessity of life, ranking of WhatsApp features, Consumption of data in WhatsApp usage, and intensity of usage. The open ended questions gave the samples a chance to express their views about WhatsApp messenger and to list out some of the features that they like the most in the app. This gave the researcher to gather more information regarding WhatsApp messenger and youth’s use of its features that would not have been said with closed ended questions.

4.3 Sampling: The researcher used judgemental sampling to identify the samples for the study. Students in Gwalior region, who possess smart phones and are users of WhatsApp messenger, were taken for the study.

4.4 Sample Size: The population under study was youth, especially college going students in the Gwalior. Since the population of Gwalior is almost 2.3 Lakh and it was impossible to get data from the whole population, so questionnaire was distributed among 100 University students in the age group of 17-22. The respondents for the study were students who were users of smart phones and WhatsApp.

4.5 Limitations & Scope for The Study

- The sample for the study was limited to 100 respondents in Gwalior region. The study can be extended to more cities with more respondents.
- The current study has concentrated much on the positive aspects of WhatsApp. In future, researchers can do a study in both pros and cons of WhatsApp.
- The study should have included other apps like Hike, imo, Instagram, Viber and snapchat messenger which is gaining popularity in today's scenario.
- There is limited literature review available in Indian context, with reference to WhatsApp usage. Many studies were done on foreign context than in India.

5. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Demographics including the age, course of study and the year of study were collected. To determine the usage of WhatsApp among students, they were asked about the time spent by students on WhatsApp messenger. To determine the intensity of usage of WhatsApp, the purpose of using whatsapp, best features of application and whether it affects their academics or not. 100 questionnaires were administered with 50 boys and 50 girls those who are University going in Gwalior region.

Young people in Gwalior use WhatsApp mainly for the purpose of communication and to update their status on a regular basis. The immediate and ubiquitous use for social co-ordination and updating makes more and more youth download and use the app. Many studies in India have proved that youth make use of WhatsApp to communicate with their friends and family. Smart devices and online access enable them to connected with their friends and relatives. The affordability of smart phones and data plans by the service providers like Airtel, Idea, Bsnl, Vodafone, Reliance Jio have resulted in a great use of WhatsApp among youth. People can buy smart phone at affordable prices and easy EMI which enable the youth to become a 24/7 user of WhatsApp. The various features like Link Preview and Custom Notification available and the great speed in sending and receiving messages are value added services of WhatsApp makes it more popular among the students. Mobile internet was not that popular among youth in earlier times, but now 90 % of youth subscribe for mobile internet as the application works through internet access. Mobile providers ensure faster connection in their internet services and offer attractive and affordable schemes. WhatsApp has brought a boom for the mobile internet concept. After the arrival of WhatsApp, many youngsters who were not a user of mobile internet has shifted to the usage of 3G and 4G, thereby bringing a huge profit for the mobile service providers through their internet usage.

The speed that the internet packages offer retains the set of youngsters to be the regular users. After the entry of WhatsApp as a quick messenger, many of the youngsters started purchasing smart phones, window phones and android phones; which results in a huge sale for the smart phone industry. According to a news report published by counter research India is now the second largest smartphone market in terms of active unique smartphone users, with the total base crossing 220 million users.

Q1. How frequent does students in Gwalior region uses Whatsapp Messenger?

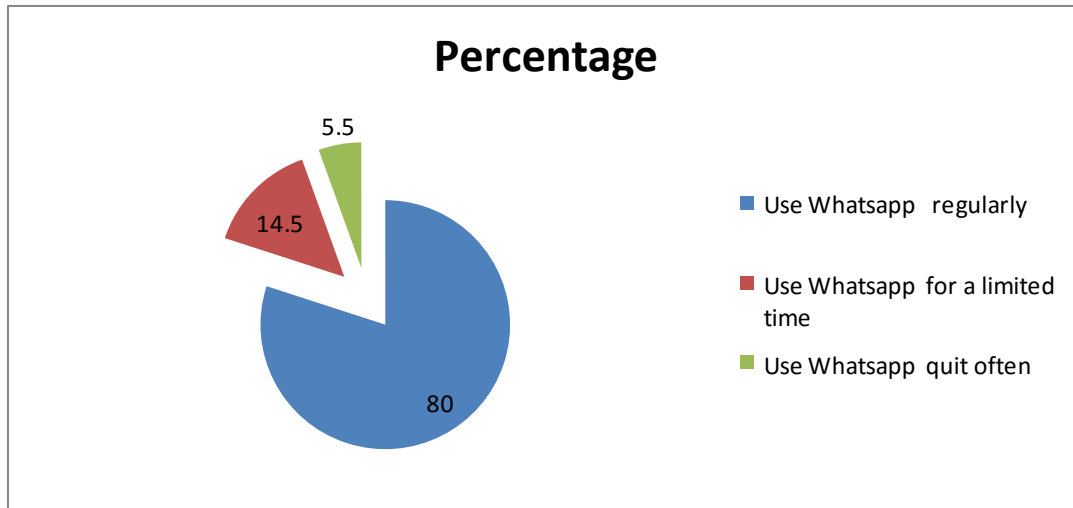


Chart 1

Majority of the students (80%) regularly access WhatsApp, thereby getting in touch with their friends without missing any single message or video call, while 14.5% of students use Whatsapp for a limited time and 5.5% students quietly often used it.

Q2. What are the purposes fulfilled by WhatsApp messenger for students in Gwalior region?

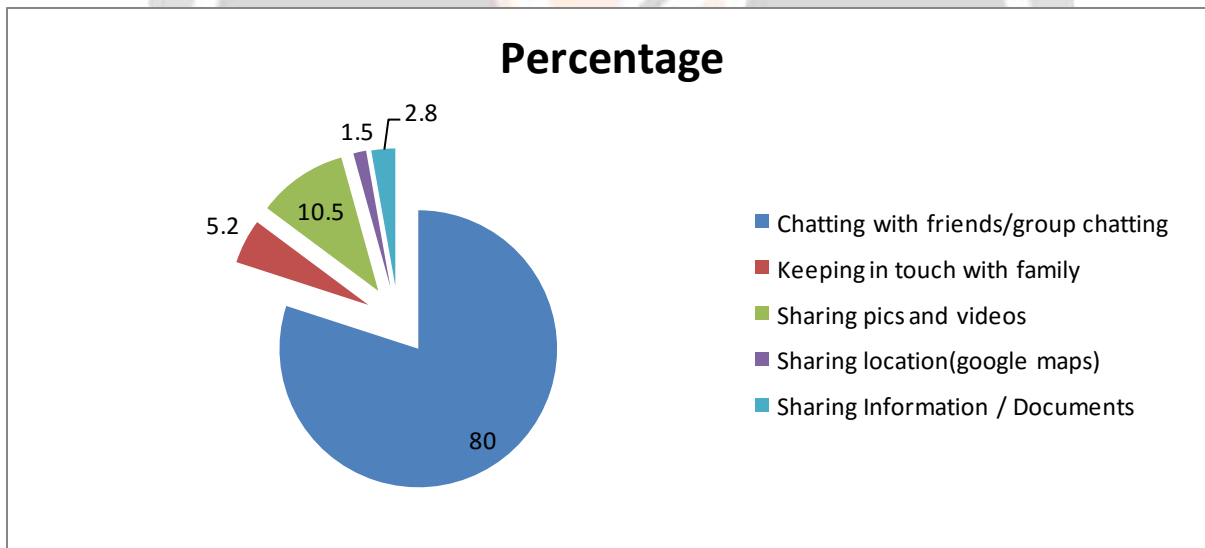


Chart 2

The finding of the survey reveals that the majority of students which is 80% of the sample clearly make strong view that they use whatsapp for chatting with friends, and acquaintances because of its cheap cost which reduce the calling & sms expenditure and 5.2% of respondents have the opinion that it is the best way to keep in touch with family, 10.5% of respondents say that they use whatsapp for sharing pictures and videos, while 2.8% use it for sharing documents /Information and 1.55 use it for sharing location.

Q3. Whether the students of Gwalior region are happy using WhatsApp messenger in their day to day life in fulfilling their personal and academic needs or not?

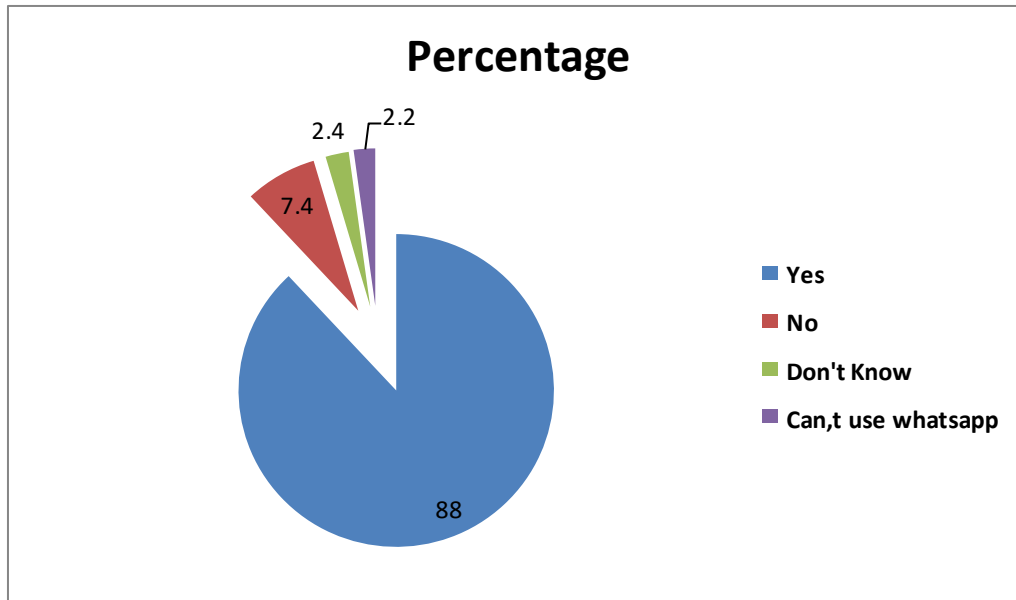


Chart 3

The finding of the survey reveals that the majority of students are satisfy with the use of Whatsapp ie 88%, while 7.4% are not happy with it because of non-informative messages and 2.4% of people don't know about whether they are satisfy using it or not and 2.2% of people can't use Whatsapp.

Q4. What are the features of Whatsapp that are mostly used by students?

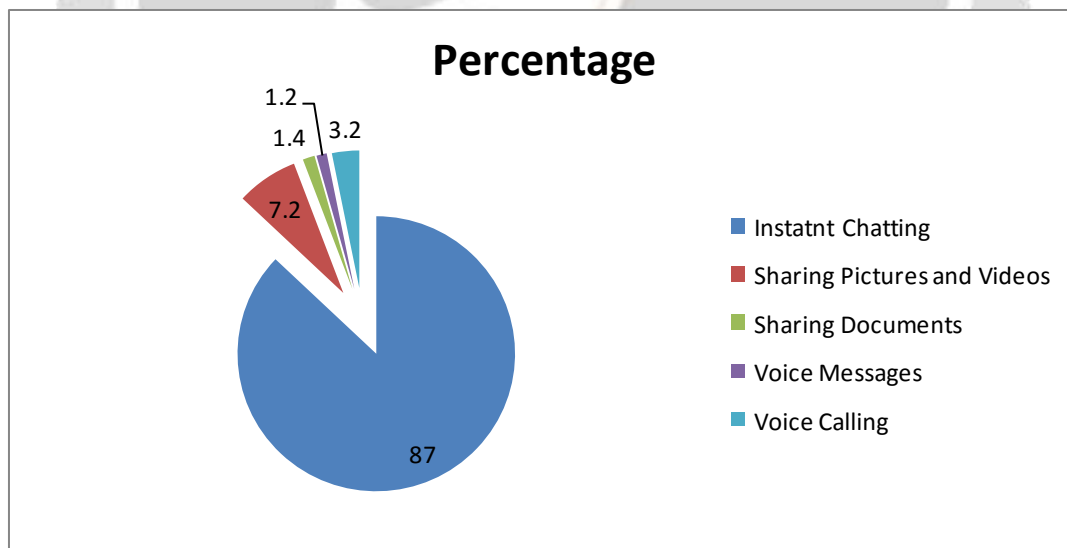


Chart 4

The finding of the survey reveals that the majority of students Majority of students 87% of use WhatsApp for chatting and they converse with more than 10 people a day .while 7.2% of students use it for sharing pictures and videos, 3.2% of students used it for voice calling, 1.4% of students used it for sharing voice messages and 1.2% of students used it for sharing documents.

Q5. How is WhatsApp affecting the academic activities of the students?

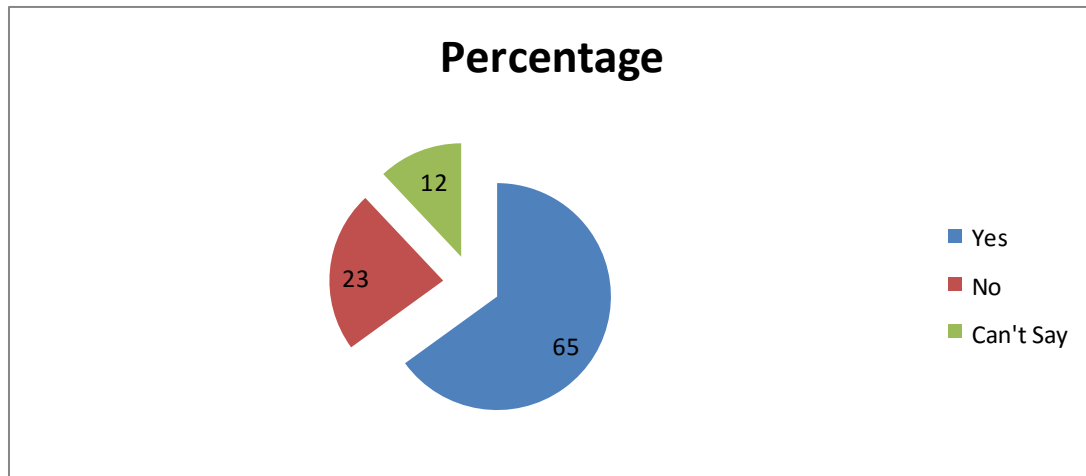


Chart 5

The finding of the survey reveals that the majority of students 65% agreed that WhatsApp is affecting their academic performance and 23% students believed that whatsapp is not affecting their studies while 12% are not sure regarding this.

6. ANALYSIS OF OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

The respondents listed out some of the positive and negative aspects of WhatsApp messenger.

6.1. Advantages of Whatsapp

- 1. Simple, Reliable Messaging:** You can download the application and use it for free and send unlimited messages, audio files, video files, images etc with internet connection. The annual subscription fee has been dropped by the company, so it is priceless and connects the users with friends and family and avoids using paid traditional sms.
- 2. Applicable to devices:** With whatsapp on the web and the desktop, the you can sync all your chats to your computer so that you can chat on whatever is any device which is compatible to the users. Users only need to download the app, to get started and keep the conversation going.
- 3. No Geographic Constraints:** Whatsapp providing the facility to talk freely with friends and family, no matter where they are located. Whatsapp calling just uses only the Smartphone internet connection and its totally free.
- 4. Easy To Use:** WhatsApp is easy to use since it reduces the users time to log in and log out by giving them access whenever internet is available in just a click in WhatsApp icon.
- 5. Security:** Until and unless you delete your chat history, it preserves the messages. Now with the advent of end to end encryption facility , messages and calls are secured and only the people are in conversation can read or listen that.
- 6. Enables The User To See When Their Friends And Relatives Logged In Last Time:** WhatsApp enables you the view your friend's last log in.
- 7. Quick In Status Updates And sharing Photo Uploads:** WhatsApp is very quick when it comes to status updates and photo updates.
- 8. Group Chat Facility:** WhatsApp enables the users to chat with their friends, co-workers and relatives in a group that matters them the most. Youngsters agree that they can't be without WhatsApp too long because they don't want to miss some important conversations made in the group. Messages, photos and videos can be shared among 256 people at a time. You can even name the group, mute or customize notifications and

more.

Document Sharing: You can easily share PDF's, documents, spreadsheets, slideshows and more without using sharing apps or email. It provides to send documents up to 100 MB.

9. **Voice Messages:** Whatsapp also enables users to send voice record messages.

6.2. Disadvantages

1. **Image Downloads:** Images can be downloaded from the profile pics and can be used for any purpose.
2. **Consume Lots of Space in Mobile Phone:** It consumes a lot of space in smartphone as we download all the pictures and videos from the application and saved them to our smartphone storage device.
3. **Access to Anonymous Contacts:** Through WhatsApp, people get access to phone numbers and images of anonymous people, just because they are a part of group texting.
4. **Visibly Hectic Text Message Culture:** WhatsApp has encouraged youth to send hectic messages and thereby enhancing the culture of visibly hectic text messages. There is no restriction in the size of text messages that can be send through WhatsApp.
5. **Lack of Concentration in Class Rooms:** Young people very seldom turn off their WhatsApp, even at colleges; They will be receiving messages every now and then. Due to this they lack concentration in class rooms, and hence won't listen to classes much.
6. **Lack of Communication with Family Members At Home:** The 24/7 online nature in WhatsApp results in lack of communication with the family in the physical world. The youngsters today, are so obsessed with WhatsApp that they rarely communicates with their family. Even though WhatsApp is having some negative sides, still youth prefers to use it to get connected with their close ones.

So as a result of the study we can say that students in Gwalior region consider Whatsapp as an alternate choice for text messaging/ social networking sites. They also consider it as a perfect tool for perfect medium to int touch with the friends/family and relatives .Whatsapp is also an perfect application for exchanging their photos, videos, and audios at a very fast pace, and as a tool for instant communication, with unlimited messages and unres tricted size of sending messages, yet there are certain students which are not happy with the non-informative messages or information which they received. There is also a negative effects of Whatsapp which came out of this study that 65% of students believe that the language students used while chatting affects their (academics) and spoils theirspelling skills and grammatical construction of sentences and it also affects their study time.

7. CONCLUSION

The tagline of WhatsApp "Simple, Personal, Real time messaging" is true and apt in every sense. It has created a sense of belongingness, closeness and effectiveness with friends and relatives. This study has revealed that being a medium of mass communication; it also has adverse impact on the life style and culture of youth especially in their studies. It affects their (academics) language and also spoils their spelling skills and grammatical construction of sentences. They may get misleading information or fake news and concentration is more on gossips and even become totally dependent on this to get information about around the world. Youths are spending more time on these applications rather than spending quality time with their family members. Many youths are addicted to it and cannot abstain themselves from constantly chatting, replying and sharing of ideas or information, so it has become difficult to control it and needs psychotic help.

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