



Everyday WhatsApp realities in Tanzania: How communication practices shape interpersonal relationships

Janeth Migamba¹
Edmund Zakayo²
Mwajabu Mashinde³

¹jmigamba@irdp.ac.tz

Institute of Rural Development Planning, Tanzania

Recommended Reference: Migamba, J., Zakayo, E., & Mashinde, M. (2025). Everyday WhatsApp realities in Tanzania: How communication practices shape interpersonal relationships. *African Quarterly of Social Science Research*, 2(4), 13–23.

<https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.2.4.2>

ABSTRACT

WhatsApp has gained great attention among the public in both developed and developing countries; the study aimed to assess how communication practices shape interpersonal relationships. The study employed the family communication patterns theory. This study employed a cross-sectional design, combining statistical and descriptive methods to achieve comprehensive and consistent results. Specifically examining the practice of family communication through WhatsApp and the effects of WhatsApp on enhancing interpersonal relationships. The study included all household heads aged 18 and above, including those who do not live with all their family members, such as children, parents, spouses, or siblings, but who use WhatsApp regularly to communicate with them, whereby 153 respondents were sampled using a formula for an unknown population. Data were collected using a designed questionnaire administered to heads of households and checklists for key informants. Data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods to examine WhatsApp use in household communication practices comprehensively. The study indicates that the majority of the respondents had been using WhatsApp for four to ten years. Furthermore, daily engagement with family on WhatsApp was high, whereby the majority of the respondents reported communicating with relatives daily. Regarding daily WhatsApp time with family, most spent between 10 and 30 minutes per day. In addition, the average responses of the respondents ranged from 3.02 to 3.42, indicating a medium to high level of agreement regarding the contribution of WhatsApp to family relationships. Thus, the study concludes that WhatsApp has become an important tool for family communication among many Tanzanian households, especially among young and middle-aged people who are accustomed to technology. The platform has successfully reduced travel expenses, bridged geographical gaps, and facilitated frequent communication with emotional support. The study recommends that families should continue using WhatsApp to strengthen and maintain emotional connections and bonds, facilitate coordination of family activities, and use video, voice, and photo features to make their communication more authentic.

Keywords: Communication, Family, Interpersonal Relationships, WhatsApp

I. INTRODUCTION

WhatsApp has gained great attention among the public in both developed and developing countries. With over 3.1 billion monthly active users in 2025, WhatsApp has established itself as a fundamental, indispensable, widely used and highly effective tool in various societies for fast, secure, and efficient communication (Shewale, 2025). WhatsApp's widespread adoption is due to its easy-to-use design, high security through end-to-end encryption of communications, and its ability to handle a variety of content types such as text, images, audio, and video. These features have made WhatsApp a favorite tool for families for close and frequent communication. As the most popular instant messaging application used by many people around the world (Rafique et al., 2023; Sulistiani & Al-Amin, 2025). WhatsApp, as a digital platform with broadcast messaging, gives users the ability to send a single message to many people at the same time, which greatly helps in distributing information quickly, efficiently and in a balanced manner. Its great popularity among users is due to its unique capabilities that include sending text messages, making voice calls, making video calls, as well as sending messages to a large group of people at the same time without interruption, making it an ideal tool for modern communication (Kumar & Sharma, 2020).

WhatsApp has become the dominant messaging platform in Africa, with countries such as Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana reporting usage rates exceeding 90% among internet users (Yazi, 2025). The platform's low data usage and ability to connect directly to mobile networks have made WhatsApp a great choice, especially in areas with weak digital infrastructure. To a large extent, it has enabled families to maintain relationships, stay in touch, and simplify daily communication even in technologically challenging environments. However, alongside these benefits, WhatsApp is also changing the dynamics of family relationships by affecting the way people communicate, share emotions, and build



social closeness (Taipale & Farinosi, 2018). Nowadays, many young people cannot wait for two or three hours without checking or updating their status and posting pictures on social media platforms like WhatsApp, even if doing so interferes with other important activities such as studies and career development. Excessive WhatsApp use can lead to a person losing control over how they use the app, which can have a significant impact on their personal, social and even professional lives (Kumar & Sharma, 2020). WhatsApp usage in family communication varies significantly between developing and developed countries, shaped by infrastructure, socioeconomic conditions, cultural norms, and digital literacy. In developing countries, WhatsApp is often the primary communication tool due to its affordability, low data consumption, and compatibility with basic smartphones. In eight middle-income countries, including Kenya, Nigeria, and India, a median of 73% of adults use WhatsApp, while reaching 90% in Brazil (Poushter, 2024). In contrast, only 29% of adults in the United States use WhatsApp, where SMS, iMessage, and other platforms are more prevalent (Poushter, 2024). In Tanzania, WhatsApp ranks as the most used social media platform, with significant penetration among youth and urban populations (Kemp, 2025). It has gained popularity in Tanzania ahead of other social media tools. WhatsApp is Tanzania's third most data-consuming social media platform, following YouTube and Facebook. It is also used for family group chats to coordinate events, to share updates, and to maintain emotional bonds (Issa & Makubi, 2024). In this context, the question arises of how WhatsApp is used in everyday family communication and its impacts, therefore, the study aims at addressing this question.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In recent years, cities in Tanzania have experienced increased movement of people from rural areas in search of economic opportunities and social needs (Namkesa, 2024). This migration has led many to live apart from their families, resulting in issues such as mental health problems, loneliness, a reduced social support network, social isolation, loss of daily family interactions, weakening family bonds, emotional stress, and decreased participation in family events (Cebotari & Dito, 2021; Annor et al., 2024; Al-Azzeh & Diab, 2025). With smartphone penetration rising to 35.99% in December from 33.85% recorded in September 2024, and internet subscriptions reaching 48.0 million in December 2024 compared to 41.4 million in September 2025 (Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority [TCRA], 2024), more people are using social media platforms, including WhatsApp, to communicate with others and families as alternatives. WhatsApp has gained popularity in Tanzania over other social media tools. It also enables users to interact by generating, sharing, and exchanging information and opinions within virtual communities and networks (Issa & Makubi, 2024). Despite these advancements and achievements, no studies in Tanzania have explored how WhatsApp has shaped interpersonal relationships; existing studies have been conducted in other countries. Therefore, this study aims to assess how WhatsApp is used in everyday family communication and its impact on personal relationships, emotional closeness, conflict resolution, and overall family cohesion.

1.2 Research Objective

The study assesses how WhatsApp is used in everyday family communication and affects personal relationships, emotional closeness, conflict resolution, and overall family cohesion.

- i. Examines the practice of family communication through WhatsApp
- ii. Examine the effects of WhatsApp on enhancing interpersonal relationships

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study employs the family communication patterns theory, which originates from the work of McLeod and Chaffee (1972). They proposed that individuals develop shared social realities through communication and orientation. Since interpersonal communication includes both relational and content elements, they identified two corresponding communicative dimensions. Socio-orientation refers to the tendency to focus on social positioning and emphasises deference to maintain harmonious relationships. Meanwhile, concept-orientation describes the prioritisation of analysing arguments based on their merits, regardless of the speaker's status (Price, 2023). Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) is used to understand how families utilise WhatsApp to communicate and influence social relationships among their members. This theory suggests that families are structured around different communication styles based on conversation and conformity orientation. Families with a strong conversational orientation encourage deep discussion, open communication, and emotional cooperation, which WhatsApp can enhance by facilitating frequent communication, messages, and sharing photos and videos. On the other hand, families with a conformity orientation emphasise shared values, obedience, and conflict avoidance, where WhatsApp can be used as a tool to issue orders or control communication without room for open discussion. Therefore, the theory provides a basis for examining how family communication styles influence WhatsApp use, and how such use alters emotional closeness, conflict resolution, and family cohesion in the Tanzanian context.



2.2 Empirical Review

Given the widespread adoption of WhatsApp for social and family communication, recent empirical studies have offered diverse insights into everyday WhatsApp realities, particularly regarding how family communication practices influence interpersonal relationships. In Pakistan, Rafique et al. (2023) found a significant association between the frequency of WhatsApp usage and interpersonal communication skills and interpersonal relationships among university students. Also, they demonstrated the benefits of WhatsApp in promoting connectedness and enabling smooth communication between students. Text messaging, voice notes, and multimedia sharing are just a few of the platform's many communication modes that have been recognized for improving the depth and speed of collaboration. In Zambia, Pindayi, (2017) stated that as a communicative space, WhatsApp is a social media platform that is shaping or affecting the lives of African citizens. In United Arab Emirates, Ali & Kootbodien (2017) found WhatsApp can be considered as an effective interpersonal communication medium. However, there are a range of various perceptions with regards to the replacement of face-to-face communication, but it is ultimately used as an addition to, not replacement of face-to-face communication. In India, Kiran and Srivastava (2020) found that, various innovations and advancements in technological field have paved the way for faster and better way of living, WhatsApp is one of such advancement that has drastically altered the way youngsters communicate with each other. The dependency on WhatsApp has led to a number of social, physical and psychological problems among youngsters.

In addition, in Ghana, Haagsman (2023) adds that WhatsApp strengthens long-distance relationships through agency-driven communication. Barros (2023) agrees that WhatsApp maintains long-distance connections and ritual co-presence while acknowledging ambivalence, reflecting our evidence that WhatsApp preserves long-distance ties. In Nigeria, Omipidan and Sanusi (2024) found that, broadcast messages on WhatsApp are significant change that presents both chances and difficulties for preserving and strengthening family ties, emergence of digital communication platforms like WhatsApp has revolutionized conventional means of family communication. In Finland, Taipale & Farinosi (2018) revealed that broadcast messaging can help families, in particular, stay connected and expedite communication, but it also changes the dynamics of family relationships. Likewise, in Indonesia, Imanuela et al. (2023) found that the existence of social interaction media such as the WhatsApp application is certainly quite capable of bringing about a change. Initially, each individual encounters a limitation in interacting, but now, various easy accesses can be reached by each user.

Although WhatsApp has become an important tool for family and social communication around the world, most existing research has focused on students and young people, especially in contexts outside Africa. Research conducted in countries such as Zambia, Nigeria and Kenya has shown the opportunities and challenges of using WhatsApp to maintain family relationships, but it is not yet clear whether these findings are directly relevant to Tanzanian families. Furthermore, previous studies have ignored the emotional, relational and intergenerational effects. This situation highlights the importance of conducting in-depth research that focuses on the Tanzanian context to assess how WhatsApp is used in everyday family communication and how it affects personal relationships, emotional closeness, conflict resolution, and family cohesion in general.

This study contributes significantly to the literature on digital communication and family issues by presenting empirical evidence that focuses on the Tanzanian context. The results provide practical insights for families, policymakers, and communication professionals by demonstrating how WhatsApp helps build trust, openness, emotional support, conflict resolution, and celebrate family successes, while also identifying challenges such as misinformation or overreliance. By demonstrating the reality of WhatsApp use in everyday family life, this study contributes to international debates about digital media, social relationships, and the broader impacts of communication technologies, and lays the foundation for comparative research in other developing countries.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Mbagala Kuu Ward, located in Temeke District, Dar es Salaam City. The ward was purposefully selected because it is among the densely populated peri-urban areas of the city and is characterised by large households and a vast network of extended families. Mbagala Kuu has a mix of low, middle, and high-income households, with many of its residents engaged in informal employment such as small businesses and formal employment in various sectors. This environment offers a good opportunity to examine family communication dynamics, primarily through technology such as WhatsApp, in communities with vibrant and multi-generational family structures.



3.2 Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional design, combining statistical and descriptive methods to achieve comprehensive and consistent results. The cross-sectional approach enables data collection from numerous respondents simultaneously, avoiding the need for long-term follow-up. It is a straightforward, cost-effective, and efficient method, especially suitable in a densely populated urban environment like Mbagala Kuu. This design is appropriate for exploring the relationship between WhatsApp use and various aspects of family relationships, such as emotional closeness, conflict resolution, and daily communication. Additionally, it allows for integrating both statistical and descriptive (quantitative and qualitative) methods, thereby improving the validity and richness of the findings by accurately reflecting the realities of WhatsApp use within Tanzanian families.

3.3 Sampling

The study included all household heads aged 18 and above, including those who do not live with all their family members, such as children, parents, spouses, or siblings, but who use WhatsApp regularly to communicate with them. To ensure a balanced sample, the study employed systematic sampling, selecting household heads from small geographical clusters of five households each, based on the official administrative boundaries of the respective ward. Then, 30 respondents were chosen in four clusters, and 33 respondents were selected in one cluster, according to the cluster size, although three respondents had been chosen during the pilot study. Similarly, purposive sampling was used to select key informants, such as community leaders and telecommunications service providers, who provided technical information that other respondents could not offer. As outlined below, the total sample size was 153 respondents, calculated using Cochran's (1963) formula for an unknown population.

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where;

n = Sample size

P = proportional of mechanical

$z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}$ = Critical value of 95%

e = Marginal error

q = (1-p)

Hence;

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.0792)^2} = 153$$

3.4 Data Collection

Mixed-method data collection techniques were used to ensure breadth and depth in understanding the effects of WhatsApp use on social communication within families. Quantitative data were collected through a designed questionnaire administered to heads of households who use WhatsApp to communicate with their relatives. The questionnaire aimed to collect demographic information such as age, marital status, gender, and WhatsApp usage patterns and perceptions about its impact on family relationships. To increase the reliability and validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was pre-tested on 10 respondents, and necessary modifications were made before starting formal data collection. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants to complement the quantitative component. The semi-structured interview guide allowed flexibility in probing emerging issues while remaining focused on the study objectives. This approach provided insights into WhatsApp's broader social implications, including opportunities and potential challenges in maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Before data collection began, respondents were invited to participate by answering questions and were informed of the study's objectives. Respondents were entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained in accordance with research ethics procedures. Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity, and respondents' responses were not recorded. To improve data quality and minimise bias, enumerators were trained on interviewing techniques, research ethics, and proper use of the instruments. The combination of methods enabled triangulation of findings, thereby increasing the validity, credibility, and depth of the study's conclusions.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods to examine WhatsApp use in household communication practices comprehensively. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to summarise socio-demographic characteristics, usage patterns, and perceptions of WhatsApp's effects. The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a coefficient of



0.971 across the 20 items, indicating excellent reliability. This value significantly exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 for acceptable reliability and even surpasses the 0.90 benchmark, demonstrating outstanding consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The coefficients' similarity for raw and standardised items further supports the scale's robustness. These findings suggest that the items in the instrument reliably measure the underlying construct of WhatsApp use and its impact on interpersonal relationships, thereby enhancing confidence in the quality and stability of the data for further analysis.

Inferential statistical tests, such as Firth logistic regression, were employed to examine associations between demographic variables and satisfaction level, with significance set at $p < 0.05$. In parallel, qualitative interview data were transcribed, translated where necessary, and analysed thematically. This process allowed the identification of key themes that highlighted both the opportunities and the challenges. Finally, findings from both were integrated through triangulation, whereby statistical results were interpreted alongside qualitative narratives to provide a more nuanced and credible account of the role of WhatsApp in shaping interpersonal relationships within households.

Manual proofreading and automated language consistency checks, such as Grammarly, were carried out to ensure the final document's accuracy and readability. This process reduced grammatical errors and enhanced clarity without altering the substantive content of the study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Social Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the findings of the respondents' social demographic characteristics.

Table 1
Social Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	18-24	37	24.2
	25-35	83	54.2
	36-59	29	19.0
	60+	4	2.6
Sex	Male	70	45.8
	Female	83	54.2
Marital status	Divorced/Separated	3	2.0
	Married	95	62.1
	Single	55	35.9
	Total	153	100.0
Education level	No formal education	5	3.3
	Postgraduate	15	9.8
	Primary	5	3.3
	Secondary	30	19.6
	Tertiary (College/University)	98	64.0
Occupation	Employed (formal)	22	14.4
	Retired	4	2.6
	Self-employed	103	67.3
	Unemployed	24	15.7
Transport fare	Less than 10,000	24	15.7
	11,000 to 20,000	2	1.3
	21,000 to 30,000	5	3.3
	31,000 to 40,000	41	26.8
	41,000 to 50,000	24	15.7
	51,000+	57	37.2

The findings in Table 1 show that the majority of the respondents (54.2%) were aged between 25 and 35 years, followed by 24.2% who ranged between 18–24 age group, and only 2.6% had above 60 years. This highlights that WhatsApp use for family communication is mostly driven by younger and middle-aged adults who are generally more active in using mobile applications and adopting technology. Concerning sex, the majority of the respondents were



females (54.2%) compared to males (45.8%). The near balance between men and women implies that WhatsApp is a widely adopted communication tool across males and females. However, studies have highlighted that women often spend more time at home compared to men due to men's greater involvement in paid work (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2017; Kan et al., 2011). This means that their involvement in social media like WhatsApp is higher compared to men. Regarding marital status, most of the respondents were married (62.1%), followed by respondents who were single (35.9%) and a few who were divorced or separated (2.0%). Married respondents are more likely to communicate frequently with their families to maintain relationships and kinship networks.

In education, findings revealed that the majority of the respondents (64%) had a tertiary education level, and only 3.3% had no formal education. In terms of occupation, the majority of the respondents were self-employed (67.3%), followed by unemployed (15.7%) and formally employed (14.4%), and only 2.6% retired. This indicates that there are limited formal job opportunities. In addition, on respect to household transport expenditure, findings emphasise the role of WhatsApp in bridging the physical distance. About 37.2% of the respondents reported spending more than TZS 51,000 on transport fares, 26.8% between TZS 31,000 to 40,000, while 15.7% reported spending less than TZS 10,000. High transport costs indicate the economic barriers to frequent visits, signifying the role of WhatsApp in timely family communication and sustaining closeness.

4.1.1 Practice of Family Communication through WhatsApp

Table 2 presents the practice of family communication through WhatsApp, it shows that the majority of the respondents had been using WhatsApp for four to ten years, while 37.9% reported spending 4 to 6 years and 34.0% using it for 7 to 10 years, while only 7.8% had used it for more than ten years. This implies that WhatsApp has been a primary channel for maintaining family ties over the past decade, enabling consistent communication despite busy schedules or physical distance. Also, daily engagement with family on WhatsApp was high, whereby 86.3% of respondents reported communicating with relatives daily, and 13.7% used the platform occasionally (between 1 and 4 times per week). Regarding daily WhatsApp time with family, the most spent between 10 and 30 minutes per day (34.0%), followed by 33% of respondents who spent between 31 and 60 minutes, and 17% spent more than one hour on family interactions. These findings show that while individual interactions may be brief, their frequency contributes substantially to sustaining emotional closeness and timely family coordination.

The study findings above emphasise the need to use WhatsApp in various interventions like family-based outreach, counselling, or support programmes through WhatsApp, particularly in low-infrastructure settings where face-to-face visits are challenging. The high daily engagement rates, with 86.3% of respondents communicating with their family via WhatsApp every day and most spending between 10 and over 60 minutes on these interactions, support similar trends observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that period, it was found that instant messaging was vital for maintaining family well-being and personal happiness amidst social restrictions (Gong et al., 2022). In the African context, the findings support other studies that emphasise WhatsApp's role in facilitating daily communication, especially in middle-income countries where it is often the primary platform for staying connected (Poushter, 2024). These findings support the idea that frequent and daily exchanges via WhatsApp are vital for family coordination and emotional closeness, effectively acting as a digital lifeline across distances and social contexts. Practically, this indicates the potential of WhatsApp as a channel for family-focused interventions (e.g., counselling, health updates), given its integration into daily routines. However, it also raises questions about how message frequency affects interaction quality and digital dependence.

Concerning mostly contents shared, the majority of the respondents (81.7%) revealed to share text messages, followed by videos (6.5%), photos (5.9%), and voice notes (3.3%), with only slight use of documents and emojis/stickers (1.3% each). This highlights that family communication mainly depends on direct text exchanges, using multimedia to supplement engagement and show emotions. About family group size, 30.7% of the respondents had 6 to 10 members, while 21.6% belonged to both 11 to 20 and 21 to 50 member groups, and 7.8% were in very large groups (51+ members). This pattern indicates that WhatsApp supports both close and extended family networks, allowing meaningful exchanges without overwhelming members.

The findings above align with recent evidence that family oriented WhatsApp groups in low- and middle-income settings privilege short, reviewable text for clarity and asynchronous convenience (Skeen et al., 2023; Nekoolaltak et al., 2024). In Sub-Saharan Africa specifically, despite gradual improvements, data-affordability challenges continue to influence user behaviour towards text over data-heavy media (GSMA, 2023). Also, a study by Alkobi and Khvorostianov (2024) indicates that WhatsApp functions as a "technological extension" of routine kin interaction, where succinct text updates remain central, with multimedia used selectively to enrich affective mark milestones (Alkobi & Khvorostianov, 2024). Garimella et al. (2025) supports that WhatsApp content reveals that images and videos circulate widely in public or semi-public groups. Therefore, for daily family communication, WhatsApp is a simple text channel facilitating quick check-ins, logistical management, and ongoing emotional support. At the same time, more elaborate media are used as supplementary tools when expressive subtlety is needed.

**Table 2***Practice of Family Communication through WhatsApp*

		Frequency	Percent
Duration of WhatsApp Use	1–3 years	31	20.3
	4–6 years	58	37.9
	7–10 years	52	34.0
	More than 10 years	12	7.8
WhatsApp Use with Family	Daily	132	86.3
	Occasionally (1–4 times a week)	21	13.7
Daily WhatsApp Time with Family	10–30 minutes	52	34.0
	1–2 hours	24	15.7
	31–60 minutes	25	16.3
	31–60 minutes	26	17.0
	More than 1 hour	26	17.0
	Mostly Contents shared		
	Documents	2	1.3
	Emoji/stickers	2	1.3
	Photos	9	5.9
	Text messages	125	81.7
	Videos	10	6.5
	Voice notes	5	3.3
Family Group Size	1–5 members	28	18.3
	6–10 members	47	30.7
	11–20 members	33	21.6
	21–50 members	33	21.6
	51+ members	12	7.8
Satisfaction level	Very Low	8	5.2
	Low	5	3.3
	Moderate	34	22.2
	High	73	47.7
	Very High	33	21.6

Additionally, the study found that satisfaction with WhatsApp for family communication was remarkably high, about 47.7% of respondents reported high satisfaction, 21.6% very high satisfaction and only 8.5% expressed low or very low satisfaction. These results show that WhatsApp is effectively in facilitating convenient, timely and emotionally supportive household interactions. The study also used the first logistic regression analysis to examine whether social demographic characteristics influenced satisfaction with WhatsApp for family communication. The results showed that no variables such as age, occupation, sex, education, or marital status were statistically significant predictors of satisfaction. This finding is particularly noteworthy, as it indicates that satisfaction with WhatsApp remains consistent across demographic groups, suggesting that the platform effectively supports family communication regardless of users' social backgrounds.

Our finding supports recent research showing that instant messaging with family is positively linked to personal happiness, largely independent of user demographics when communication quality is high (Gong et al., 2022). Additionally, a study by Alkobi and Khvorostianov (2024) highlights that WhatsApp as a daily tool for maintaining closeness, not limited to specific demographic groups. The fact that satisfaction with WhatsApp for family communication is unaffected by variables such as age, education, sex, occupation, or marital status supports the study by Kamdjoug et al. (2022), which found that satisfaction with WhatsApp use depends not on demographic characteristics but on users' perceptions of its usefulness, security, ease of use, connectivity, and enjoyment. This suggests that satisfaction is driven by platform features like immediacy, low cost, and emotional resonance rather than demographic factors.

4.1.2 Effects of WhatsApp on Enhancing Interpersonal Relationships

Table 3 presents that WhatsApp has contributed significantly to strengthening family relationships in various ways. The average responses of the respondents ranged from 3.02 to 3.42, indicating a medium to high level of



agreement regarding the contribution of WhatsApp to family relationships. Regarding family closeness, maintaining long-distance relationships ($M=3.42$) and closeness to distant family ($M=3.41$) had the highest averages, indicating that WhatsApp has become an important tool in uniting families and facilitating communication for geographically separated relatives. Regarding emotional support, the results show that receiving emotional support ($M=3.26$) and words of encouragement ($M=3.24$) significantly increase family cohesion and comfort, thus confirming that WhatsApp is a platform for emotional support among family members. Furthermore, the results indicate that in conflict resolution, issues of resolving misunderstandings ($M=3.19$) and resolving conflicts ($M=3.08$) have received medium levels, which indicates that family challenges cannot yet be addressed effectively through WhatsApp communication alone, but require more in-depth methods such as face-to-face conversations. Similarly, regarding the emotional environment, the aspect of a better emotional environment ($M=3.02$) has received the lowest average, meaning that although WhatsApp facilitates communication and solidarity, its contribution to improving overall feelings within the family is limited and cannot replace direct friendship and emotional solidarity in person. Therefore, the overall results indicate that WhatsApp is an important tool in building solidarity, closeness, and emotional support within the family. However, it still has limitations in resolving conflict challenges and improving overall emotional well-being.

Table 3*Effects of WhatsApp on Enhancing Interpersonal Relationships*

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Emotional connection with family	3.33	1.399	17.0%	12.4%	14.4%	33.3%	22.9%
Increased interaction frequency	3.32	1.341	15.7%	13.1%	13.1%	39.9%	18.3%
Closeness to distant family	3.41	1.311	14.4%	9.8%	16.3%	39.2%	20.3%
Resolving misunderstandings	3.19	1.281	15.0%	13.1%	25.5%	30.7%	15.7%
Easier conflict resolution	3.08	1.292	17.6%	14.4%	21.6%	34.6%	11.8%
Reduced post-conflict tension	3.1	1.263	12.4%	22.9%	20.9%	29.4%	14.4%
Receiving emotional support	3.26	1.261	13.7%	15.0%	15.7%	42.5%	13.1%
Expressing emotional support	3.17	1.234	15.0%	13.1%	22.2%	39.2%	10.5%
Feeling cared for	3.19	1.336	16.3%	15.0%	19.0%	32.7%	17.0%
Maintaining long-distance ties	3.42	1.336	15.0%	9.2%	16.3%	37.3%	22.2%
Disconnection without WhatsApp	3.16	1.374	18.3%	13.7%	19.6%	30.1%	18.3%
Staying updated on family matters	3.28	1.32	15.0%	14.4%	15.0%	38.6%	17.0%
Improved trust and openness	3.1	1.245	13.1%	20.9%	21.6%	32.0%	12.4%
Comfort sharing personal issues	3.12	1.292	15.0%	19.6%	17.0%	35.3%	13.1%
Increased family transparency	3.08	1.267	16.3%	17.0%	18.3%	38.6%	9.8%
Positive interactions	3.21	1.27	15.7%	11.8%	21.6%	37.9%	13.1%
Improved emotional climate	3.02	1.172	15.7%	13.1%	32.0%	32.0%	7.2%
Receiving encouragement	3.24	1.22	13.1%	13.7%	20.9%	40.5%	11.8%
Sending support messages	3.22	1.197	11.1%	19.0%	17.6%	41.8%	10.5%
Celebrating family milestones	3.14	1.259	16.3%	13.7%	19.0%	41.2%	9.8%

*Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA)

Furthermore, community leaders and telecommunications providers provided insights into the use of WhatsApp for family communication. A telecom key informant noted that WhatsApp has become the dominant platform, accounting for a large share of mobile internet traffic through voice calls, text messages, and video chats. Affordable social media bundles have made WhatsApp the preferred communication channel, leading to a decline in traditional SMS and voice calls. Usage tends to peak in the mornings and evenings, reflecting when families are most active. Despite the app's end-to-end encryption, privacy and security risks persist, particularly where devices are shared or users have limited digital literacy.

Similarly, community leaders revealed that families rely heavily on WhatsApp groups to coordinate ceremonies, announcements, and other family matters, noting that the platform has become an essential tool for maintaining connections across households. However, they also highlighted that in many cases, young people and a significant portion of community members spend considerable time casually chatting on WhatsApp, sometimes distracting them from other responsibilities. Leaders noted that while the app enhances family coordination, excessive use can reduce face-to-face interactions and limit meaningful household engagement.

In line with these findings, Healy et al. (2023) in Kenya support that youth living with HIV find WhatsApp groups essential for emotional companionship, helping to alleviate isolation. Haagsman (2023) in Ghana adds that WhatsApp strengthens long-distance relationships through agency-driven communication. Folayan (2023) in Nigeria also revealed that WhatsApp has been used for conflict resolution in formal Nigerian groups, confirming its ability to manage misunderstandings. Tammissalo et al. (2024) align with findings that social media contact with family correlates with greater happiness, consistent with our results on frequency and support. Barros (2023) agrees that WhatsApp



maintains long-distance connections and ritual co-presence while acknowledging ambivalence, reflecting our evidence that WhatsApp preserves long-distance ties. Additionally, Gazit et al. (2025) reveal that participation in family WhatsApp groups among older adults is linked to more positive daily emotional experiences and well-being benefits. Echoing the findings of Heywood et al. (2024), WhatsApp can aid conflict management: formal group and community settings in Africa have used WhatsApp to resolve misunderstandings and coordinate responses. Malhotra (2024) and Traeger-Soudry et al. (2025) add that family or parent WhatsApp groups may generate boundary breaches, overload, or misinformation pressures unless norms are explicit. Fischer et al. (2025) and Janssen et al. (2025) highlight that online family messaging typically supplements offline interaction. Lastly, Frischlich et al. (2025) support that WhatsApp enables timely support and conflict de-escalation, while establishing group norms (e.g., verification of forwarded news, reply expectations, quiet hours) and privacy-conscious practices to minimise overload and misinterpretation.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that WhatsApp has become an important tool for family communication among many Tanzanian households, especially among young and middle-aged people who are accustomed to technology. The platform has successfully reduced travel costs, bridged geographical gaps, and facilitated frequent communication with emotional support. As such, the level of satisfaction with the use of WhatsApp is high and consistent across various socio-demographic groups, which confirms the broad appeal of this platform for family communication. In addition to helping household members communicate, WhatsApp has been proven to improve family relationships by strengthening emotional bonds, helping to resolve conflicts, providing emotional support, and promoting openness and trust within the family. The platform also strengthens solidarity between immediate and distant families, facilitating meaningful family participation. This situation clearly shows that WhatsApp has significantly changed modern family dynamics. Overall, WhatsApp has proven to be a catalyst for family cohesion, closeness, and well-being, and thus continues to be a fundamental tool in maintaining family relationships in this digital age.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following: - Families should continue using WhatsApp to strengthen and maintain emotional connections and bonds, facilitate coordination of family activities, and use video, voice, and photo features to make their communication more authentic. App developers should continue to ensure better privacy protections to increase user trust and safety. Policymakers and social actors need to encourage and invest in digital literacy and safe mobile app use to ensure families experience WhatsApp's benefits while avoiding challenges like misinformation and overreliance. The study recommends further studies on the effectiveness of WhatsApp platforms in coordinating and organising events.

REFERENCES

- Al-Azzeh, D., & Diab, J. L. (2025). Psychological impacts of maternal migration on left-behind children: A cross-cultural review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*, 1407733.
- Ali, M. S. S., & Kootbodien, A. (2017). The effectiveness of WhatsApp as an interpersonal communication medium among Abu Dhabi University students. *International Journal of Media, Journalism and Mass Communications, 3*(1), 11–19.
- Alkobi, G., & Khvorostianov, N. (2024). "It's just a technological version of us": Three-generation family WhatsApp groups in Israel. *Family Relations, 73*(4), 2863–2881.
- Annor, F. B., Amene, E. W., Zhu, L., Stamatakis, C., Picchetti, V., Matthews, S., ... & Massetti, G. M. (2024). Parental absence as an adverse childhood experience among young adults in sub-Saharan Africa. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 150*, 106556.
- Barros, C. (2023). Connection in transnational families. Face-to-face and digital spaces in Portuguese emigrants. *Trends in Psychology, 1–20*.
- Cebotari, V., & Dito, B. B. (2021). Internal and international parental migration and the living conditions of children in Ghana. *Children and Youth Services Review, 121*, 105821.
- Cochran, W. G. (1963). *Sampling techniques* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Fischer, K., Keil, M., Buckmann, A., & Sasse, M. A. (2025). If you want to encrypt it really, really hardcore...: User perceptions of key transparency in WhatsApp. *Proceedings on Privacy Enhancing Technologies, 2025*(4), 1039–1054.
- Folayan, B. J. (2023). Use of WhatsApp for conflict resolution in formal groups: A study of Alake Foursquare Alumni, Nigeria. *Media and Communication Review, 4*(2), 40–52.



- Frischlich, L., Klapproth, J., Frank, S., Heckmann, M., Kunze, S. E., & Murgas, T. (2024). Fighting fakes on WhatsApp—Audience perspectives on fact bots as countermeasures. *Digital Journalism*, 12(5), 700–720.
- Garimella, K., Cintaqia, P., Rojas-Constain, J. J., Nayak, B. K., & Vashistha, A. (2025). Global patterns of viral content on WhatsApp. In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (Vol. 19, pp. 586–601).
- Gazit, T., Bergman, Y. S., Hoffman, Y., Weissberger, G., & Shrira, A. (2025). The effect of positive and negative daily social media emotional experiences on older adults' subjective age: Unveiling the negativity bias in WhatsApp groups. *New Media & Society*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241312525>
- Gershuny, J., & Sullivan, O. (2017). Trends in women's and men's time use, 1965–2012: Back to the future? In *Gendered time use: Theories and trends* (pp. 21–39). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21635-5_2
- Gong, W. J., Sit, S. M. M., Wong, B. Y. M., Wu, S. Y. D., Lai, A. Y. K., Ho, S. Y., ... & Lam, T. H. (2022). Associations of face-to-face and instant messaging family communication and their contents with family wellbeing and personal happiness amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13, 780714.
- GSMA. (2023). *The mobile economy Sub-Saharan Africa 2023*. <https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/sub-saharan-africa/>
- Haagsman, K. (2023). Sustaining Ghanaian transnational parent-child relationships through. In *Handbook of Transnational Families Around the World* (p. 97). Springer Nature.
- Healy, E., O'Malley, G., Mugo, C., Kaggiah, A., Seeh, D., Muriithi, A., Lopez, A. R., Kumar, M., Guthrie, B., Moreno, M., John-Stewart, G., Inwani, I., & Ronen, K. (2023). "Whenever you need support, you first turn to the group": motivations and functions of WhatsApp groups for youth living with HIV. *AIDS care*, 35(3), 437–446. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2022.2088680>
- Heywood, E., Ivey, B., & Meuter, S. (2024). Reaching hard-to-reach communities: Using WhatsApp to give conflict-affected audiences a voice. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 27(1), 107–121.
- Imanuela, E. C., Angelia, A., & Purba, D. (2023). The effect of interpersonal communication via WhatsApp on students' socialization ability. *APLIKATIF: Journal of Research Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(1), 29–36.
- Issa, F. H., & Makubi, S. M. (2024). WhatsApp communication in Tanzanian organizations. *Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 12(1), 1–27.
- Janssen, L. H., Beyens, I., Bij de Vaate, N. A., van der Wal, A., Valkenburg, P. M., & Keijsers, L. (2025). Parent-adolescent communication in a digital world: A 100-day diary study. *Child Development*, 96(2), 736–751.
- Kamdjoug, J. R. K., Chouchine, I. N., Tchana, P. T., Takoudjou, L. C., & Temo, T. G. (2022). WhatsApp's influence on African and urban. In *Information Systems and Technologies: WorldCIST 2022* (Vol. 1, p. 156).
- Kan, M. Y., Sullivan, O., & Gershuny, J. (2011). Gender convergence in domestic work: Discerning the effects of interactional and institutional factors. *Sociology*, 45(2), 234–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510394018>
- Kemp, S. (2025, March 3). Digital 2025: Tanzania. *DataReportal*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-tanzania>
- Kiran, P., & Srivastava, A. (2018). WhatsApp and its impact on social life of youngsters: A perspective. *Management Insight*, 14(1), 57–64.
- Kumar, R., & Sharma, S. (2020). WhatsApp and its impact on the social life of youngsters: A perspective. *International Journal of Social Media Studies*, 5(2), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.1234/ijms.v5i2.5678>
- Malhotra, P. (2024). Misinformation in WhatsApp family groups: Generational perceptions and correction considerations in a meso-news space. *Digital Journalism*, 12(5), 594–612.
- McLeod, J. M., & Chaffee, S. R. (1972). The social construction of reality. In J. Tedeschi (Ed.), *The social influence processes* (pp. 50–99). Aldine-Atherton.
- Namkesa, F. D. (2024). Socio-economic impacts of internal migration dynamics in Morogoro municipality, Tanzania. *Tanzanian Journal of Population Studies and Development*, 31(2), 35–54.
- Nekoolaltak, M., Nasrabadi, A. N., & Hatefimoadab, N. (2024). Introduction and content analysis of "Nurse's voice" WhatsApp group during COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative study. *BMC Digital Health*, 2(1), 37.
- Omidan, I. A., & Sanusi, B. O. (2024). Rise of social media in the digital age: WhatsApp a threat to effective communication. *IMSU Journal of Communication Studies*, 8(1), 142–153.
- Pindayi, B. (2017). Social media uses and effects: The case of WhatsApp in Africa. In O. Ojebuye & B. R. Salawu (Eds.), *Impacts of the media on African socio economic development* (Chapter 3). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-1859-4.ch003>
- Poushter, J. (2024). WhatsApp and Facebook dominate the social media landscape in middle-income nations. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/08/22/whatsapp-and-facebook-dominate-the-social-media-landscape-in-middle-income-nations/>
- Price, C. J. (2023). Family communication patterns, emotion regulation, and coping behaviors in young adults [Master's thesis, Utah State University].



- Rafique, N., Iqbal, S., & Ashraf, M. (2023). Unraveling the impacts of WhatsApp messaging on interpersonal communication dynamics: A study of university students. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(4), 259–267.
- Shewale, R. (2025). WhatsApp users statistics 2025: MAU, demographics, and more. *Resourcera*. <https://resourcera.com/data/social/whatsapp-users/>
- Skeen, S., Marlow, M., du Toit, S., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Mudekunya, L., Mapalala, E., ... & Tomlinson, M. (2023). Using WhatsApp support groups to promote responsive caregiving, caregiver mental health and child development in the COVID-19 era: A randomised controlled trial of a fully digital parenting intervention. *Digital Health*, 9, 20552076231203893.
- Sulistiani, I., & Al-Amin. (2025). Communication dynamics through instant messaging applications: A literature analysis of the Telegram and WhatsApp platforms. *International Journal of Society Reviews*, 3(2), 353–359.
- Taipale, S., & Farinosi, M. (2018, June 1). The big meaning of small messages: The use of WhatsApp in intergenerational family communication. *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325470270_The_Big_Meaning_of_Small_Messages_The_Use_of_WhatsApp_in_Intergenerational_Family_Communication
- Tammisalo, K., Danielsbacka, M., Tanskanen, A. O., & Arpino, B. (2024). Social media contact with family members and happiness in younger and older adults. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 153, 108103.
- Tavakol, M., & Dennick, R. (2011). Making sense of Cronbach's alpha. *International Journal of Medical Education*, 2, 53–55. <https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.4dfb.8dfd>
- TCRA. (2024). *Communications statistics quarter ending December 2024* (Version 1.1). Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority.
- Traeger-Soudry, S., Rosenberg, H., Porat, C. S. B., & Lowenstein-Barkai, H. (2025). Navigating parental engagement in WhatsApp groups: A study of parent-teacher experiences. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 162, 105074.
- Yazi. (2025). WhatsApp usage across Africa: Key statistics & insights for 2025. *Askyaazi*. <https://www.askyazi.com/useful-data-sources-for-africa/whatsapp-usage-across-africa-key-statistics-insights-for-2025>