



## Journalistic Use of WhatsApp: Measuring Perception of Journalists in Islamabad

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Keywords	Abstract
Journalists, News Gathering, Use of WhatsApp	<p><i>This study attempts to explore view of the local journalists regarding use of WhatsApp as a news gathering and sharing forum. Under such ambitious circumstances, many are associated with profession of media so, the study envisions to probe their working practices in the age of internet in order to understand, identify and effort for possibilities that could make their work easy and resulting in promotion of ethical, unbiased, objective and informed reporting. The study also explores main factors behind the use of WhatsApp as a news gathering tool by the journalists and what features of WhatsApp are regarded most by the journalist. Moreover, it measures the frequency of WhatsApp use by local journalists for processing news stories and comprehends the level of confidence media professionals have on chat application. The study is a quantitative research. It has used the primary data gathered through a questionnaire from targeted population (207 male and female journalists and reporters based in Islamabad) using a survey research method. A non-probability sampling technique is used while the data is gathered using a research questionnaire comprised of close ended questions with five point Likert scale responses. The study finds that majority of the respondents (local journalists) rely on WhatsApp messenger for the purpose of gathering and sharing news, they valued its prominent features, perceived it as a trustworthy tool for information sharing and share confidence on its security and authenticity as well as reliability of the information received through it. The study also finds that in current age of technology, use of advanced tools for gathering and sharing news worthy information is inevitable for media professionals.</i></p>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The changing trend of gathering and sharing news with technological development and internet has also changed the overall perspective of media houses and their audience. There are no more delays in preparing and sharing breaking news as internet has made things boosted for news producers to reach their consumers in no time. Social media provides great ease to share information promptly and get feedback on the spot. Similarly, media professionals also have changed their working style by adopted new approaches and using latest tools to timely reach their audience and provide information and news without losing its currency.

WhatsApp as commonly known as a modern tool for sharing text messages, videos, picture and many more since August 2009 (Dodds, 2019). Media practitioners are agreed to the notion that mobile instant messaging apps have been used more frequently and gained the status of essential tool for day to day communication patterns (Andueza and Perez, 2014). The advance features of WhatsApp as a tool for communication has gained much popularity in short span of time as unlike Short Message

Service (SMS) it provides more advance features to users such as audio and video sharing, location and maps sharing, still images and screenshots, documents and apps and many more (Church and De Oliveira 2013). The access to information and messages through WhatsApp has boosted because of increased use of cell phone that can handle such application as well as easy access to the data and internet on such devices for users (Bouhnik and Deshen 2014). The researches on this topic, previously done by social scientists, primary focused on nondemocratic circumstances of using WhatsApp in a zones where media is facing censorships (Craig, 2017). Similarly, countries with continuous sanctions against media houses and organizations are enacted and journalists face difficulties while performing their official duties, social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and others are becoming the prime channels of information and platforms for debates (Frere, 2017). WhatsApp being a massager having dominant feature of providing a secure end to end encrypted information to both sender and the receiver has earned great reputation among working professionals and information providers (Endeley, 2018). It is not only safe but hard to crack, eavesdrop free and secure for communicating parties (Waterson, 2018). A moderate analysis of existing body of literature (Sedano and Palomo 2018) provides that there are limited publications on journalists' interactions with their sources using WhatsApp.

This study attempts to measure the perception of local journalist about their professional use of WhatsApp. It explores the prime reasons behind using WhatsApp as a tool to share news and factors involved in preferring this mean of communication and information sharing over other mediums. WhatsApp usage is as common in Pakistan as any other country of the world. Journalists who are the prime source of gathering, making, generating and disseminating news items have their own reasons to use various forms of communication channels. This study is an attempt to understand the factors and reasons behind use of WhatsApp as news exchanging forum by the local journalists.

The study in hand tend to provide detailed analysis regarding perception of local journalists about using WhatsApp for news practices. It encompasses key features of WhatsApp as a tool of sharing information and comprehends the advantages of its use for both the initiator and the receiver of the information and news content. The study also expands its scope by including two-folded objective which has either positive or negative impacts of using WhatsApp for the purpose of information gathering and sharing. Moreover, it is important to know how greatly such tools have changed the working practices and attracted the journalism.

### **1.1. Objectives of the Study**

1. To explore main factors behind the use of WhatsApp as a news gathering tool by the journalists
2. To understand what features of WhatsApp are regarded most by the journalist in terms of reliance on this application then others
3. To measure the frequency of use of WhatsApp by journalists during the process of making news stories
4. To comprehend the level of confidence the journalists and their news sources have on WhatsApp for sharing information
5. To learn about the chief reasons of reliance of journalists on WhatsApp for gathering and sharing news content

## 1.2. Research Questions

1. To what extent journalists rely on WhatsApp messenger for the purpose of gathering and sharing news?
2. What are the prominent features of WhatsApp messenger that appeal the journalists to use this application for their professional work?
3. How journalists perceive WhatsApp messenger as a trustworthy tool for information sharing?
4. What are the prerequisites for press and media professional to ensure authenticity and reliability of the information received through WhatsApp messenger?

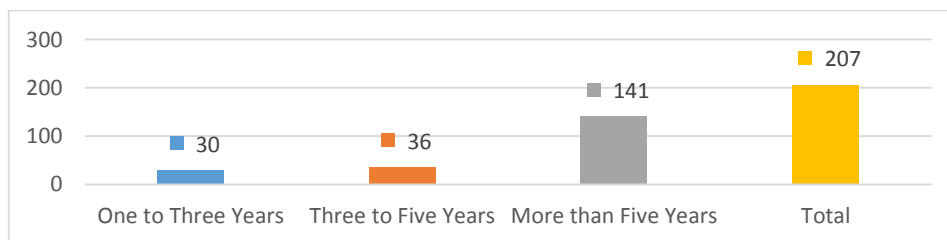
## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

In order to understand the factors behind use of WhatsApp by local journalists, the researcher adopted the quantitative survey research method for reaching the targeted population and getting their responses on a specified format of questionnaire covering various research variables. The population of this study is working journalist, also known as media professional, reporters, correspondents and newsmakers who are affiliated with print, electronic or web-based media organizations based in Federal Capital Islamabad. A non-probability sampling technique known as snowball sampling also called referral sampling is used and the sample size for this study was initially set as (n=250) potential male and female professional journalists, however due to time constrain, the researcher managed to interview only 210 respondents while of which 207 contained complete information required for this study while the remaining three questionnaires were dropped because of incomplete and missing information. There are two type of variables of this descriptive study i.e. use of WhatsApp—an online messenger—is sole independent variable while use of WhatsApp by professional journalists for specifically new practices is the dependent variable.

## 3. DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistical technique is used to find the findings. The further analysis of each research question and dependent variables was prepared using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The inferences were drawn out of each finding. Percentages were calculated and used to illustrate the data in graph.

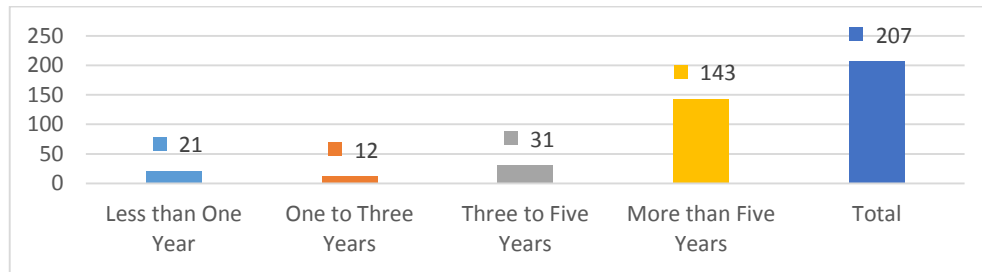
**Figure 1: Use of Smart Mobile Phone by Journalists**



Out of 207 respondents, 30(14.5%) respondent that they are user of smart phone for one to three years which explains that they were familiar with the functions and applications available for smart phones. Further, 36 or 17.4% respondents said that they operate smart phone from three to five

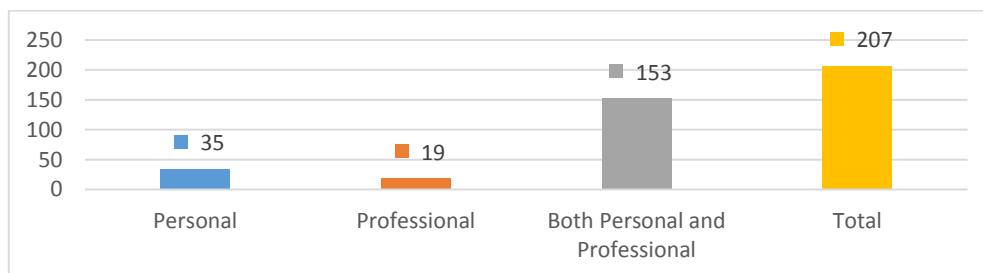
years which makes them moderate user of cellphone-based applications. Majority of the respondents—141(68.1%)—said that they are using smart phone for more than five years which shows that journalists are quite familiar with and can run various application along with making contact for their personal and professional needs through smart mobile phones. It can be concluded that media professional are more engaged and connected with different information sources, there need has been fulfilled in result of advancement in technology.

**Figure 2: Use of WhatsApp Messenger by Journalists**



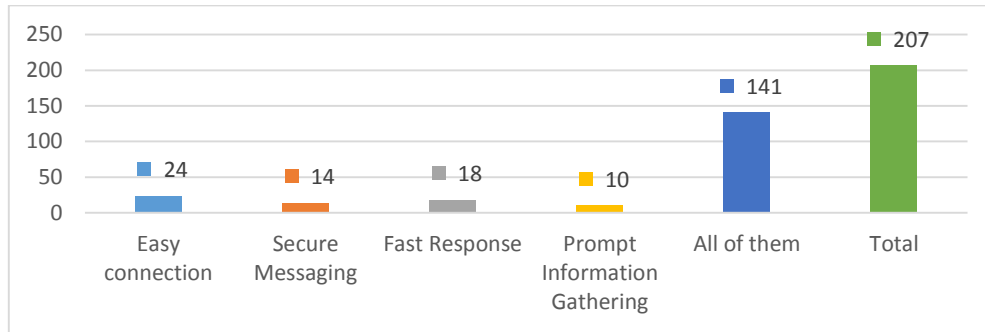
Another important variable of the study was from how long interviewed journalist are using WhatsApp. Among the respondents, 21(10.1%) said that they are using WhatsApp for less than a year, 12(5.8%) responded that they are using WhatsApp for more than a year but less than three years. Similarly, 31(15%) responding media professionals stated that they are using WhatsApp messenger for three to five years while surprisingly, as many as 143(69.1%) out of 207 respondents maintained that they are user of WhatsApp for more than five years. This shows the popularity of the application among majority of the journalists. One can easily conclude that most of the journalists are user of WhatsApp because of one or another reason. The fact established from the respondents’ data illustrates that among other mediums, WhatsApp is most preferred medium for journalists.

**Figure 3: Preferred use of WhatsApp Messenger for Journalists**



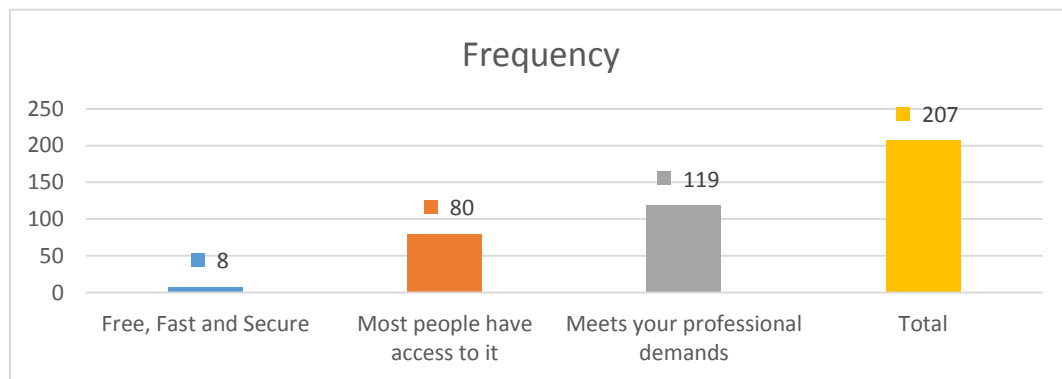
When asked, what is the preferred use of WhatsApp from responding journalists, it was found that more than 70% (153 or 73.9%) of them are using WhatsApp for both personal and professional purposes. Very few of the respondents said that the use it to fulfil their personal purpose (35 or 16.9%) only while less than 10% (19 or 9.2%) stated that WhatsApp assist them while performing their professional responsibilities and not relying on this application for performing their personal life routine. Again, the finding of survey showed the reliance of journalists on WhatsApp for their professional purposes. Keeping in view the data findings, it can be said that cumulative above 80% of the journalists perceive that they can rely on WhatsApp for professional practices.

**Figure 4: Useful WhatsApp Features for Professionals**



The respondents were asked about their rating of features of WhatsApp features. As many as 24(11.6%) were of the view that easy connection feature of WhatsApp is the reason behind their reliance on it. Furthermore, 14(6.8%) were observed found of WhatsApp’s security features for their main reason of using it while 18(8.7%) respondents said due to rapid response service provided by WhatsApp, they are able to put on their faith on this application. Another 10(4.8%) respondents stated that prompt information gathering was made way easier due to WhatsApp and that is why they like to use it. More than 60% of the responding journalists (141 or 68.1%) are observed found of all the aforementioned features of WhatsApp and endorsed that they mainly use this application for information gathering and sharing because of its unique pack of features which are not available in any other freeware messenger application. This finding proves that easy to use features of WhatsApp appeal most of the users and they are comfortable to use it for different purposes one of which is assistance for their professional practices.

**Figure 5: Reasons for Using WhatsApp for Exchanging News and Information**



One of the study’s proposed objectives was to dig out the factors behind use of WhatsApp by journalists for their news practices. The respondents were asked about their preferable social media messagers’ use for information sharing and exchange of news and it was found that 8(3.9%) responding journalists believe that it is free, fast and secure while 80(38.6%) said because more and more people have access to it, it is easy for them to use it as well. The data shows that as many as 119(57.5%) out of 207 journalists are convinced that they prefer WhatsApp for exchange of news and information because it meets their professional demands. Here, the findings of descriptive analysis suggest that majority of the respondents who are using smartphones for more

five years or so are users of WhatsApp for as many years for both personal and professional purposes because of its unique feature like easy connection, secure messaging, rapid feedback and quick information gathering and all of this is free of any cost which easily meets their professional demands.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The study in hand encompasses key features of WhatsApp and comprehended the advantages of its use for both the sender and receiver of the information and news content. The findings suggested that majority of the respondents who are using smartphones for more five years or so are users of WhatsApp for as many years for both personal and professional purposes because of its unique feature like easy connection, secure messaging, rapid feedback and quick information gathering and all of this is free of any cost which easily meets their professional demands.

The research findings suggest that use of smart phone is common in professional journalists and they are quite familiar with operationalization of smartphones and can operate its various features including online applications. The study found that journalists are very much familiar with the use of WhatsApp as a messenger which shows the popularity of the application among majority of the journalists. Most of the journalists are user of WhatsApp because of multiple reasons and in their view WhatsApp is most preferred medium for sharing information between news sources and audience. WhatsApp is used for both personal and professional purposes.

The findings of this study also propose that journalists rely on WhatsApp application for their professional purposes. The features of WhatsApp are found appealing to media professionals and they like easy to use features of WhatsApp and are comfortable while using them for different purposes one of which is assistance for their professional practices.

Study's proposed objectives was to dig out the factors behind use of WhatsApp by journalists for their news practices. It was found that journalists prefer WhatsApp because it assists them in exchanging news and information which is one of the demanding requirements of their profession. The findings also suggest unique features of WhatsApp such as easy connection, secure messaging, rapid feedback and quick information gathering and all of this is free of any cost which fulfils the professional demands of media professionals. Findings also revealed that journalist think that WhatsApp is helpful in keeping a secure connection with news sources on regular intervals. The journalists voted in its favor over other means of communication including telephonic communication and face to face communication. The finding suggested that authentication of news content before publishing has become easy because of WhatsApp. While, the dependency of journalists for information collected is rather a dependent task but is not limited to the online sources. However, the availability of online communication mediums like WhatsApp and others has made things easier for the media professionals to depend on it when it comes to information gathering process.

Furthermore, it was learned that WhatsApp as a messaging tool has enabled journalists to instantly connect with groups or individual having similar interest in sharing or receiving information in different forms. The security is considered as most important concern of every journalists while performing their professional responsibilities. The study found the in view of journalists' WhatsApp is highly scored application over other mediums because of privacy of information. It

was also found that in presence of virtual forums for direct communication with sources, journalists do not prefer face to face communication because of multiple reasons. Survey findings suggest that majority of the respondents believe that WhatsApp is a reliable medium for stay connected and exchange information with their news sources. Additionally, it was observed that that majority of the journalists are convinced that WhatsApp as an effective tool for sharing information has made things easy for them in context of gathering information from more than one sources. It can be concluded here that technological advancements such as WhatsApp has lot to do with changing structure of information gathering and sharing in modern day media industry.

The study also found that despite availability of other advance sources used by professionals for new gathering and sharing, WhatsApp is rated higher as an effective source with rapid impact as journalists were agreed that it is a helpful tool that assists in rapid flow of information. While performing their professional duties, journalists are more concerned about the confidentiality of the information. The study found that journalists are agreed that confidentiality of the information is not compromised when they are connected with news sources through WhatsApp. Meanwhile, their relations with sources are more developed and they are always welcomed by their news organizations in order to be innovative and involve tech support for new gathering and making process.

The study found that Journalists profoundly relied on WhatsApp messenger for the purpose of gathering and sharing news, they valued its prominent features, perceived it as a trustworthy tool for information sharing and showed confidence on its security and authenticity as well as reliability of the information received through it.

#### **4.1. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the research study, following are some recommendation to be considered for future studies on same topic, users of social media, media professionals and journalists, and other who are either directly or indirectly involved in this study topic.

- The adoption of advance technology for producing and sharing information is the need of the hour and it should be adopted by media industry in general and especially the media professional to make things competitive and proximate for masses in modern age.
- The findings of this study endorse the unique online messenger over traditional communication mediums for news sharing. It is recommended that if a professional has access to such tools, his performance is more enhances and he has more opportunities to connect with multiple sources at one time. This not only helps him in producing quality news content but to verify and manage more detailed information in very less time.
- The study findings also suggest professional reporters to use information sources which are secure, recognizable and accessible globally.
- Recommendation for future studies can be simplify here that there is need to explore more on engagement of news source in the final news products and how direct or indirect inclusion of information providers is changing the overall news paradigm.
- The study findings recommend the mass media professionals to imply security friendly open source information tools for gathering information in order to defuse any unforeseen threats.
- It is recommended to verify any piece of information before sharing with others.

- To avoid incidence of cybercrimes, media workers should get proper training in order to comply with state's cybercrime laws.
- It is recommended that with presence of online mediums such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and others, media professional should be incorporated and present data based analysis of new worthy content to masses.
- This study was conducted in limited time with limited resources, if the same is done with larger sample and broader population, it would give more detailed results of technological use and its implications on shifting trends of professional practices of individual and organizations of media.

**Note:** This research paper is part of MPhil thesis of Abbas Ali

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