

# WhatsApp and Information Sharing: Prospect and Challenges

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on WhatsApp and information sharing showcasing its prospects, challenges based on review of literature by scholars. Anchored on network society and media convergence theory that views everyone as nodes in a network; relationship depends essentially happenings in media-centered communication space and the ability of social actors, in various contexts, to act on programs, modifying them in the sense of their interests. This dynamic landscape of continuous, diversified witnessing and reporting does not represent a crisis in journalism according to scholars, but rather, an explosion of it. The profession seems to be more alive than ever and going through a multiplication of both forms and content at amazing speed and all the actors involved seem to benefit in one way or the other.

**Keywords:** WhatsApp, Information sharing, prospects and Challenges, Media-centered communication space.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of information and communication technology which allows for easy access to information in a convenient form, social media and social network services such as Facebook, Twitter, *WhatsApp* enable easier accessibility and retrieval of information from anywhere and at any time. Through these apps, information is becoming intertwined with our daily lives and could either enhance productivity, efficiency and intelligence or make users vulnerable to its side effects. Supporting this claim, Boyd and Ellison (2007) noted that the rise of social media sites as another platform on the internet has gained popularity over the last decade. The sites have attracted millions of users worldwide. Due to this fact, Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert (2009) asserted that many people are changing the outlets where they search for news, information, business and entertainment.

The social media by their nature have the capabilities of educating, informing, entertaining and inflaming the audience, of which are also the basic function of the mass media. Above all, they possess a contagious and outreaching influence which the conventional media lack. This potential is most likely what Osahenye (2011) and Buhari, Ahmad & Bashir (2014) referred to as 'unstoppable power of the social media'. The social media and social network tools especially *WhatsApp* Messenger, Facebook, and Viber, have become dominant factor in today's digital world and are affecting how users communicate and businesses operate Yeboah, Horsu & Abdulai, (2014). Also of this view, Newman & Levy (2014) noted that *WhatsApp* is emerging as a key network for news in some countries and the rise of messaging network *WhatsApp* recently bought by Facebook for \$19bn has been particularly striking.

*WhatsApp* has tipped the Smartphone into mainstream culture. The Smartphone has revolutionised life on a global scale, including in developing countries (Donner & Tellez, 2008; Shambare, Rugimbana & Zhoua, 2012). In South Africa, for example, although numerous social apps (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Mixit) have been introduced, very few have been as widely-received as *WhatsApp*, which today is used by 15 million subscribers; compared to Facebook with 9 million and Mixit with 7 million subscribers (TruTower.com, 2014). According to a compilation of Google search statistics originating from South Africa for 2011, *WhatsApp.com* was observed to be the most 'googled' and downloaded site in that country (The Star, 2011). The fact that *WhatsApp* was introduced into the market in 2009, and has reached half a billion active users in less than five years, represents a remarkable accomplishment by any measure.

Furthermore, advancement in technological innovation are increasingly influencing the way information is communicated through diverse channels particularly the internet and these changes are also shaping the way people access information and its usage. This study therefore examines *WhatsApp* as a channel for information dissemination and efficient service delivery, current trend in *WhatsApp* Application use showcasing its prospects and challenges based on review of literatures by Scholars.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT –WHATSAPP

According to these scholars Yeboah, Horsu and Abdulai (2014); Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) and Alsanie (2015), *WhatsApp* Messenger is a proprietary, cross platform instant messaging subscription service for smart phones and selected feature phones that uses the internet for communication. In addition to text messaging, users can send each other images, video and audio media messages as well as their location using integrated mapping features. *WhatsApp* is an application available on the new generation smart phones like iPhone, Android, Blackberry, Samsung, Sony that allows users to send text messages to each other for free. Users are not charged for a text sent through *WhatsApp*. This is because *WhatsApp* sends messages through an internet data connection. *WhatsApp* supports many different message types, from simple text to pictures to audio files and videos (Yeboah, Horsu and Abdulai, 2014; Bouhnik and Deshen, 2014 and Alsanie, 2015).

Current statistics puts *WhatsApp* usage at one (1) billion as at February 2016 (Statista, 2016). It was founded by Brian Acton and Jan Koum former employees of yahoo. *WhatsApp* uses a customized version of the open standard of the extensible messaging and presence protocol (XMPP). Upon installation, it creates a user account using the phone number of the registering member as the username. *WhatsApp* is considered to be the most sought after messenger for Apple iOS, Android, Nokia S40 and Symbian 60, blackberry and window phone. *WhatsApp* can also be used on laptops and computers based on configuration applicable that involves users downloading an app player and this enables users to download the *WhatsApp* web version and use it comfortably without restriction (Yuvaraj, 2014).

Users would click on the URL bar of the computer browser and type *web.whatsapp.com*. in the next window opened, will see QR code on the left side of the screen. The user will then pick up his or her phone, go to settings of *WhatsApp*. An icon which is the same as the one reflecting on the laptop will be on the setting. User should click on it. Scan the QR bar code of the computer with the mobile phone. Within 3-5 seconds, they will be able to access it on the laptop (Yuvaraj, 2014).

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Various theories have been used for *WhatsApp* studies. Theories like Domestication theory, Technological acceptance theory, uses and gratifications theory, social learning theory but this study is anchored on Network society theory and Media convergence theory.

Scholars have seen that this dynamic landscape of continuous and diversified witnessing and reporting does not represent a crisis of journalism, but rather, an explosion of it. In fact, the profession seems to be more alive than ever and going through a multiplication of both forms and content at amazing speed (Castell, Parks & Bregtje, 2012). Therefore, every journalist becomes a node in a network that functions to collect, process, and distribute information (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Jarvis, 2006). A network is defined as a collection of links between elements of a unit. The element are called nodes, units are often called system and culture of the network society are largely shaped by the messages exchanged in the composite electronic hypertext made by the technologically linked network of different communication modes (Castell, 2004).

Castell argues that it is not purely the technology that defines modern societies but also cultural upbringing, economic, political organization, religion and social status all shape the network society. These influences can either raise or hinder these society. The network society is a social structure based on networks operated by information and communication technology based on micro electronics and digital computer networks that generate process and distribute information via the nodes of the network. The network society can be defined as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organization at all level. Society shapes technology according to the needs, values and interest of people who use the technology.

The network society works on the basis of a binary logic of inclusion/exclusion, whose boundaries change over time, both with the changes in the networks' programs and with the conditions of performance of these programs. Thus, in theoretical terms, the network society must be analyzed, first, as a global architecture of self-reconfiguring networks constantly programmed and reprogrammed by the powers that be in each dimension; second, as the result of the interaction between the various geometries and geographies of the networks that include the core activities, that is the activities shaping life and work in society; and third, as the result of a second order interaction between these dominant networks, and the geometry and geography of disconnection of social forms left outside the global networking logic (Castell, 2004).

In essence, media in the network society present a large variety of channels of communication, with increasing interactivity. The media system is characterized by global business concentration, by diversification of the audience (including cultural diversification), by its technological versatility and channel multiplicity, and by the growing autonomy of an audience that is equipped with the Internet, and has learned the rules of the game – namely, everything that is a collective mental experience is virtual, but this virtuality is a fundamental dimension of everybody's reality (Castell, 2000). The commons of society are made of electronic networks, be it the media inherited from the mass media age, but deeply transformed by digitalization, or the new communication systems built in and around the Internet. This is not to say that cities disappear or that face to face interaction is a relic of the past. In fact, the opposite trend is observed as more communication happens in the electronic space, and the more people assert their own culture and experience in their localities (Borja, 2003). However, local experience remains fragmented, customized, individualized. The socialization of society, that is the construction of a shared cultural practice that allows individuals and social groups to live together (even in a conflictive togetherness), takes place nowadays in the networked, digitized, interactive space of communication, centered around mass media and the Internet. Thus, the relationship between citizens and politicians, between the represented and the representative, depends essentially on what happens in this media-centered communication space. It also depends on the ability of social actors, in various contexts, to act on these programs, modifying them in the sense of their interests (Castell, 2000).

Media convergence is a term which refers to the merging of previously distinct technologies and media forms resulting from digitization and computer networking; an economic strategy in which the media properties owned by communication companies employ digitization and computer networking to work together. Also technological convergence simplifies the production of media content while also greatly expanding, accelerating and facilitating its distribution often with associated cost savings. Convergence in integrated production according to a study carried out by Jinglei (2012) found in the reorganization of the newsroom. These last models assume that there is some sort of common planning of the news coverage delivered by every outlet. This would ideally foster a more efficient production that would use every medium strengths to offer the most useful information in each of them at the right moment. Media groups may use these coordinated strategy to promote audience loyalty (Salaverría, 2003).

Distribution of content has been the dimension of convergence that more visibly has developed in recent years, even though journalism research has seldom paid attention to the implications of this trend. The maturity of the Internet and mobile communications, as well as the data-enabled digital television systems, have broadened the range of options for the citizens to access the news. Digitization, again, has facilitated the development of multiplatform delivery strategies that aim to make news distribution as efficient as possible, ideally using the work of one reporter on an issue as the common source for any version of the story in the different outlets of the media company. There seems to be a virtuous circle accelerating the development of multiplatform delivery technologies. All the actors seem to benefit: telecommunication companies and software developers foster new content services as a way to find new revenue opportunities; the media perceive multiplatform strategies as a way to reach new audiences and increase the visibility of their content; and the users may be attracted by the easy anywhere-anytime access to news (Jinglei, 2012).

Jinglei (2012) also addresses process of unification in convergence as a fusion process. To create interactivity in a story, journalists must do the hypertext structure and multimedia content in a very intuitive way for the users. Thus, journalists must imagine the structure of information, adapt to the phases of multimedia production, and use many platforms to distribute multimedia news. Opgenhaffen & d'Haenens (2011) identifies six such pieces of information and formats of online news: text, picture, video, sound, embedded picture slideshows, and embedded info graphics. In fact, the «fusion» processes between information assures the growth of knowledge and the information propagation through various media platforms (Jinglei, 2012). Thus, media convergence based on «fusion processes» generates products which are cross-platform or multi-platforms.

#### 4. WHATSAPP AND INFORMATION SHARING

Pande(2015) noted that in the entire process, the use of chat apps for communication within and outside assumes an interesting proportion and dimension. Blackberry Messenger, *WhatsApp* and other chat apps were extensively used by Aam Aadmi Party(AAP- AAP an insurgent political outfit which has established itself well within a very short time in Delhi, the capital of India) for communicating at three levels. It was most widely used for terse and frequent communication between closed groups like the one used by the TV monitoring team to flag Imam's offer of support to AAP. Assigned volunteers at an elections meeting frequently used *WhatsApp* messenger to continually feed pictures and video to Ankit Lal and his team. Lal, in turn, would process the input on his high end android phone and post it online as against the election to be held on 7th February, 2015. At another level, chat apps are used to mobilise party volunteers on the ground for rallies or protests. And finally these apps have been useful in communicating directly with the electorate. For mass communication through chat apps, the party has relied upon the database generated by volunteers continually since 2013 (Pande, 2015).

Furthermore, Pande was also of the view that the proliferation of messages using apps has two inherent advantages. Firstly, it allows for closed group communication and intended users can be selected to suit the purpose. And secondly, even while being used for the purpose of mass communication akin to social media platforms, the origin of a message on chat apps can be shrouded in anonymity. At the same time, once in circulation, the dissemination through apps lends the message a personal touch as it is communicated from one know person to another (Pande, 2015).

Africa media barometer (2014) in their study, noted that Social media – particularly Facebook and *WhatsApp* – was effectively used to carry out the seven-week-long teachers' strike in 2012 in Swaziland while Clayton discovered that emerging messaging applications like Snapchat, Kik, *WhatsApp*, and WeChat are clearly filling a consumer need for new mechanisms of communication, drawing time spend from the most established social networks. These apps are valued for their simplicity, highlighting a consumer preference that could dictate future marketing opportunities. The study took a look at use of the leading messaging apps, what's driving messaging app adoption, where the effects are being borne out, and future projections(Clayton, 2014).

It was also discovered that in Brazil, *Newspaper Extra* introduced *WhatsApp* application into their news room especially through their computer and they claimed the advantages of using such application was stable platform, cheaper than text messaging, user friendly, hyper proximity with readers and younger news room since 90% of the population had cell phone and 47% had computer and internet access( Paiva, 2013).

A new study from The Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (2014) reported that *WhatsApp* is Qatar's leading social media service, across all groups. Usage includes group discussions around the news, cooking and religion, as well as SMS replacement activities (Radcliffe, 2015) also, Robinson, Grennan & Schiffirin noted that among Internet users, a third of Qatari Nationals use *WhatsApp* to find out the latest news, compared to 21% of online expats. This is the top social news source for Nationals, whereas 52% of expert Internet users in Qatar find the news on Facebook, versus just 12% of Qataris (Robinson, et al, 2015)

According to these scholars, *Eyewitness News* has become the first outlet in South Africa to use *WhatsApp* to communicate with its readership. Through the use of mobile application-*WhatsApp*, they created a community, published or reported stories relevant to local audience (such as a network of vetted citizen journalists). Messages can be broadcasted to a maximum of 250 recipients as a blind carbon copy (BCC), which allowed each recipient to respond directly without seeing who the other recipients are. This model has been used successfully by *Eyewitness News* in South Africa (Robinson, et al, 2015). As Deputy News Editor Camilla Bath of *EyeWitness* explained: "People are very chatty. They respond to us and tell us what they think about stories or the selections. It's a powerful tool for news tip offs as well. You create a community. People see you as a person or entity rather than a service" (Robinson et al, 2015, p 45). *Eyewitness News* is a syndicated radio broadcast and online news website that in April of 2015 became the first African news outlet to begin using *WhatsApp* as a way of communicating with its followers. While using *WhatsApp* is very labor intensive, it has had the unexpected benefit of increasing reader feedback and news leads (Robinson, et al, 2015). According to Deputy News Editor Camilla Bath, the idea for using *WhatsApp*, "came about by being plugged into what is going on at the *Oxford Mail* and publications in Sweden and the United States.

We did a bit of research into how *WhatsApp* works in South Africa and found that there are about 10.6 million users. ... No one else in South Africa was doing this. Recognizing that there was a market, *EWN* launched the *WhatsApp* version in April 2015 and 'the response has been great. (Robinson, et al, 2015, p 88)

In recent years, news outlets have used a variety of messenger apps to reach out to their readers. The BBC has utilized apps such as Mxit in South Africa during an election, *WhatsApp* and WeChat in India during an election, recently, the BBC has used *WhatsApp* in Sierra Leone and Viber in Nepal to share information and safety tips and according to Adams (2014), the BBC has launched an Ebola public health information service on *WhatsApp* with the aim of reaching users of the service in West Africa. Adams noted that the service will provide audio, text messages alerts and images to help people get the latest public health information to combat the spread of Ebola in the region as content will be limited to three items a day and the service will be in English and French. To subscribe, users send 'JOIN' via *WhatsApp* to +44 7702348651. This was because the app was seen as the biggest 'chat app' in use in Africa (Adams, 2014). *The Oxford Mail* has been using *WhatsApp* since 2014. The *Washington Post* used the *WhatsApp* chat feature in April 2015 to have an open discussion with British expats living in the United States about the British elections and in July 2015, *The New York Times* began a *WhatsApp* program where interested readers can receive updates from their Vatican correspondent (Robinson, et al, 2015).

*Washington Post* also used *WhatsApp* to set up a group chat because they actively wanted to invite input rather than drive traffic (Wright, 2015). Wright noted that during the 2015 general election, collection of Birmingham city university students used *WhatsApp* to publish regular updates throughout the two days of voting. According to him, most news organization use *WhatsApp*'s broadcast message features to publish updates. This is because it has particular advantage or users not seeing each other details. According to him "we try to be selective with stories. We want them to be breaking so the service keeps users up to date with the big politics events, or useful and insightful ones. We have had a steady growth sign-ups since we started about two months ago" (Wright 2015, para. 3).

Similarly, Azgor (2015) noted that *WhatsApp* is starting to play an increasingly important role in the gathering of eyewitness media at *BBC*. The *BBC* 'Have your Say Team' set up their *WhatsApp* account in February, 2015 and started adding it to their 'call for action' such as forms underneath stories on their websites and messages on twitter encouraging people to get in touch. In an interview with *Journalism.co.uk*, User Generated Content team (UGC) said "we were noticing that there are materials coming in to our user channel, some being sent to us directly but we were getting a lot of content quicker through *WhatsApp* account" (Azgor 2015, para. 2). Azgor further noted that this might be because the chat app was a preferred method of communication for many in the area as the phone lines may have gone down after the national disaster. Azgor also noted that user generated content sent to *BBC* via *WhatsApp* goes through the same verification procedures as material found on other platform but the is one advantage, one will have the phone code and know the country where the person is and the country where the phone line was registered (Azgor, 2015).

Welsh also discovered that *The New York Times* publishing on *WhatsApp* for the first time covering Pope Francis announced it to their users who were given Phone contact Number to save and then text the word 'POPE' to the phone number given to them via their *WhatsApp* account which they could also unsubscribe anytime (Welsh, 2015). She also noted that despite how awkward *WhatsApp* could be as a publishing platform, its audience have made it a platform of interest (Welsh, 2015).

Similarly, the editor of *Dawn Newspaper* in Pakistani, noted that *WhatsApp* was used to keep their journalist safe. He found out that *WhatsApp* was a quick, easy and communication app to streamline media coverage. According to him, *WhatsApp* group facilitate communication between editors indicating how details of an attack should be treated, whether to immediately publish or hold details because negotiation was ongoing and almost all major newspaper and television in Pakistan were participants (Zaffar, 2016)

*Journalism.co.uk* in their report said they have been getting hundreds of SMS updates on what was going on during the Nigerian election. Similarly on reports of Ebola, half of their reporting group had access to *WhatsApp* on their smartphones so it was easy using photos and audio to tell their story in an interesting and engaging way (Alaster 2015). Myles in a report also said "as well as obvious text and photo functions, we have *WhatsApp* audio where you can record in a quiet place, decent quality audio and it sends straight through without having to have an email address, thereby allowing reports to skip the upload and attachment process" (Daily Trust, 2015, para. 2).

## 5. PROSPECTS

Research has shown that its seeming benefits such as - the ability to create, share, adapt and reuse content engage in digital dialogue and collaborate, have peer-to-peer contact, social interaction with other users, its discoverability, and continuous accessibility have attracted greater number of digital communication users using the platform (Yeboah, & Ewur, (2014) Melissa, (2013) Ling, and Baron, (2007) & Lenhart, Ling, Campbell & Purcell, (2010).

Yalcinalp and Gulbahar cited in Yeboah & Ewur (2014, p 2) articulate the value of the application as follows: “encourage learners to learn by anticipating needs, make collaborative learning efficient and effective, build a relationship that stimulates learner-to-learner for consistent and progressive learning”. Similarly, Patil, Deepthi & Tadasad (2015) sees *WhatsApp* as an instant messaging app for smart phones that operate under a subscription business model. This proprietary, cross-platform app uses the Internet to send text messages, images, video, user location and audio media messages. They are also of the view that *WhatsApp* instant messaging is a free application, which is advantageous. A mobile system text messaging which allows its user send and receive messages synchronously and asynchronously. The *WhatsApp* instant messaging system is simplistic, intuitive, and very easy to use . (Patil, Deepthi & Tadasad, 2015)

The ability to interact with viewers while on the air increases communication and allows for additional information to be shared. It also provides the opportunity to build a new audience and expand the reach of the show (Chadwick, 2014). Similarly, Sahar(2012) noted that cultural traits have been identified as one of the most important factor that impacts users’ perception towards different features of information technology, also in different cultures, people have different values on the same topic, secondly, cultural differences also lead to diverse type of behavior, thirdly, our way of thinking is also different in different countries.

One intriguing finding is the extent that messaging apps are now being used for discovering and sharing news. *WhatsApp* – now owned by Facebook – is used by over half of the sample in Spain (60%) and over a quarter (26%) say they use it for news. A third of the sample in Brazil, Germany, and Italy also use *WhatsApp* on a weekly basis (32%, 30%, and 29% respectively) (Neuman & Levy, 2014). In essence, there is a strengthening in the role played by Facebook in finding, discussing and sharing news. Facebook-owned Instagram and *WhatsApp* are playing a big role amongst younger groups (Neuman, Levy & Nielsen 2015). *WhatsApp* is hardly used in the United States but is a growing force elsewhere. It played a major part in last year’s Brazilian elections and is also used for traffic updates. Many brands now offer *WhatsApp* sharing buttons on their websites but it remains a commercial-free zone and the network makes it notoriously difficult to push messages to multiple users. *WhatsApp* and Snapchat are fast growing networks for the young but are still only marginally used for news(Neuman, Levy & Nielsen, 2015 p 25).

Furthermore, *WhatsApp* has been growing fast in Germany over the last few years and some local newspapers have been experimenting with it for distributing their stories while *WhatsApp* is gaining popularity (weekly use now 4% for news and 32% for any purpose) and 2014 was the year of the *WhatsApp*– or ZapZap as it is known in Brazil(Neuman, Levy & Nielsen 2015, p. 39). News organisations like El País actively encourage sharing with the tool while radio stations have been using accounts to build a collaborative network sharing information about traffic jams in São Paulo. *WhatsApp* is cheap in comparison with normal phone rates, which explains its rapid growth (Neuman &Levy, 2015 p. 40).In researching about social networks and their role in news, unique data from 12 countries show that Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, *WhatsApp*, and Google+ are by far the most important networks for news in that order (Neuman &Levy, 2015 p. 80). Interestingly *WhatsApp*, an American start-up now owned by Facebook, has a very small user base in the US (4%). It is much more popular in Brazil (61%), Spain (67%), Italy (49%), and Germany (41%). And a significant proportion of users is looking at *WhatsApp* for news.

Also, in Brazil news usage has doubled to a third of our urban sample (34%). What is perhaps most important about this development is the speed of the change, and the profound change it signals for journalism organisations. The existential question of a decade ago ‘who is a journalist?’ was born out of the access of the general populace to publishing tools. Now the question has been replaced by ‘who is a publisher?’ Protocols like Twitter and social platforms like Facebook are being joined by messaging services such as *WhatsApp* (owned by Facebook) and Snapchat. News organisations have realised that, in order to reach readers or viewers, particularly in younger demographics, they have to publish through these platforms (Neuman &Levy, 2015 p. 89).

Additionally, *WhatsApp* is also seen as a relatively new tool in education with similar positive characteristics as previous technological tools that are implemented, but it seems that *WhatsApp* has some up-to-date features that encourage teacher and students to use it in order to enhance understanding (Bouhnik, & Deshen, 2014). *WhatsApp* also includes a variety of functions, such as text messages, attached images, audio files, video files, and links to web addresses. Over the last two years, the application has become very popular, gaining over 350 million users and is rated the most downloaded application in 127 countries (Cohavi, 2013); everyday an average of 31 billion messages are sent (Tzuk, 2013).

Technically, *WhatsApp* can be viewed as a social network that allows people to access a great deal of information rapidly. The simple operation scheme makes the program accessible to a variety of people of different ages and back-grounds. *WhatsApp* enables communication with anyone who possesses a Smartphone, has an active internet connection, and has installed the application. The overall cost of the application is very low, up to one dollar per year (Bouhnik, & Deshen, 2014). *WhatsApp* is a Smartphone application for instant messaging. Lately the application's popularity has risen. One of the unique features of the application is its ability to enhance communication within a group (Bouhnik, & Deshen, 2014). Also, given the economic situation (i.e. widespread poverty) in many Third World countries, economic decisions relating to products (including ICTs) come to constitute one of the most important adoption-rejection criteria. In terms of *WhatsApp*, the service is very affordable: it is free to download and, once downloaded, users pay a mere \$0.99 subscription per year. Also, *WhatsApp*'s ability to work on different mobile phones and platforms means that users need not purchase certain devices to access the programme (Bouhnik, & Deshen, 2014). In essence, *WhatsApp* is a practical communication tool that addresses consumers' need to communicate effectively and cheaply – through text, video and audio (Tuosong and Faisal, 2014)

Also Mgbeahurike (2015) noted that the penetration and proliferation of social media and telephony remains the cogs that bind us all together owing to the easy access of information and anonymity which allows everyone to have their say as location automatically is no longer a barrier for communication and relationship and over 70% of Nigerians today have access to the internet and social media packages are now affordable. *WhatsApp*, he noted can be used to create groups or mailing list with 256 members whose messages can be shared and reshared. Four of such groups will mean a thousand people could be reached via a singular phone, in reality according to him, a singular idea can reach 1(one) million people in just 2 (two) simple hops (Mgbeahurike, 2015) .

Furthermore, some media stations like *Cool FM Lagos*, *Wazobia FM*, *Lagos state Television*, *The Punch* in Nigeria are restructuring to include *WhatsApp* in most of their programmes feedback columns thereby enhancing and integrating audience into their programmes.

## 6. CHALLENGES

Research has proven that *WhatsApp* may generate noticeable improvements in consumer's lives but may simultaneously cause serious social and personal problems, including addiction to these applications (Singh, Chopra & Kaur, 2015). Also, In the first three months of implementation, from April to June 2015, *EWN* has been able to manually add 7,930 subscribers. Subscribers are invited to join through *EWN*'s online platform but then need to be entered manually by *EWN* staff into the *WhatsApp* application. Each *WhatsApp* account can send out a broadcast to a maximum of 250 recipients as a blind carbon copy (BCC), allowing each recipient to respond directly to *EWN* without seeing who the other recipients are. Due to the nature of *WhatsApp* broadcasts, the process of adding new members and sending messages cannot be automated and therefore is very cumbersome and labor-intensive. *EWN* saw opportunities in expanding the *WhatsApp* program into areas such as traffic or sports news broadcasts, but the cumbersome nature of the app limits *EWN*'s ability to expand (Robinson, et al, 2015).

Furthermore, most publishing effort around messaging app are still in the formative experimental stage but even those have often proven effective in diversifying traffic source for digital content. Drawing upon interviews and case studies, a number of opportunities and challenges for organization using or hoping to use messaging app for news exist. For successful messaging app strategy, publisher, journalist must understand regional stronghold, user demographics and popular feature of the app.

Similarly, research carried out on *WhatsApp* studies are mostly tilted toward its use by students and how it can be utilised to enhance learning. Nevertheless, few studies have been carried out on how it could be used as a medium for information sharing and dissemination despite the facts that research has shown that currently, it is the most widely used app and have outlived Facebook whose owner saw potential in the apps and bought it .

The challenge here, as Mgbeahurike pointed out, is that the uncensored nature of these social media and social networking apps, means that ‘lies’ and ‘half truth’ can reach a million people in just 2(two) simple hops. Distrust of the people for government means that these stories might do a lot more damage before they are salvaged because such stories will be believed a lot easier than official positions. In essence social media platforms like *whatsApp* can serve as a propaganda tool(Mgbeahurike, 2015).

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The next phase of development is already upon us. Messaging services like *WhatsApp* are growing more quickly in some parts of the world and among a younger demographic than platforms like Facebook. These platforms are, if anything, even further removed from the broadcast environment we are all used to as a driver of news and discussion. Existing journalism businesses and new entrants into the market must have a strategy to deal with their future which is centered on mobile distribution and which accepts that there is little they can do to control the environment in which their journalism is distributed. News businesses, which thought the shift from an analogue model to a digital model was painful and fraught a decade ago, now have to make even greater adjustments. Social platforms which felt they could maintain their status as ‘just a platform’ and avoid the implications of bearing publishing responsibility are also realising that this is untenable (Neuman, Levy & Nielsen, 2015). The future depends on where *WhatsApp* takes it product. We can only do as much as what *WhatsApp* allows us to do. Similarly, more research should be carried on how media platform such as *WhatsApp* have been used in Nigeria by media practitioners and audiences as communication tools in dispensing journalistic duties and as recipients of information taking into cognizance its expanding features as series of restructuring and updates are carried out by its developers to suit communication purposes.

Furthermore, *WhatsApp* audience expands daily and the rate is alarming, it is therefore pertinent that such communication tool, content and its audience are to be studied and analyse to see how business developers, practitioners, consumers could use it effectively and efficiently.

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