




A Case Study on the Evaluation of WhatsApp Groups Established for Managerial Purposes by Academicians

Alev ELÇİ* 
Zeliha SEÇKİN** 
Onur DOĞAN*** 

ABSTRACT

Technological developments have enabled the traditional nature of communication to evolve into group messaging. These developments gained momentum amid the COVID-19 process and brought instant messaging and social media communication to the forefront. WhatsApp, one of the most commonly used instant messaging applications for informal communication, has also started being favored more for formal communication in organizational management. WhatsApp has become a powerful professional communication tool that organizational administrators preferred, has become to serve organizational purposes as an alternative to formal information and document sharing platforms. This study aims to investigate whether WhatsApp messaging effectively serves organizational purposes in higher education, and evaluates how it is perceived and utilized by academicians. This case study is a type of qualitative research where the data collected from the workgroup are analyzed by descriptive analysis to obtain findings. Five main themes are derived from the analysis; namely group structure and characteristics, communication, cooperation, psycho-social impact, negative opinions, and related ten sub-themes were detected. According to the results derived from the study, the participants expressed mostly positive and some negative perceptions regarding the communication made through the WhatsApp groups established for administrative purposes.

Keywords: COVID-19, Communication Management, Knowledge Sharing, Academic Administrators.

Yönetsel Amaçla Kurulmuş WhatsApp Gruplarının Akademisyenler Tarafından Değerlendirilmesine Yönelik Bir Durum Çalışması

ÖZ

Teknolojik gelişmeler iletişimin geleneksel doğasının sayısal mesajlaşmaya doğru evrilmesini sağlamıştır. Bu gelişmeler COVID-19 sürecinde ivme kazanarak anlık mesajlaşma ve sosyal medya iletişimini ön plana çıkarmıştır. Anlık mesajlaşma uygulamalarından biri olan WhatsApp, biçimsel olmayan iletişimin yanı sıra biçimsel olarak da yönetim amaçlı kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Örgütlerde yöneticilerin sıklıkla tercih etmeye başladığı güçlü bir iletişim aracı haline gelen WhatsApp'ın resmi bilgi ve belge paylaşımı platformlarının yerini alarak örgütsel amaca hizmet edecek şekilde kullanımı yaygınlaşmıştır. Yönetici akademisyenlerin konuya ilişkin yaklaşımları uygulamanın etkin kullanımı ve sürdürülebilirliği açısından önemlidir. Mesajlaşma uygulamalarının bu şekilde resmi bir niteliğe büründürülmesinin örgütsel amaca hizmet edip etmediğinin ve çalışanlar tarafından nasıl algılandığının araştırılması çalışmanın temel amacını oluşturmaktadır. Bu araştırma nitel bir araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak açıklayıcı/tanımlayıcı durum çalışması türünde desenlenmiş ve çalışma grubundan toplanan veriler betimsel analiz yapılarak bulgulara ulaşılmıştır. Yapılan analiz sonucunda; grup yapısı ve özellikleri, iletişim, iş birliği, psiko-sosyal etki, olumsuz görüşler olarak beş ana tema ve on altı tema belirlenmiştir. Çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçlara göre yönetsel amaçla kurulan WhatsApp gruplarından yapılan paylaşımlarla ilgili olarak çoğu katılımcı olumlu bazıları ise olumsuz görüş bildirmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: COVID-19, İletişim Yönetimi, Bilgi Paylaşımı, Akademik Yöneticiler.

1. Introduction

In the digital era, organizational communication has evolved from its traditional shell into a technology-based structure. These technological developments rapidly changed the ways of communication (Doğan, 2019). Emerging technologies imposed flexibility in terms of time and space as the “new normal”, and have opened the doors to radical changes in traditional communication in organizations. Adapting to the new conditions, organizational administrators aimed to ensure the sustainability of administrative success by communicating effectively with both internal and external stakeholders. Within the organization, networks are created to facilitate employee interaction for common

* Doç. Dr., Aksaray Üniversitesi, dr.avelevelci@gmail.com

** Prof. Dr., Aksaray Üniversitesi, seckinz@aksaray.edu.tr

*** Öğr. Gör., Aksaray Üniversitesi, onurdogan@aksaray.edu.tr

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purposes through formal vertical, horizontal, and diagonal communication channels (Ahmed et al., 2010), and communication groups are established to serve the purpose (Zakaria and Ibrahim, 2018). Technological developments rendering inadequate traditional communication networks in organizations have led administrators to seek innovative alternatives that are compatible with the conditions. WhatsApp, commonly used for informal purposes, became one of these alternatives and later began to be used in a formal environment (Ali et al., 2019); it became an empowering option compared to traditional messaging (Church and Olivera, 2013). The fact that WhatsApp enables effective and timely communication, especially in groups, transformed today's organizations into agile structures acting quickly to produce more effective results (Attalla et al., 2020; Seufert et al., 2016). In that context, this new communication tool deeply affected both individuals' private and professional lives (Doğan, 2019). The widespread use of messaging applications in organizations has recently been the subject of an increased number of researches conducted in this regard. Related literature studies are encountered that investigate the effectiveness of using WhatsApp for organizational communication and professional business environment (Attalla et al., 2020; Pozin and Nawi, 2018).

As a de facto rule in organizations, formal interaction about work must be communicated in writing; yet, usually, some information distributed to employees can be by phone, e-mail, or verbal. Therefore, written communication together with verbal communication is desired to increase the effectiveness of communication among employees. Although the developments in communication technologies have carried written communication to a more digital extent, new problems are imminent since employees may not follow formal correspondence on time.

Enterprise/Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) is a group of technologies that work as a whole system; and provides a solution for the management of creating, capturing, retrieving, and disposing of information assets of the organization. EDMS is also used for formal information and document exchange. Recently, it has been observed that the same exchange has been repeated in WhatsApp groups and the annotations to the official documents are transmitted through such messaging channels. When the literature is examined, it is understood that the messaging application provides independence from time and place, causing the working hours' concept to evolve into a 24/7 work overtime forming organizations in a communication nexus (Levine et al., 2012). In addition, the existence of information that the application also activates intra-group communication became quite exciting.

Since its establishment, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic process, WhatsApp emerged as an administrative communication tool in many education institutions (Ahmad, 2018). Since there are no adequate studies to contribute to the literature in that respect, this research aims to investigate whether the "formal" characterization of messaging applications in administrative communication serves expected purposes.

1.1. Organizational Communication

The realization of organizational goals is closely related to the effective use of the intra-organizational communication network and the interaction in communication. Interactive communication emerges depending on the various needs of organizations. The most significant purpose of interactive communication in organizations was determined as coordination, problem-solving, information sharing, and conflict resolution (Tutar, 2003). At the same time, it is realized that technological developments save internal communication from the traditional and hierarchical structure and transform it into a faster and more interactive way (Ölçer and Koçer, 2015). Developments in communication technology make a great contribution to the facilitation of organizational communication. In the organizational communication process, it is possible to transmit messages using a considerable number of tools and methods. The more important issue is to deliver the messages effectively to the receiver, rather than using a variety of tools and methods (Demir, 2014). Organizational communication is related to the interaction between individuals within the organization and makes an important contribution to the development of both personal and organizational social satisfaction and gratification by mediating the acceptance of the information presented with a common understanding (Winarso, 2018).

Organizational communication is an imperative factor for the formation, sustainability, and success of organizations; and includes communication of individuals, between individuals, between groups, and communication relations between individuals and groups in the organization with external stakeholders (Paksoy, 2001). Organizational communication includes reactions and responses obtained through feedback from transactions and actions carried out in the organization. In this context, organizational communication takes place as a two-way communication process where the administrator affects the employee and the employee affects the administrator. The communication order of the organization also reflects the success of the organizational order. In other words, the existence of effective and continuous communication in the organization indicates the healthy functioning of the organization as a whole (Murat, n.d.).

With the digital transformation, organizational communication has gained a different dimension and it permitted employees of the organization to develop a better relationship with each other through social networks and messaging applications that is created among employees. Connecting people through communication also strengthens the relationship of trust and responsibility between them. For this reason, digital social networks are communication tools that allow direct and fast relations between communities consisting of a few or millions of users and have distinctive features that each individual can contribute to. Digital social networks, if used appropriately, are powerful tools that allow employees to reveal their strengths, understand their environment better, and develop their relationships at a higher exchange value level (Lacayo-Mendoza and de Pablos-Heredero, 2016).

1.2. Administrative Communication

Administrative communication in the organization symbolizes the formal structure and the communication framework suitable for this structure. In addition, there is a natural communication process within the individuals in the organization and the informal structure formed by them, and this process is called informal communication. In this context, organizational communication is a two-dimensional system: administrative/formal communication and informal communication (Şahin, 2007). Ahmad (2018), in his study, categorized the communication of the leader and the subordinates' WhatsApp communication into social communication and official communication. Organizational success needs effectively using both types of communication systems. In addition, it is necessary to establish an institutional structure that supports the establishment of dense organizational communication between leaders and subordinates with an understanding that trusts communication based on technology-based systems (Njuguna et al., 2021). Dolphin (2005) suggests a communications executive, who has a vital role in encouraging the establishment of this structure, by the creation of an effective communication network. In other words, an important dimension in administrative communication is leadership quality.

Administrative communication is significant in terms of framing the attitudes and behaviors of individuals as well as directing the relations between employees in the workplace (Dasgupta et al., 2014). This framework also constitutes the prerequisite for the vigorous functioning of the administration in organizations. The corrosive results of communication-based problems are not only disrupting relations between employees but also negatively affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization as a whole. Bell and Martin (2008) define administrative communication as the sharing of information vertically, horizontally, and diagonally, using formal or informal channels to convey meanings that will enable administrators to achieve their goals. In other words, administrative communication is the communication network established between employees in the context of management to achieve the desired result (Ahmed et al., 2010). As a result, in today's rapidly digitizing environment, it is seen that in addition to traditional communication networks, administrators have started to use new generation messaging/ communication applications, especially WhatsApp, effectively for administrative purposes.

1.3. Group Communication

It is assumed that digital social networks provide great support to organizations that are increasingly using new forms of social media and trying to surge in their productivity and competitiveness (Lacayo-Mendoza and de Pablos-Heredero, 2016). Researchers state that especially higher education organization

administrators prefer the use of digital social networks in terms of connection and communication management to achieve more effective results. In this way, they drew attention to the necessity of uniting employees around common goals by making use of teamwork to strengthen their competitive position. Based on this aim, the researchers mentioned above proposed the application of a relational coordination model based on sharing goals, optimal knowledge management, mutual respect, and effective communication mechanisms. As a result, administrators share information and documents about the contents of formal posts by forming groups over messaging applications with other administrators and their colleagues at different levels.

Seufert et al. (2016) claim that group communication is an emerging communication paradigm that has a foremost impact on today's mobile networks. Organizational success is closely related to the effectiveness of formal communication. However, it is stated that informal communication and awareness are also determining factors for successful teamwork in business environments (Röcker, 2012). According to Ali et al. (2019), WhatsApp which is widely used in formal or informal communication; turned into a form of formal communication because employees in organizations accept this messaging channel as a formal form of communication. However, the mentioned researchers emphasized that some rules and regulations should be made for the adoption of this communication channel and stated that the legitimacy of the information transmitted through this channel is still unclear.

1.4. Using WhatsApp in Communication

The WhatsApp messaging application developed by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009, was inspired by the English saying "What's up?". WhatsApp, which is a part of the service offered to users by mobile operators over the Cloud connection, allowed them to send and receive real-time images, videos, audios, and location-based messages to other individuals or groups of people free of charge and became a very powerful option for traditional phone messaging (Church et al. Oliver, 2013). Any user can create a communication group using this application for a specific purpose (Zakaria and Ibrahim, 2018). With the development of such applications, WhatsApp has begun to be used for other purposes as well as for personal use. The use of WhatsApp and other social media tools makes it easier for people to communicate and share information with no limits (Omar et al., 2017). In terms of instant messaging, WhatsApp has increasingly become a powerful communication tool that administrators recurrently prefer in today's organizations (Uzun and Uluçay, 2017).

According to the Hootsuite Turkey January 2021 report, 60 million people, corresponding to 70.8% of the 84.69 million population, are social media users. In the same report, WhatsApp ranks third among the most used social media platforms by individuals between the ages of 16 and 64 with 87.5% (Kemp, 2021). It is observed that the creation of WhatsApp groups for administrative purposes accelerated the widespread use of the flexible working model in organizations, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic process. In this context, the most important contribution of WhatsApp to the functionality of organizations is that it has led to innovative changes in communication, information, and document sharing. Being grateful to WhatsApp, an employee has the opportunity to fulfill his/her role and duty in a faster, contemporary, and effective manner. It is also noteworthy to mention, WhatsApp contributes to employees working more independently and flexibly (Scornavacca and Barnes, 2008). But contrarily, being indecisive about spending enough time with the family and doing academic studies at home can create a role conflict in the faculty members (Doğan et al., 2020)

WhatsApp, which is commonly used as a social communication media, has found a formal use in daily organizational communication, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic its use for organizational purposes has become prevalent. It is important in terms of its contribution to the literature to investigate whether the "formal" characterization of messaging applications in this way serves the expected purpose. In this context, this study aims to examine in-depth the views of administrative academics in WhatsApp groups established for administrative purposes in higher education organizations, on work-life balance, administrative processes, communication management, and the information-sharing process.

2. Material and Methods

This study is a qualitative case study research. In qualitative research; methods are flexible, samples are small, induction is essential, and developing theory is the goal (Aytaçlı, 2012; Özdemir, 2010). Case studies are seen as an effective approach used to find answers to scientific questions (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). Yin (1984) explains case study as a research method preferred when a current phenomenon works in its reality, the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined and there is more than one data source (as cited in Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). Datta (1990) states that descriptive case studies are set to describe the structure. He also states that it aims to add reality and in-depth examples to other information about a program or policy. As Rowley (2002) states, although case studies are characterized as lacking in rigor and objectivity, they offer perspectives that cannot be obtained with other research approaches. This is also the reason for the preference of the descriptive case study in this research. Written permission was obtained from the Aksaray University Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study (Date: 28/12/2020, Number: 2020/13-112).

The following research questions were prepared to examine the opinions of each participant about the WhatsApp groups established for administrative purposes in their organizations.

Concerning the communication via WhatsApp groups established for administrative purposes;

1. What are the effects on academicians' work-life balance?
2. What is the impact on administrative processes?
3. What are the effects on communication management and the information sharing process?

2.1. Universe and workgroup

The workgroup of this research consists of administrative academicians working at different universities in Turkey. Criterion-based sampling technique, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to determine the workgroup. In this technique, criteria can emerge from people, events, objects, or situations with selected features (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). Academicians who have administrative duties and are in a WhatsApp group established for administrative purposes were included in this research. In this context, names of 30 academics from different levels of management such as rector, vice-rector, dean, vice dean, director of vocational school, head of a department, deputy head of department, and head of scientific branch were listed. Preliminary talks were conducted with the individuals using digital communication platforms mentioning the purpose of the research and interview questions, and 20 academic administrators who agreed to participate in the study responded to the questions. Demographic information about the participants is included in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

No	Title	Position	Age	Gender	University Type
1	Prof. Dr.	Rector	67	Male	Foundation
2	Prof. Dr.	Department Head	53	Male	Public
3	Prof. Dr.	Dean	50	Male	Public
4	Prof. Dr.	Dean	52	Female	Foundation
5	Prof. Dr.	Director of Graduate School	56	Male	Public
6	Prof. Dr.	Department Head	70	Male	Foundation
7	Prof. Dr.	Director of Vocational School	60	Male	Public
8	Prof. Dr.	Department Head	48	Male	Public
9	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	Assistant Dean	34	Male	Foundation
10	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	Assistant Dean	36	Male	Public
11	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	Director of Vocational School	52	Male	Public
12	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	Assistant Department Head	36	Male	Public
13	Assist. Prof. Dr.	Department Head	38	Female	Public
14	Assist. Prof. Dr.	Department Head	42	Female	Public
15	Assist. Prof. Dr.	Department Head	56	Male	Public
16	Assist. Prof. Dr.	Department Head	39	Male	Public
17	Instructor	Department Head	38	Female	Public
18	Assist. Prof. Dr.	Department Head	40	Female	Public
19	Assist. Prof. Dr.	Department Head	36	Female	Public
20	Assist. Prof. Dr.	Department Head	43	Female	Public

2.2. Data collection

As a result of the literature review, a structured interview form with seven open-ended questions was prepared per the purpose of the research questions, aimed to determine the opinions of the academic administrators on the WhatsApp groups established for administrative purposes. An interview is a verbal communication process between at least two people and it is intended to collect data from the relevant people within the framework of the questions to be answered in the research. At the same time, interviews allow the collection of in-depth data about a research topic or a question (Büyüköztürk, 2016). The opinions of three experts on the interview form were taken and it was rearranged by making necessary corrections. 20 participants agreed to participate in the study, 13 sent responses via e-mail and seven participants filled out the structured interview form via Google Forms. Research data were collected between April 10 and May 20, 2021.

2.3. Data analysis

In this study, the data were evaluated according to the descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis is a type of qualitative data analysis that includes summarizing and interpreting the data obtained by various data collection techniques according to predetermined themes. In this type of analysis, the researcher frequently includes direct quotations to reflect the views of the individuals he has interviewed or observed strikingly. The main purpose of this type of analysis is to present the findings to the reader in a summarized and interpreted form (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016).

Each researcher collected the data, which she/he evaluated independently from the others, under certain themes. Afterward, all researchers (2 Females and 1 Male) get together and rearranged the themes they created comparatively. After reaching a consensus, the researchers identified five main themes and 10 sub-themes (Table 2). Miles and Huberman's reliability formula ($Reliability = \frac{Agreements}{Agreements + Disagreements}$) was used and the calculated reliability coefficient related to the researchers' agreements/disagreements was 80%. Miles and Huberman stated that at least 80% agreement in 95% of the codes is suitable for the reliability of the research (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). These themes and sub-themes were interpreted concerning the answers of the participants and some of their views were directly quoted. In these excerpts, participants are coded as W1, ..., W20 to obtain confidentiality.

Table 2. Themes and Sub-themes

No	Theme	Sub-Theme
1	Group structure and characteristics	Group Participation/membership
		Functionality
		Purpose and content
		Cultural structure
2	Communication	Formal communication
		Informal communication
3	Cooperation	Collaboration
		Coordination
4	Psycho-social impact	Work-life balance
		Socialization
5	Negative perceptions	

3. Results

In this section, the findings of the research, five main themes, and ten sub-themes (Table 2) are described. These five main themes are; *group structure and characteristics*, *communication*, *cooperation*, *psycho-social impact*, and *negative perceptions*.

3.1. On group structure and characteristics

The answers given by the participants emerged four sub-themes of the group structure and characteristics. These sub-themes are; *group participation/membership*, *functionality*, *purpose and content*, and *cultural structure*.

In the context of joining or being a member of the group; some of the participants stated that they joined voluntarily or were added by management in many administrative and academic WhatsApp groups created for different purposes due to their duties.

“Our university has two WhatsApp groups. Each employee is included in these groups. There is only one difference between the groups in terms of content. Of course, as the Rector of the University, I belong to both groups.” (W1)

“I have been involved in various WhatsApp groups created within our faculty and for administrative purposes. For I am the Deputy Dean I am a member of the Dean's group consisting of the dean, vice deans and faculty secretary, and to the Heads of Departments Group of our Faculty due to my administrative duty (for I am the vice dean, the Department Head and the department's general groups due to my being a faculty member), due to my being the vice dean. I am a member of the distance education process follow-up group of our faculty, the Islamic Economics and Finance group, of which I am a member of the department, and also a WhatsApp group with research assistants and vice deans of our faculty.” (W10)

“The fact that we entered the structural classification or accepted the structuralism formed the basis for our use of WhatsApp. The main basis of this obligation is that we are in an administrative position. If it were not, our thoughts would still be protected with unstructured classification and the postponement of WhatsApp usage would continue (unlimitedly). A second structural necessity is based on breaking the unity of time and space during the pandemic period. Both structural reasons and the existence and need of the communication process in the management action led to the establishment of 'Academic's Staff WhatsApp', 'Administrative Staff WhatsApp', 'Department Heads WhatsApp', 'Board of Directors WhatsApp', and 'Board of Discipline WhatsApp' groups. (W11)

“Oh God, they didn't even ask, 'Will you be involved?'” (W16)

The participants expressed their views on efficiency, convenience, and speed with the following expressions regarding the functionality of the groups. Some participants expressed their opinion as WhatsApp groups play a mediating role in increasing the functionality of EDMS.

“Also, this informal communication channel shows that mechanisms such as EDMS, which is a formal communication tool, do not actually function properly or that employees do not systematically use EDMS. Rather than sharing information, this is the transfer of the task list from the formal channel EDMS, where bureaucracy works slowly, to an environment where there is informal bureaucracy.” (W3)

“Although our institution has an Electronic Information Management System, I think these groups were established because many of our friends did not use this system actively... Friends who do not see the text written from EDMS and reply at the last minute cannot say that they did not see the notifications made from WhatsApp.” (W16)

“Announcements about the articles that need urgent answers and the action/meeting announcements about the department are shared via EDMS. (W12)

Some participants expressed their views on the purpose and content of creating WhatsApp groups. They pointed out that such groups have almost evolved to become “formal” by fulfilling many functions as prompt communication, being informed, and sharing information.

“Fast communication, quick information and sharing information.” (W6)

“The idea that the sharing of open and covert information is open to discussion (we still maintain the dominance of the idea that it is controversial), the necessity of using WhatsApp applications and processes has caused it to be postponed until the beginning of the pandemic period.” (W11)

“... I also use it frequently because some informal information sharing is shared through these platforms.” (W16)

It was determined that one participant expressed her/his views on the cultural structure in the context of the readiness of the group members and the necessity of collective communication as follows.

“Personal deferral applies to all social media groups, not just WhatsApp. Because we think that the beginning of WhatsApp applications and processes, including all social media coverage, is untimely (from timelessness, it is meant that society and its culture are not prepared for technology adaptation and use) ... In our opinion, we are dominated by a culture that adopts mass communication and is prone. Before urbanization, communication networks and processes were carried out while 'filling water at fountains or in coffee houses or living in houses, etc.' Today, the same sovereignty has found a living space in social networks/communication tools to protect its existence or is to protect it (here is not a criticism, but a reference to a cultural need). Structural references and compliance with time and returns were not ignored (though they should not). The returns and speed of change and the heavy feeling of communication have led to the inclusion of tools such as social media in life. However, it takes an important place in the thoughts we share that this pioneering

feature is not or will not be purified from cultural influences. Therefore, it is necessary to draw attention to the needs of communication and/or speed. As an academic observer/ academic intellectuality, we still tend to continue the discussion of the two classifications, 'nonstructural and structural', for answers that may meet the needs here." (W11)

3.2. On communication

The participants stated that academic, professional, and social exchanges for communication purposes took place. *Formal* and *informal communication* are the sub-themes under this theme.

In the context of formal communication, the sharing of information-documents and pedagogical discussions for administrative purposes, mentioning audio and video calls, and similar issues.

"In these groups, information and documents are generally shared for administrative purposes. Opinions are requested on some issues." (W2)

"Generally, information is given about formal jobs, courses, and programs. Demands are sent from the faculty members of the department, and information is given on the documents to be filled. The work of department administrators." (W5)

"There may be administrative directives, information requests, and document transfer from time to time. Synchronous video calls can be made." (W19)

"Both positive and negative. People are more comfortable saying what they want to say." (W18)

Under the sub-theme of informal communication, the participants expressed positive and negative perceptions by emphasizing that social content was also shared, although not frequently. These shares were the latest news, special day/holiday celebrations, death condolence messages, funny messages, and videos. Participants who have negative opinions may not want to share social messages through the WhatsApp group created for formal posts, because it does not serve the purpose.

"Very rare daily topics, current issues, special topics are shared." (W2)

"There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding in personal posts." (W8)

"Special day celebrations, condolences, get well soon wishes." (W13)

"Sometimes holiday greetings. Condolences." (W17)

"Funny messages and videos are shared." (W4)

"If we define the effectiveness of communication as the ability to express oneself correctly and the person to understand what is being said correctly, it is not possible to convey the feelings of facial expressions with emoji and to convey the thoughts to the other party fully with a few words. In my opinion, some expressions can be forgotten in face-to-face communication, while written expressions can stay in the group permanently. Some conversations can be better forgotten." (W16)

3.3. On cooperation

Under the theme of cooperation, two sub-themes as *collaboration* and *coordination* emerged. Participants mainly talked about collaboration among colleagues, working together, exchanging views, and similar issues.

"Conveniently, simultaneously, faster and easier access to colleagues." (W17)

"If my question is answered about a subject that I do not know, it makes an important contribution to doing the right thing. Recently, I asked the professors for an opinion about a student I mentored, and I developed an attitude as a result of the feedback I received. It also facilitates the work of the faculty administration." (W9)

"It provides support to my business life in terms of announcing the transactions that need to be followed due to my administrative duty more quickly through the posts made in WhatsApp groups, making the reflex towards the job quicker, enabling the exchange of views on the work or the evaluation of the criticisms." (W10)

"I have the opinion that ensuring information sharing among academic staff within the professional framework leads academic life to a higher quality process. It makes a great contribution to providing the necessary support to colleagues in case of information needs." (W15)

In the context of coordination, the participants talked about harmonious and regular solidarity, effective decision-making processes, teamwork, knowledge generation, and sharing.

"I think it aims to provide faster accessibility and coordination." (W3).

"Instant access to group members/authorities has very positive effects on data sharing, exchange of views, and decision-making processes. It is especially useful in situations where it is not possible to come together physically or when there is an

urgency. It has positive effects in terms of sharing necessary information and documents instantly and expressing opinions and decisions related to it. It strengthens teamwork. It makes positive contributions to the sharing and dissemination of new information, important information, for administrative purposes, or in other groups. In general groups, it has an impact on the development and expansion of a person's network in every field, and in this way, he can find the solution to a problem here." (W2)

"Especially during the epidemic, rapid communication positively affects decision-making processes." (W6)

"You can provide information, make quick decisions and organize quickly." (W4)

"It is used as a joint decision-making mechanism." (W2)

"I think it has positive effects on fast communication and decision making on any subject." (W7)

"The existence of WhatsApp groups makes it very easy to provide quick access to staff and notify staff about urgent work." (W1)

"Since no one has a chance to say to the related messages that I have not seen this administrative job, it reduces the possibility of avoiding responsibility. In addition, it eliminates the notion of overtime in the administrative sense of the academics who do not have a certain working time in terms of management. In the administrative sense, the abolition of working hours shows itself both temporally and spatially. (W3)

3.4. On the psycho-social effect

The theme of psycho-social impact had *work-life balance* and *socialization* sub-themes. Participants put forward positive and negative perceptions regarding work-life balance. In this context, the participants who gave a positive opinion stated that WhatsApp group correspondence allows administrators for pre-planning and fast communication.

"I don't think that postings made outside of working hours harm my work-life balance, as it allows preliminary preparations before being reminded, announced, or notified by a formal letter of a job or transaction that needs to be performed on the following business day or soon." (W10)

"Because my WhatsApp groups are different and diverse, and the out-of-hours posts that I'm used to not affect my work life. My students or other groups are constantly writing. This has matured my non-working posts... The fact that the message is both written and visual strengthens communication. You can also understand emotions with emoji." (W4).

"It has a positive impact on business life, since mobile phones are in everyone's hands, making it possible to communicate directly with a short way, the speed of work increases in parallel with this." (W14)

On the other hand, some participants expressed their critical views on the disappearance of the notion of working hours in the context of work-life balance, with their justifications as follows.

"It affects negatively. They neither say weekend nor night, they send messages whenever they think of it. This is not pleasant either... Due to the pandemic, we are obliged to such a communication system. Even though there are sometimes unnecessary posts, I believe that we should use this instrument right now. I cannot say that it had a very positive effect." (W5)

"I am uncomfortable. I don't think there is such a thing as working hours. Especially when you remember the message that came at 12 or 1 am, as well as the message that came at 3 in the morning." (W17)

"Here is the most [...] point of the job. With the flexible working during the pandemic process, there is no limit to the working hours. A group member who gets up for a sabur meal can write about a problem he is experiencing without thinking. If you prefer to sleep with your phone turned down, you seem uninterested this time. Especially since you can't even think of not responding to your superior. You feel like a clerk that your supervisor can't find on his desk during working hours. One day later, your supervisor may say, 'I wrote to you last night but you did not answer'. You will understand that work and life are intertwined." (W16)

In the sub-theme of socialization, the participants talked about the social and emotional dimensions of the communication carried out through WhatsApp groups.

"... On the other hand, while observing those who come for the meeting in front of the administrator's room, he now has to observe what is written on WhatsApp (this may make the administrator think about his loneliness again)." (W11)

"I quickly gain knowledge in terms of socializing with the staff and solving problems." (W1)

"Everyone can be informed about school-related affairs. In addition, sharing outside of work strengthens communication within the school." (W13).

"I am aware of professional, academic and social issues. This keeps me dynamic and affects me positively." (W7)

"Even though we cannot meet in the school environment due to COVID-19, we can have some information about both business and daily lives. It provides solidarity, especially in matters related to the disease. I am pleased." (W13)

3.5. On negative perceptions

In addition to other themes, as a separate theme, negative opinions regarding the use of the administrative WhatsApp group were also discussed. The participants drew attention to the negative aspects of communication via WhatsApp, especially mentioning the intense information sharing, the necessity of prompt responses, the massive increase in the information-sharing, but the decrease in quality and information deafness. What is meant by information deafness here is that important information sharing is simmering in the information explosion.

"Effective communication can be considered as both written and verbal communication. Expressing oneself in WhatsApp Groups will of course be weak for effective communication. Although several emoji types try to define it with signs, it will not be enough according to the verbal, face-to-face communication method. Communicating with text and similar characters without seeing the addressee may prevent him from showing his true intention and personality. However, despite all negativity, it is a fact that it contributes to effective communication, especially in the simultaneous sharing of feelings and thoughts." (W2)

"From time to time, due to news or invitations, it is distressing and can disrupt plans. Response to superiors in formal groups is expected to be quick. This requires constant vigilance. Collective meetings with relatives can also turn into a mess. Everyone feels obliged to ask for each other's sake. This also wastes time. There can be confusion in live interviews in large groups." (W19)

"Here, the members' sharing of necessary and unnecessary things will harm productivity." (W2)

"The speed of information sharing makes a great contribution to the usability and applicability of information WhatsApp groups. However, sharing too much information from these groups reduces the quality and weight of the information. Different discussions are also held in the same groups, and they are made in very serious correspondence. As such, critical information can boil over. When too much information is shared in the group, unresponsiveness, which I can call information deafness, may occur in the group members over time. The influence and mood that formed when the group was first established may diminish over time, and there may be confusion with the establishment of new groups instead of separating people from the group. In summary, I think that WhatsApp groups are of great benefit when administrative decisions are used only for information sharing and information sharing within a certain scope, instead of using them constantly outside of information sharing, with a formal language, and without damaging the position of superior. However, the change of group members or the loss of meaning of the group over time can also cause interruptions in the transmission of information." (W16)

"Since I don't use the WhatsApp application very heavily, I don't instantly follow the posts outside of working hours. I prefer to call by phone in case of workplace emergencies. Therefore, I do not think that it negatively affects my work-life balance." (W12)

"Sometimes, it can cause misunderstandings when I want to write short." (W20)

"I think it makes a formal mission informal. Therefore, I think it undermines the inherent quality of a formal service we perform." (W3)

"... But recently, social platforms have overtaken formal correspondence systems. Unfortunately, some of the formal correspondence is now sent via WhatsApp groups. There's no chance that group members won't see it or don't reply." (W16)

4. Discussion

This study enclosed a literature review of WhatsApp messaging groups within the scope of formal and informal professional, organizational, administrative, and intergroup communication in higher education institutions. The limited number of studies in the literature on the use of WhatsApp for administrative communication purposes reveals the importance of this research. In this context, questions were asked to the participants to reveal their positive and negative perspectives on the formation and use of WhatsApp groups.

The participants stated that they are included in at least two WhatsApp groups created for administrative purposes, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic process, depending on the differences

in their administrative positions. Most of the participants expressed a positive opinion about the use of WhatsApp. These findings coincide with Simon's (2016) and Ahmad's (2018) findings that WhatsApp is used not only for one-way flow of information from management but also for dynamically sharing informal information among colleagues. Another study claimed that WhatsApp had a positive effect on the academic and professional lives of the participants (Singhal and Chawla, 2019). In addition, the use of social media as a single and formal platform for academic communication in higher education institutions during the COVID-19 period, especially the preference of WhatsApp as a communication tool by administrators were claimed (Ali et al., 2019; Sobaih et al., 2020; Uzun et al. Ulucay, 2017).

The literature frequently mentions WhatsApp as strengthening both formal and informal communication and relationships, accelerating communication, and transforming into interactive communication. Lacayo-Mendoza and de Pablos-Heredero (2016) also stated that social media is a powerful tool that allows the development of corporate relations. According to Njuguna (2021), communication between leaders and subordinates is also an essential enabler in organizational learning. Ahmad (2018) also stated that an optimistic situation has emerged that improves informal communication and friendship between subordinates and superiors. In this study, many participants used expressions in the same direction and stated that WhatsApp plays an important role in improving corporate communication and relations. The role of the administrator in the organizational communication which is expressed by the participants is also emphasized in Dasgupta and Singh (2012). They mentioned the impact of administrative managerial communication on employees' attitudes and behaviors; if managerial communication is collaborative, based on respect and trust, and allows participation and autonomy, it contributes to the happiness and better performance of employees. The fact that managerial communication does not have these features creates a negative environment.

WhatsApp groups, which increase cooperation among faculty members, lead the academic environment to a higher quality process by providing necessary sharing and support in case of information needs. In line with Levine et al. (2012)'s study, the employer expects communication tools will create an intellectual community within the organization and even outside the office boundaries. It is noteworthy that the participants emphasized a two-way exchange of information with colleagues, especially using the phrase "exchange", give and take. This reveals the contribution of WhatsApp groups in the transformation of communication into interactive.

Talking about the contribution of WhatsApp to coordination, the participants especially emphasized that it accelerates communication, leads to effective teamwork, improves collaboration, increases productivity, and improves resource utilization (Pozin and Nawi, 2018). In this context, team coordination is the effectiveness of sharing knowledge and information among team members to complete the task; team expertise, on the other hand, represents the knowledge of the members in different fields by the common belief in "who knows what" (Urien et al., 2019). Attalla et al. (2020) stated that since everyone who is a member will see the posts made on WhatsApp, group members can be engaged. The simultaneous delivery of the messages from the WhatsApp group to all units ensures instant information sharing, the effectiveness of the work done by the uniformity of the units. These opportunities allow an uninterrupted execution and continuity of the work. In other words, this situation produces a result that is compatible with the nature of coordination. Dolphin (2005) also claimed that managers should be responsible for creating an effective communication network.

While some participants emphasized that sharing on WhatsApp groups in the context of psycho-social impact did not pose a problem in terms of work-life balance, some participants stated that they were uncomfortable with this issue. Some of the participants claimed the reason as the postings made through these groups stretched the limits of working hours to the concept of overtime. However, some were not bothered by this stretching and stated that they were content with sharing information outside the working hours and that this situation allowed prior planning. According to studies, work-life balance can be disrupted due to role conflicts. For example, the conflict that occurs due to the lack of sufficient time or energy for the requirements of both business and family life is an example of role conflict (Doğan et al., 2020).

The participants expressed that they have information about both work and daily life through the posts about socialization, stated that these correspondences strengthen their relations and contribute to their socialization.

Some participants, who drew attention to the negative aspects of the use of WhatsApp groups for administrative purposes, mentioned that they could not express themselves adequately and emphasized that there could be misunderstandings and this sharing would not be as effective as verbal communication. In addition, they stated that unnecessary and excessive information sharing declines the quality of communication.

Globally, using WhatsApp and similar communication tools has become a part of daily life. In the case of Turkey, it can be said that being under the dominance of a culture that adopts collective communication has a vital role in this transformation. Kemp (2021) states that 87.5% of the total population actively uses the WhatsApp application in the findings of the number of social media users related to Turkey in his research. This result can be considered as a pressing indicator of a radical change in the culture of communication tools. Digital messaging platforms such as WhatsApp have started to create a common communication culture all over the world. In this case, "Is the world moving towards uniformity in communication?" can be the question raised.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In the study, the personal opinions and ideas of academic administrators were consulted. The approval has been received from the Aksaray University Human Research Ethics Committee to comply with scientific ethics. This research examined in-depth the views of academic administrators who are included in WhatsApp groups established for administrative purposes in higher education organizations, on work-life balance, administrative processes, communication management, and information sharing process. As a result of evaluating the findings obtained from the data collected in this study, the participants drew attention to very interesting issues about the use of WhatsApp for administrative purposes in higher education institutions. One of the most emphasized ones is related to the use of an electronic document management system (EDMS). In recent years, formal corporate communication has been done through an EDMS to share documents formally. The participants emphasized that while all kinds of formal documents are shared via EDMS, nowadays since the employees did not check/use the system on time, the administrators had to send the same content or further explanation via WhatsApp. Furthermore, it appears that staff tardiness is not the only reason why WhatsApp has become an alternative to EDMS. It can be said that some of the impositions and obligations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic process (urgency of work, flexible working hours, etc.) have paved the way for WhatsApp groups to gain an organizational character.

These new conditions have brought a new standpoint to the agenda. For example, the perception of the concept of overtime work has started to change completely. The flexibility of space and time in the communication made in these groups has rendered the concept of work evolve into a 24/7 understanding. While there are employees who affirm this situation, there are also those who criticize the developments.

Many participants expressed a dissenting opinion regarding the inclusion of non-work-related social sharing in administrative WhatsApp communication groups. In addition, the fact that a text message written over the group turns into an everlasting record is also criticized. Although messages are augmented with emoji in these groups, it may be that not all content representing emotions can be expressed in written communication and does not show the real intention and personality of the people. This deficiency also applies to communication via WhatsApp. The ability of people to say what they want to say in WhatsApp groups more easily was evaluated both positively and negatively. Despite some isolated criticism, many participants expressed a positive opinion that these groups accelerate communication, make it more effective, increase cooperation, and contribute to socialization.

Based on the findings of the study, the following may be suggested to the administrators:

1. Taking measures to prevent sharing EDMS professional information-documents via WhatsApp informal communication groups,

2. Preventing the concept of overtime extending to a 24/7 understanding, not allowing violations of "personal space" caused by business-related posts made especially at very late hours,
3. Respecting the sensitivity of those who do not want to share or receive information from these groups regarding social communication,
4. Carrying out necessary studies to determine usable measures for the more effective use of the groups in providing administrative, group, and academic cooperation,
5. Tolerating delayed responses of employees to the posts made on WhatsApp by administrators,
6. Ensuring and supporting the sustainability of communication via WhatsApp with affirmative rules and guides,
7. Taking measures to ascertain the security and privacy of information and documents shared for administrative purposes and ensuring confidentiality at the same time.

It is suggested that this study, which is made specifically concerning WhatsApp use, should be expanded to include other social media communication tools in the future, and the subject should be explored by reaching a wider academic audience, not just academic administrators.

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Yazarların çalışmadaki katkı oranları %33,3/%33,3/%33,3 şeklindedir.
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In this study, the rules specified within the scope of the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were followed.