

Functions, Influences & Effects of WhatsApp Use During the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia

Mohd Fatrim Syah Abd Karim¹ & Mohd Syuhaidi Abu Bakar¹

¹ Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation, Universiti Teknologi MARA

Correspondence: Mohd Syuhaidi Abu Bakar, Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. E-mail: syuhaidi@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract

On March 18, 2020, the Malaysian government took a firm position to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic by putting in effect the Movement Control Order (MCO). By that time, Malaysia had recorded deaths and the number of infections was hundreds. During this period, in addition to the use of popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for rapid information communication, the WhatsApp messaging app was also heavily relied upon during the MCO. In addition to providing information, WhatsApp was also considered to play an important role in daily tasks as well as in education. This article discusses the functions, influences and effects of the use of WhatsApp among Malaysians during the MCO. This research conducted a structured interview with 10 informants from diverse backgrounds and age range. The data was then transcribed verbatim. Analysis of the results revealed that WhatsApp's main functions were to facilitate communication with family members and employers, as well as the means for a rapid exchange of information. On the other hand, the informants revealed that some information shared in WhatsApp was unreliable since there were irresponsible people who were creating and sharing fake news. The informants were also aware that the dissemination of fake news will cause mass panic among the Malaysians. As such, the informants would refer to reliable sources to determine the authenticity of the news they have encountered. This action reflected a mature attitude using WhatsApp during the MCO.

Keywords: Functions, Influences, Effects, WhatsApp, Movement Control Order, Malaysia

1. Introduction and Review of Literature

There is a plethora of web and mobile applications that are used as a means of information transmission and communication with others. The WhatsApp messaging app has been popular among users in Malaysia since 2010. According to a report by TNS Global, Internet users in Malaysia accounted for 77% of WhatsApp users, which was among the highest in the world. This demonstrates the importance that WhatsApp has as the medium of communication, which is mainly cemented in the fact that it provides free messaging services and a user-friendly group messaging tool. These two aspects attract Malaysian consumers and have made WhatsApp a popular communication platform (BERNAMA, 2017).

According to Gelles & Goel (2014), WhatsApp was developed on February 24, 2009 by two former employees of Yahoo, Jan Koum and Brian Acton, who named the application as WhatsApp Inc. Development was based on the realization that WhatsApp could be the alternative to the existing text messaging application, which was much more rigid, not easy to use and costly. In its early stages, WhatsApp was not an instant hit and Koum and Acton almost gave up. After several improvements, WhatsApp Inc was operational on the Apps Store in November 2009. From there, the application was easily accepted by consumers. As of February 2013, the application had almost 200 million users and this number increases by year. In September 2015, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg bought WhatsApp for 16 billion USD.

The widespread use of WhatsApp nowadays certainly has its positive and negative implications. According to Blaszkiewicz, Sariyska, Montag, Lanchmann, Andone, Trendafilov, Eibes & Markowetz (2015), the use of smartphones interrupts daily activities such as working and socializing. One of the causes is that addiction users have to constantly check and pass unverified information through WhatsApp. In addition, many are also carried away when communicating with friends in a group chat, as the members would share a common interest. For example, there are groups that talk about stamps collection, interesting videos and latest news. WhatsApp, on the

other hand, is known to have been used as a source for news and information. It is known for being used to stop many crimes around the world. Today, WhatsApp has surpassed many online news sites as the fastest way to spread information to many users around the world.

Bunyan (2020) states that Malaysia implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March 2020 under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967 as a way to curb the spread of COVID-19. By then, the COVID-19 had claimed lives and caused many to be infected. The MCO has also closed the Malaysian borders. In the light of how the disease is highly infectious and deadly, this drastic move by the government is definitely imperative.

Referring to the opinions of Christensen & Senthilingan (2020), Coronavirus or COVID-19 is a virus that originates in animals. Scientists have explained that the virus is zoonotic in nature, which means it can be passed from animals to humans. The first cases of COVID-19 were reported in December 2019 in Wuhan China, where more than 3,000 people died and more than 50,000 people were infected. One of the causes of the spread of this virus outside of China was the exodus of the Chinese people. Fear of this virus has made them flee to other countries, in fact and without knowing it, carrying the virus with them.

According to Malaysia's Minister of Communications and Multimedia, Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah, the people have a responsibility to verify the authenticity of any news concerning COVID-19 and the MCO before sharing it on any social media platform. He added that it is important to practice good values in exercising their freedom of information transmission, as the government will not hesitate to take firm and swift legal action against those who spread fake news, as the action can cause panic and tensions that could lead to irreversible consequences (BERNAMA, 2020).

Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, the Senior Minister (Security) took to The Malaysian National Security Council (NSC) official website to declare an intransigent stance against those who spread fake news on WhatsApp as a response to the increasingly worrying trend of false information circulating on the application regarding the MCO. He also stressed the danger of transmitting unconfirmed news as it had the potential to threaten public safety and harmony. He also adds that this situation has revealed individuals out there who irresponsibly spread information without checking its legitimacy. During this period, WhatsApp was also trying to control fake news on its platform, as the effects rippled internationally as well. The medium introduced a measure that made it possible to transmit information on COVID-19 to a single person. This initiative by the founder of Facebook was hoped to assist in curbing fake news, especially in Malaysia with its high number of users (Yaakob, 2020).

The transmission of fake news, according to Halid (2020), has an effect on the mental health of older people. This is not surprising as older people face more significant risk of being hit by COVID-19. Information received in WhatsApp about COVID-19 tends to create psychological stress in them, as they are more likely to believe this type of information. One of the reasons is that information is most often passed on by people they trust. Dr S. Ponnusamy, a senior lecturer and researcher from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), said that COVID-19 had a direct effect on the psychological well-being of the elderly in Malaysia, as fake news about COVID-19 was found to cause stress and depression among older people. He also argued that Malaysians were unaware of the danger of spreading fake news with data showing 95 per cent of messages received on WhatsApp regarding COVID-19 and the MCO were found to be untrue.

The spread of fake news through the WhatsApp messaging app clearly has terrible consequences. Malaysians must show greater empathy before sharing any news, taking into account those who may be emotionally affected by COVID-19 and the implementation of the MCO. The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the functions, influences and effects of the use of WhatsApp during the MCO in Malaysia.

1.1 Functions, Influences & Effects of WhatsApp Use

Church & Oliveira (2013) warns that the unethical use of WhatsApp will result in more problems in the future that will shadow its positive use. In India, Farooq (2018) confirms that WhatsApp is the main choice for over 200 million active users. However, this application is widely used to circulate propaganda and fake news in India. It is not surprising that politicians use WhatsApp as a means to spread messages imbued with their own agenda during election seasons. An example of this situation is the Uttar Pradesh election in 2017, where a politician created more than 10,000 groups in WhatsApp to spread unverified news and biased propaganda to curry favours and votes. The politician reportedly won the election race by this method (Verma, 2017). This example illustrates how common it is to abuse WhatsApp use.

The same situation appears to be reflected in Brazil. According to Sousa, Messias, Resende, Melo, Vasconcelos, Almeida & Benevenuto (2019), winning an election in Brazil by creating fake news on WhatsApp is not new.

This is the standard for any political publicist to circulate information that can highlight a political party in a good or bad way depending on the agenda in question, although almost 70% of this information is unfounded. The main objective of this method are the groups created on WhatsApp, where information from opposing political parties is shared. This exchange of information is often accompanied by pictures to convince people of good and bad accusations, and is part of a systematic political campaign. The low cost and speed with which the information can be sent to any target group makes it a powerful tool during elections. Moreover, this practice is rampant as many WhatsApp users the world over have little to no knowledge of information literacy, so they are easy to manipulate.

On the other hand, WhatsApp is also a useful tool to support learning. Khalid, Daud & Karim (2012) conducted research on collaborative learning through technology and found 56 bachelor's students from 10 different disciplines who confirm WhatsApp as a more conducive platform for collaborative learning, compared to other means such as email, Facebook, Telegram and others. Despite WhatsApp's role in spreading fake news, its uses in higher education learning cannot be denied. Among the reasons students can opt for WhatsApp compared to other tools are its features, which make it possible to create groups and send information easily and instantly. The group creation function is also widely used by instructors of higher education institutions to communicate with students, with students more likely to participate in discussions with teachers in WhatsApp. WhatsApp has a significant impact on higher education learning, which is confirmed by respondents who feel that the application contributes to making the learning process effective.

WhatsApp has also been found to be effective in spreading religious ideologies and sermons. Raihan & Nordin (2019) studies the effectiveness of WhatsApp in spreading Islamic values. Four constructs were identified in the research, which were teenager's acceptance to WhatsApp as the means to spread religious values, the interest in the religious topic sent through WhatsApp, changes that have been the direct result of religious messages on WhatsApp and the sharing of religious values on WhatsApp. A survey of 100 teenagers was done to investigate these four constructs and it was found that all respondents agreed that WhatsApp was a reliable platform for spreading religious values and teachings. The researcher stressed the need for a study on whether WhatsApp can be used as a means to spread religious teachings as it can be used by today's Islamic preachers for something good. Thanks to this particular research, it is clear that WhatsApp can be a good agent, especially in communicating positive values instantly to many through group chats.

According to Salleh, Ekhwan & Salman (2019) WhatsApp also has significant power to influence public relations with authorities. The study identified the role of WhatsApp in the relationship between the public and The Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) in Seremban district. The study found that WhatsApp was an essential tool for bridging the gap between the people and the police. This is because the public needs information from authorities to help maintain a harmonious community. At the same time, they stressed the importance of monitoring the information transmitted through WhatsApp to ensure that no one is using the tool to create mistrust between authorities and the masses. WhatsApp must always be monitored to ensure the ethical use of the platform.

2. Method

A structured interview was conducted with 10 informants who were all active users of WhatsApp from various backgrounds and age groups. The data collected from informants were compiled and analyzed to investigate the functions, influences and effects of the use of WhatsApp during the MCO.

All informants expressed differing views on the functions, influences and effects of using WhatsApp during the MCO. This may be due to the fact that the informants had a different employment status. In addition, college and school students were also interviewed, as they were affected by the MCO. The following Table 1 illustrates the informants' information:

Table 1. Information regarding the informants of study

Informants Code	Age	Career/ Occupation
Y11	48	Headmistress
Y12	33	Lawyer
Y13	23	Soldier
Y14	17	High School Student
Y15	22	College Student

Y16	28	Civil Servant
Y17	38	Civil Servant
Y18	56	Kindergarten Teacher
Y19	29	Private Sector Worker
Y20	27	Hospital Worker

3. Results

3.1 The Functions of WhatsApp During the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia

The structured interview with the 10 informants revealed a wide range of uses for WhatsApp, especially as a means of communicating information during the MCO. Since everyone was required to stay home during the MCO, WhatsApp was used as a tool to facilitate information, work and learning. One of WhatsApp's key roles during the MCO included disseminating information, exchanging information, facilitating learning, communicating with others and maintaining close relationships among friends and family members.

3.1.1 Information Dissemination

According to Informant Y15, "I agree that compared to any news outlets, WhatsApp is a more efficient and faster way to transmit information about the MCO as I don't own a television". On the other hand, informant Y16 stated "I don't agree that WhatsApp should be used as the platform to share news. This is because there is more fake news around. This can destabilise public peace. All news should be verified by the National Security Council before it can be passed on to others".

Informant Y13 replied that "All individuals should exercise caution when passing news or information during the MCO". In addition, Informant Y13 stressed that the public should be aware of the impact that every news has on the populace, as each person might have different ways to process information. In addition to the age factor, this may also be due to the inability of some to access another source of news. This view was supported by Informant Y20, where he stated that the ones fighting the virus at the front line are the ones most affected by the spread of fake news. This is because most of the fake news that were circulated in many group chats was about clinics and hospitals. Family members working in the health sectors were worried and many asked their loved ones to take leave from work or even quit. WhatsApp users should ensure that they do not share unverified information as they may have a negative impact on others.

Informants' responses revealed low public awareness of the exchange of information and news in WhatsApp during the MCO. Even though the informants were aware of the danger of fake news on WhatsApp, they were also conscious of the limitation they had in stopping it from spreading to family members and frontline workers. Moreover, while acknowledging the importance that WhatsApp had in relaying information, they emphasized the vital need to check before sharing with others.

3.1.2 Information Sharing

Informant Y11 felt that a sense of responsibility should exist in all when sharing information with friends, family members and others. Informant Y11 stated the following, "I had to remind a teacher not to share an information of how the hot weather might be able to kill the virus in COVID-19". She also confirmed that she took it upon herself to police the information that came to her because she did not want fake news to be a culture among her teachers, if not dissuaded from the beginning. Someone must remind others not to aggravate the situation regarding COVID-19 and MCO, since there were students who could not leave Kuala Lumpur when the MCO began. This could cause unnecessary panic to those who live and study in Kuala Lumpur.

On the other hand, Informant Y18 also agreed that WhatsApp was very important to keep students calm during the MCO, as they could make video calls to family members. It eased all the worries they had. This was particularly true for those with family in Sabah. In addition, lessons continued to be conducted online and WhatsApp has been one of the platforms used for this purpose. The Y15 Informant also agreed that WhatsApp made it easy to stay in touch with friends and relatives during the MCO. She stated that, "Video calls helped me keep my family and colleagues updated with my state of being. I think WhatsApp is a popular medium of communication because the video calls can be made at no cost."

The responses of the informants show that any information relayed must be verified so as not to cause unnecessary concern and panic to any party, which might be afraid to read terrifying news. The time has come for the public to learn how to be responsible for certain information.

3.1.3 Learning Facilitation

When the MCO came into force on March 18, 2020, schools, colleges and universities were still in session. Sudden interruption has definitely impacted students and teachers in a significant way. However, this has been mitigated by WhatsApp when teachers and lecturers created groups to facilitate learning. Students must maintain close contact with teachers and lecturers as this is imperative for their learning. According to Informant Y15, “Communications from the lecturers were important, as we were at the end of the semester and the final examination was around the corner”. Informant Y14 revealed that he and his friends were in shock when the MCO began. However, the classes continued to be online and the teachers still expected the tasks were still expected to be completed. In short, learning has continued, albeit in a more challenging and new way. However, Informant Y14 believes that e-learning allows students to be closer to teachers, facilitating the direct consultation of their teachers on issues that are difficult.

Informant Y15, a college student, revealed that during the MCO, learning occurred in groups on WhatsApp. Lecturers relied on different groups of WhatsApp to assign assignments since all students were users of this app. Lecturers would also disseminate information and instruction regarding any assignment to ensure that all students understand the requirements. This experience was echoed by Informant Y11, “I just started my duty as the headmistress of a school in February this year. I was not very aware of the platform prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Google Meet, to be used as a way of communicating. So I used video calls in WhatsApp to communicate with my teachers and staff. This application has had many uses during the MCO, especially for schools and students”.

The importance of WhatsApp during MCO to facilitate learning is undeniable. This application helped lecturers and teachers to continue the teaching and learning process while helping students to adapt to the new norm. All assignments and homework were administered through the platform, allowing students to stay on the same page and communicate feedback. This created an enabling learning environment, although WhatsApp was originally designed to be used as a messaging app.

3.1.4 Communication with Others

WhatsApp is certainly an application that is intended to be used to communicate, be it in the learning or professional environment. Communication during the work was particularly important during the MCO. Some might feel that it was a new medium on which work can be done, while others used WhatsApp regularly in their professional lives. According to Informant Y16, “WhatsApp is used by the superiors to relay work information in a quick manner”. Informant Y17 also agreed with this opinion stating, “We had to operate as usual, since the National Registration Department (NRD) is listed as an essential service. I was very apprehensive about coming to work as I have a small child at home and I was afraid I would be exposed to the virus. However, the top managements at work communicated all information regarding the MCO and the standard operating procedures to curb COVID-19 at workplace. It certainly dispelled any fear and doubts I had”.

According to Informant Y16, WhatsApp is perfect as a means of communication when working, as it also has voice recording tool to send any message without the hassle of typing. This practice is cost-effective as phone calls would incur charges that change all the time. Informant Y19 said, “I use the voice note tool as it saves me a lot of time compared to typing. Time is of the essence when working and I truly appreciate this aspect in WhatsApp. My bosses also use WhatsApp to communicate work instructions instead of email”. The responses of the informants concerning the WhatsApp functions during the MCO shows that the application fulfilled its roles during the period in question. The areas of work affected by the MCO relied on WhatsApp to ensure that all work tasks were carried out.

3.1.5 Maintaining Close Relationship

The main function of WhatsApp, as agreed by everyone is that it helps to maintain and strengthen relationships among family members. It also plays an important role in strengthening relationships between employees and the employer, among employees, as well as students and teachers. During the MCO, many people showed a more loving attitude towards the well-being of others. “Kita Jaga Kita” was the slogan spread during this time. This was admitted by Informant Y13 who stated, “The MCO brought family members, friends and colleagues close together. I was tasked to monitor the students and roadblocks during the MCO, and found myself reminding the public to adhere to the MCO guidelines”.

Aside from that, parents with children stranded on campuses in higher education institutions contacted them twice as often as they would before the MCO. This has been done to ensure that their children are safe and healthy. WhatsApp has bridged family relationships, as family members encouraged each other in group

WhatsApp to go through the MCO together. This was acknowledged by Informant Y11 who confirmed, "I video-called my child who was stuck on campus daily to reassure her. I would also advise her on several occasions not to leave his room unless absolutely necessary."

Based on the feedback from informants on the five functions of WhatsApp during the MCO, it can be said that the application has contributed to facilitating the lives of its users, either at work or in learning. If WhatsApp wasn't around during the MCO, users would have to pay a lot of money for voice and video calls. This would certainly be a burden on users. With WhatsApp around, all users need to spend money was on the Internet connection of their telecommunications providers.

3.2 The Influences of the Use of WhatsApp During the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia

Many informants admitted that WhatsApp has a great influence on their daily lives. Because of the speed at which information travels in WhatsApp, many things can happen. This was much more pronounced during the MCO as many were using WhatsApp to pour their hearts out to family members and friends about their concerns about life, work, and other aspects. Emotional control played an important role in using WhatsApp when the MCO was first announced. This may be due to the fact that many have been forced to adapt to the new standard of communication, learning and online work. Most Malaysians have been very new in the idea of operating through different online applications to get work, learning or daily tasks accomplished. This has created changes in many areas of a person's life caused by WhatsApp influences on the following aspects; behaviours, academic performance, quality of life and on work.

3.2.1 The Influence on the User's Behavior

Like so many social applications around, WhatsApp has also created changes in user behaviour. Informant Y17 confirmed this, saying, "WhatsApp has the ability to modify communication behaviours". This opinion was echoed by Informant Y15, who explained, "WhatsApp can influence the way one communicates and socialises with others. On WhatsApp, we don't talk in the normal way. Our behaviours are definitely different on WhatsApp and in real life".

This change in behavior could be positive and negative. However, Informant Y12 agreed that during the MCO, the public behaved more admirably by being sensitive to the well-being of others. The influence that WhatsApp has had on its users has also been positive, as can be seen in messages exchanged between people who cared about the status of others. According to Informant Y19, "My family members and friends were constantly asking about my welfare, even more so after I lost my mother-in-law during the MCO. I was able to get through it all with their support. In my opinion, WhatsApp can influence the way I think and feel". WhatsApp's influence on user behaviour was different before and during MCO. The responses of the informants were based on their individual reflection as the MCO changed the way they see themselves, the family and society in general, which were all influenced by the new norm brought by COVID-19.

3.2.2 The Influence on Academic Performance

Many parents were skeptical whether their children would be able to adapt to the new way of learning by WhatsApp. Teachers and lecturers administered homework and notes through WhatsApp groups. In retrospect, it can be said that there was nothing new in the teaching and learning process, except that they were on a different medium. Informant Y11 explained that, "Homework is one of the ways to remind students that the school is still in session, albeit online". On the other hand, Informant Y18 reported that, "I had to help my grandchild with school work such as memorizing the multiplication tables and also the Quranic verses. After 3 weeks, I could sense an improvement in her studies. Her academic performance was much better than when she was spending learning at school. Maybe this style of learning suits her". This trend is also reflected in the higher education environment. According to Informant Y14, "The lessons done through WhatsApp group and Google Meet were easy to follow". Informant Y15 also concurred, saying, "WhatsApp has been a part of learning for a while now. We could reach out to lecturers whenever we have questions. However, the lectures done during the MCO were easier to understand than when we were in classrooms".

3.2.3 The Influence on Working Environment

The MCO has particularly affected the areas of work. It's changed the way everybody works. Occupations requiring physical presence were made to fully function online, and the transition proved to be difficult during the first days of the MCO. According to Informant Y11, "I had to relearn everything and the pace of my work has changed. I had this urge to want everything to be in front of my eyes for me to fulfil my tasks". This feeling was shared with Informant Y19. She worked with a company that required her to count and track the number of products that were coming in and going out, as well as make sure that the selected items were sent to the post

office to be mailed. Many of the affected staff worked in marketing and it was also done at home. The informant reported that she had to resign from his position because of her inability to cope with the pressures and expectations of management.

It is unsurprising that the implementation of the MCO was not welcomed by many, as it added to the already demanding conditions of the workplace. For Informant Y16, the change was something he had to face in his work, saying, "My line of work requires me to meet people. The MCO definitely puts a dampen on this process". Informant Y17 on the other hand said, "The MCO changed the way my team and I work. At night, we would discuss the tasks for the next day, so that everyone knows what work they need to finish. Even though the MCO is in full effect, we still need to settle our clients' matters at the National Registration Departments (NRD)".

Responses to WhatsApp influences in all three aspects during the MCO revealed that the application was an important means of communication. At the same time, it also affects behaviors when working and studying.

3.3 The Effects of the Use of WhatsApp During the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia

Each communication application has a positive and negative impact on users. Users should be careful to share and disseminate information not only on COVID-19 and the MCO, but also about other topics. It must be treated as something normal to consider in disseminating information about any means of interaction. The use of WhatsApp affects certain areas such as mind and psychology, contributes to technology addiction, affected health, and family relationships. All informants agreed on these aspects as they believed that an application such as WhatsApp has positive and negative effects on the user.

3.3.1 The Effects on the Psychology and Mind

Implementation of the MCO caused substantial impacts on the psychology and mind of many. This has been exacerbated by the spread of fake news on WhatsApp groups. Informant Y18 was of the opinion that, "Many people of my age believed everything they read on WhatsApp". This caused emotional stress. According to Informant Y20, "Those who are in the habit of sharing fake news are the ones trusted by many. Others would believe what this person passed on without checking the validity of the news".

The psychological effect fake news has on users should not be undermined. Informant Y17 said, "If you can't check the origin and veracity of any news, don't share it, as frightening news can affect some people's emotion badly". Informant Y13 shared this opinion, saying the sharing of fake news creates confusion and emotional distress. The informant, who was one of the people working on the front lines, had to show additional patience as road users were showing him news and road regulations on WhatsApp. He had to correct them several times during a day.

WhatsApp certainly had psychological impact on everyone, especially the elderly. The public should be more vigilant and responsible in sharing news, in particular those related to COVID-19 and MCO.

3.3.2 The Effects of Technology Addiction

Technology addiction in everyone has different ways of adapting and accepting any technology. There are students who refuse to stop chatting on WhatsApp as it is one of the ways to unwind and connect with friends. This connection was not made only by chat. It was strengthened through a common interest shared within a group. An example of this is the game group. According to Informant Y14, "WhatsApp introduced a lot of people who shared the same interest as mine. We played game day and night". On the other hand, Informant Y19 lamented, "My husband is addicted to gaming and he plays all day and all night during the MCO. I was always losing my patience with him, as he chatted with his friends in the gaming group, while he was playing games. This is definitely an addiction".

Any addiction depends on the individual environment. One example is the MCO itself, where the situation and the environment have a direct effect on a person's behaviour. According to Informant Y17, "My child stays on his phone 24 hours a day during MCO. Most of the time he would be on video calls with his friends". Regarding this, Informant Y11 continued with, "I don't mind them staying in contact as long as they are talking about their studies. However, that is not the case. Most of the video calls about everything except their studies. It was because of boredom, since no one was allowed to leave their homes unless it was for something important".

The effects of this addiction to social applications such as WhatsApp during the MCO were due to the feeling of isolation at home.

3.3.3 The Effects on Health

The MCO disrupted everyone's daily routine. When communication occurred only to relieve the boredom of staying at home, it led to different degrees of health issue. One of them was the irregular lack of sleep and

tension in the muscles around the hands after holding on a device for a long period of time. Informant Y18 said, “My sleep pattern was not synced during the MCO. My friends in one of the WhatsApp groups were still chatting at 3 in the morning”. Informant Y14 shared his experience as a student, “Usually, students would have their own WhatsApp group. We talked a lot. Teachers gave a lot of homework during the MCO and we would do them at 2 or 3 in the morning. It was normal for us, but the lack of sleep did give me headaches in the morning when my parents woke me up”.

Uncontrolled use of WhatsApp is not good for anyone, especially students. They fall into the category of users who tend to go overboard when doing something without any regard to their own health and well-being. Parents play an important role in advising these students to make sure that these behaviors are not becoming a habit. Taking care of their health is of the utmost importance during the MCO, as it should not belong to the category of those at greater risk of being infected with COVID-19.

3.3.4 The Effects on Family Relationships

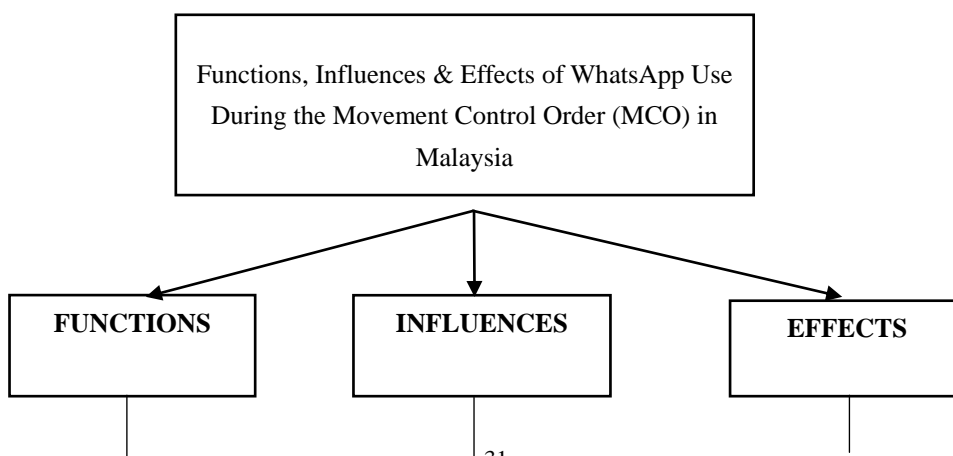
The technology can create a bridge or gap in a family. Not everyone is eager to join the family WhatsApp group as this is considered as tedious. According to Informant Y18, “The young generation of today does not communicate with their extended family member and older relatives much. The technology has changed them”. This was agreed by Informant Y12 who stated that WhatsApp offered the tools to create more groups, such as that populated by family members. However, millennials would have left these groups as they were not very interested in meeting extended family members. There were many who refused to come home for the celebration of Hari Raya. Today's teens like being on social networks and talk to friends more than they would with their families.

Su & Zakiah (2014) said communication is important in any family. Today's technology has changed the behavior of many teenagers, where they communicate with their family members and friends through WhatsApp. It should not be used as a reason why teenagers do not want to socialise with family members.

4. Framework of Result

The functions, influences and effects of the use of WhatsApp during the MCO have clearly demonstrated that users today depend greatly on the application for fast communication and its ability to facilitate work and study. Ariffin & Idris (2018) explained that WhatsApp has been recognized as a very useful means of communication not only for students but also for professionals and the general public. However, users must understand the limitation of each communication application. They are encouraged to learn about the impacts and risks of using any social media platform. Everyone should be ethical. Based on the 3 main focus of this research into WhatsApp use during the MCO in Malaysia, a framework of results has been developed to clearly illustrate this research.

Five functions have been explored for the WhatsApp usage function: Information Dissemination, Information Sharing, Learning Facilitation, Communication With Others; and Maintaining Close Relationships. With respect to the influence of the use of WhatsApp, three main influences have been explored, which are The Influence On The User's Behavior, The Influence On Academic Performance; and The Influence On Working Environment. On the other hand, four effects of using WhatsApp were explored, which were The Effects On The Psychology And Mind, The Effects Of Technology Addiction, The Effects On Health; and The Effects On Family Relationships. The framework for the findings of this study can be interpreted as follows:



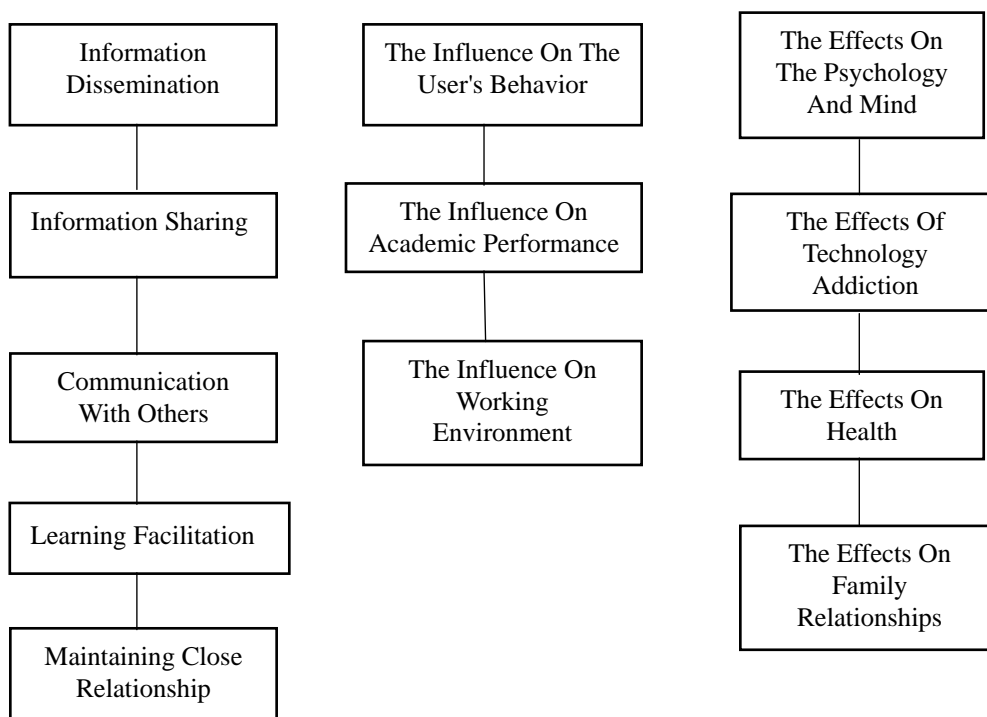


Figure 1. Functions, Influences & Effects of WhatsApp Use During the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that WhatsApp has played an important role in Malaysia since the implementation of the MCO on March 18, 2020. The application was used by Malaysians to get information and stay connected with each other. This application had a number of functions in relation to relationships. It also had influence on the psychology of the user. This research also revealed that WhatsApp had both positive and negative impact on users. However, this has mostly been determined by the users themselves. They should refrain from spreading unverified news, especially during the MCO as this would adversely affect the elderly. Like any other social networking platform, WhatsApp had its strength and weakness. WhatsApp users must exercise control so that the use does not bring any negative aspects.

This study recommends that the government implement a stricter measure by creating a WhatsApp line that users can use to report any fake news. According to Muhamad (2020), the Health director-general, Datuk Dr Noor Hisham had remarked how the fight against COVID-19 was done at the same time as the war against fake news. In fact, the Health director-general felt that the spread of unfounded news was much faster than the virus in question. He also acknowledged how worrying this situation was. Public awareness of the dangers of fake news is still low and that was why he stressed the importance of educating the public at the beginning of the MCO. With early education on these issues, the public could adapt more quickly to the new norm. Preventing fake news on WhatsApp should not be based solely on government efforts. The public has a role to play in monitoring the information presented.

During the MCO, many individuals were arrested and accused of spreading fake news. This serves as a warning to others to think before they transmit any information they receive. The government's efforts to prevent the spread of fake news are commendable. However, to make people understand the dangers of fake news, a more stringent and drastic measure must be taken. WhatsApp as a fast communication medium is suitable for transmitting any government information, in particular regarding COVID-19 and MCO. However, the proliferation of fake news on WhatsApp is making people doubtful of the trustworthiness of any information on this application. It would be much better for the application and users if everyone is more responsible and careful when sharing any piece of information.

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