Influence of Social Media Chat on English Writing Skills of the Students

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Abstract: *The advancements in technology have cast a shadow on people belonging to all walks of life. The life of youth is incomplete without the use of technology. Mobile phones have become a necessity in their lives. Invent of internet gifted mobile phones with many new applications e.g. WhatsApp, Twitter, Snapchat, etc. WhatsApp is the easiest and the most user-friendly application among all has gained tremendous importance in the lives of youth. WhatsApp users are rising each day as every new invention comes up with many advantages as well as disadvantages. The present study attempts to study the effects of WhatsApp messenger on formal writing of students by using a mixed research design i.e. two research tools have been used for the collection of data, one is quantitative in the form of a questionnaire whereas the other one is qualitative like the assessment of students essays. Resultantly, it was found that the language they use in texting while using WhatsApp messenger often deviates from the spelling and grammar rules of a standard language. It was observed that the informal style of writing developed due to excessive use of WhatsApp is reflected even in the formal writing of the students. The linguistic expressions used over WhatsApp by most of the students affect their writing skills negatively.*

Introduction

The dawn of the twenty-first century brought with it many innovations and advancements in the field of science and technology. New methods of communication were introduced. The traditional communication means were abandoned, and modern ones were adopted. These modern technological methods influenced the life of each individual on the planet in such a way that today, it seems hard to escape the world of networking. Technology changed the lifestyles of people in a number of ways starting from dressing to communication manners and world, universal or international perceptions. It has bridged the gap among individuals and has brought them closer. The world has become a global village in its true sense due to the miracles of the age of information technology. It is due to this technology that a man living in a busy capital of the first world country gets connected to a man residing in a far-flung backward village of Africa. Technology has occupied a very significant space in the life of every individual. The lives of the masses have become technologically handicapped. The day of modern man starts and ends with the use of technology. Right after getting up in the morning, the first thing they check is their cell phones. Similarly, the last thing before they go to bed is also the same. In short, it can be said that the life of modern man is surrounded by technology. Technology has helped man to evolve and grow in his knowledge. Social networking sites are recognized as an important resource for education today.

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Researches show that the students of the youth are at a more advantageous position in reaping the benefits of technology as compared to the older generations. The networking apps/sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are mostly used by younger populations like students. They are more exposed to and influenced by social media networks.

Social media is a means of electronic communication that enable individuals from different walks of life to interact and socialize with each other. It includes different websites and mobile applications used for social networking. Social media helps the users to create online communities in order to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as videos. Social media is very popular among people belonging from all generations, particularly the younger generation. It has served and influenced the younger generation in a number of ways. It has altered the lifestyle of its users by connecting it with many different cultures around the world.

The current study investigates the effects of WhatsApp on the writing skills of students and how the use of WhatsApp affects the writing skills of individuals.

The Rationale for the Study

It is observed that the language used for online communication through different social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, does not follow the standard language rules i.e. the spelling and grammar rules are overlooked in communicating informally on WhatsApp. In order to investigate this assumption, this study is conducted in which the researcher attempts to find out the effect of computer-mediated communication such as WhatsApp communication on the writing skills of individuals. The purpose of the study is to explore the effect of using WhatsApp writing among students and determine the opinion of the students toward the process. The research objectives of this study are: 1) to find out the effects of the use of WhatsApp on the writing skills of students 2) to study and evaluate the degree of effect the use of WhatsApp has on the writing skills of students. The study is very significant for the students as well as the teachers in understanding the effects of the use of Whatsapp on the writing skills of students. It helps the language learners to identify the habits posing hurdles in their way of learning language. It also informs the students to avoid the writing errors they make due to the overwhelming use of Whatsapp in their daily lives. The study is delimited to the effects of Whatsapp on the writing skills of students.

Research Questions

Following research questions were formulated for the present study:

1. What are the effects of WhatsApp messenger on the writing skills of students?

2. What are the common errors students commit in writing because of the influence of the informal language use in communication on WhatsApp?

Literature Review

"Man is known by the company he keeps" is a famous proverb. It means that we are influenced by the environment in which we live and the people with whom we consistently interact in terms of attitude, behavior, linguistic expression, habits, interest, likes, dislike, etc. It may be true in terms of the use of software applications, which have become part and parcel of human life in the present age of science and technology. The informal written or oral communication through this software affects the formal communication in various dimensions of linguistic elements or features that is in the use of spellings, words, phrases, sentences (grammatical or syntactical structures), culture-specific terms, etc. This phenomenon of segmental and suprasegmental features of communication is equally applicable to WhatsApp informal communication. People usually do not take care of accurate spelling, words, phrases, sentences etc., while communicating through WhatsApp.

A number of researches have so far been conducted on the impacts of WhatsApp use on language. Yeboah and Ewur (2014)

conducted a study entitled "The impact of WhatsApp messenger usage on students' performance in tertiary institutions in Ghana" that was published in the journal of Education & Practice. It mainly focused on the negative aspects of WhatsApp communication on the language. The study finally concluded that those students who frequently interacted through WhatsApp showed comparatively more linguistics errors than those who did not use WhatsApp a lot. Hence, WhatsApp communication has a negative impact on the language proficiency and accuracy of WhatsApp users.

Another study was carried out in the year 2012 under the name "Smartphone applications usage amongst students at South African University." The study investigated the use of social applications among the students and their impacts on the lives of users. It was observed that students spend an average of five hours per day interacting with different people by using their smart phones. Moreover, for 16 hours a day, students stay online from their smartphones through various software applications.

Furthermore, Riyanto (2013) concluded that WhatsApp is also a source of language learning and acquiring knowledge besides socializing with friends. Moreover, Rambe & Chipunza (2013) observe that students feel more freedom in learning by interacting through WhatsApp instead of a restricted environment where face-to-face interactions take place like formal education systems. They suggest that WhatsApp can be used as an important tool in disseminating knowledge and information among students. Similarly, Neelamalar & Chitra (2009) conducted a study to identify the issues regarding the youth's social networking usage and the resultant impact on their social interactions. In addition, another researcher Riyanto (2013) says that the non-native speakers of English can significantly improve their English skills by exchanging WhatsApp messages with their peers and instructors. Thus, they can learn the target language in a joyful manner and pleasant atmosphere. The same idea is supported by Motiwalla (2007), who asserts that mobile devices provide students with a fun-filled experience to learn a language instead of learning it through tiresome and boring classroom procedures.

Writing is a process in which the writers put their thoughts into meaningful words and convey their message. Writing is not an easy task; it is very difficult in the first language, so, in a foreign language, it is even more difficult. Therefore in learning a foreign language, the learners commit many errors. The common errors committed by the learners are errors in prepositions, articles, subject-verb agreement, infinitives, pronouns, gerunds, borrow words from the first language, spelling mistakes, and punctuations. Many of the sources cause these errors: first language interference, translation from the first language, the complex structure of the target language, general order of difficulty, and overgeneralization.

Different studies conducted across the globe have reflected positive as well as negative utilities of the software applications. The same application may be used to enhance or improve the accuracy and proficiency of a language with proper guidance and monitoring. It can be a good forum in this regard. However, through consistent informal, careless or non-serious communication, there may be multiple issues for the language accuracy and proficiency. Currently available studies highlight a considerable gap in this domain/area of research.

This particular study focuses on the impact of the use of WhatsApp on the writing skills of its users. WhatsApp is a frequently used application of social media. It is currently the most popular messaging application with the largest number of users. It helps users to privately and freely send messages to each other through their smartphones and also facilitates large group conversations. It requires a working internet connection in order to enable the users to communicate with each other. According to a report by Telegraph, WhatsApp is being used by more than a billion people of the world. It is different from text messaging in ways, that besides text messages WhatsApp users can send each other videos, images as well as audio messages. Owing to its increasing popularity, the WhatsApp application is

available for almost all smartphones. Moreover, the increasing use of smartphones among youth has further amplified the effects of WhatsApp on today's youth. Resultantly, the impacts of WhatsApp on lives, culture, and society keeps on increasing.

The present study focuses on the relationship between the use of WhatsApp and the writing skills of students. In view of the above literature review, this study will mainly focus on the writing skills of the students who use WhatsApp.

Research Methodology

The study in hand is mixed-method research. A mixed research design has been used accordingly. The data has also been collected and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The research study has been carried out by using quantitative as well as qualitative research instruments. A questionnaire was developed with ten items and used for the collection of quantitative data accordingly. In addition to that a writing assessment test was prepared and subsequently used for the collection of qualitative data. The questionnaire comprises multiple-choice questions (MCQs), open-ended as well as closed-ended. The

population for the current study comprises BS students of the department of Management sciences at NUML, Rawalpindi. The sample was chosen on the basis of non-random stratified sampling. A total number of 100 students from BS third of NUML Rawalpindi were selected as a sample for the study. The age group was between 18-21 years.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaires test was organized and analyzed very carefully. Data analysis tends to discover the impact of WhatsApp on the writing skills of students.

Analysis of Questionnaires

Questionnaires were distributed among hundred students. Out of 100 questionnaires, only 95 were received back. The analysis of retrieved questionnaires provided the following answers.

Question 1: Do you use social media in your daily life?

When asked if they use social networking sites in their daily life, all the participants answered yes.

Table 1.

	Yes	No
Number of students	95	00
Percentages	100%	0%

The results show that 100% of students use social media. This means that social networking sites are very important for them, and social media has become a necessity in their lives.

Question 2: Which social networking application do you use the most?

Students were asked about which social networking platform they use the most. They were given choices between Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram. 28% of students answered that they mostly use Facebook, 10% said they use Twitter, 38% said they use WhatsApp and 7% answered in favour of Instagram.

Table 2.

	Facebook	Twitter	WhatsApp	YouTube	Instagram
Number of students	27	10	36	15	07
Percentage	28%	10%	38%	15%	7%

According to the above results, it can be concluded that WhatsApp is the most popular social media used by students for communication.

Question 3: Why do you use WhatsApp?

When this question was asked, 45% said that it is easy to communicate with , 20% said that

it is easy to use , 20% said that it is a money-saving app, 15% were of the view that it is time-saving because you can send audio messages in just a few seconds.

Table 3.

	Easy to Communicate	Easy to Use	Money–Saving	Time–Saving
Number of students	43	19	19	14
Percentage	45%	20%	20%	15%

Results revealed that WhatsApp is mostly used because it is an easy tool for communication.

Question 4: How many hours do you

normally spend on using WhatsApp?

42% said that they normally spend 5-6 hours using WhatsApp, 21% said that they spend 2-3 hours, 10% said almost 7 hours.

Table 4.

	2–3 hours	4–5 hours	5–6 hours	7 hours
Number of students	20	20	40	10
Percentage	21%	21%	42%	10%

The results revealed that on average, students spend 5-6 hours a day using WhatsApp.

Question 5: Which current features of

Whatsapp you mostly use?

The participants, responses were recorded as follows:

Table 5.

	Text Messages Features	Photo and video Features	Forwarding Information	Voice Messages
Number of Students	40	20	15	20
Percentage	42%	21%	15%	21%

42% of the participants said that they use text messaging features of WhatsApp, 21% said that they mostly use photo and videos features, 21 % use voice messages, and 15% said that they use WhatsApp for forwarding information. The result revealed that the text messaging feature of Whatsapp is the most common among students.

Question 6: What do you prefer when communicating?

26% students said that they prefer writing, 26% said they prefer speaking while communicating through WhatsApp, 47% students replied that they prefer both speaking and writing while communicating

Table 6.

	Writing	Speaking	Both	none
Number of students	25	25	45	0
Percentage	26%	26%	47%	0

The results revealed that students prefer using both ways of communication equally, i.e., speaking and writing.

Question 7: Do you take care of spelling while texting?

Table 7.

	Yes	NO
Number of students	75	20

	Yes	NO
Percentage	78%	21%

78% of the participants said that they do not take care of spelling mistakes, while 21% said that they always take care of spelling during texting. The results show that majority of the students do not take care of spelling mistakes.

Question 8: Do you think that WhatsApp texting affects the students' formal writing?

When participants were asked if texting can affect their academic writing or not, 82% of participants said that writing is affected by WhatsApp text messaging, while the rest of the participants were of the view that WhatsApp texting does not affect their writing skills.

Table 8.

	Yes	No
Number of students	82	13
Percentage	86%	13%

The results revealed that 86% of participants are of the view that writing is affected by texting.

Question 9: Do you use abbreviations while texting?

In response to this question, 70% answered in affirmation while 25% in negation.

Table 9.

	Yes	No
Number of students	90	5
Percentage	94%	5%

The results revealed that almost 94% of students use abbreviations while texting.

Question 10: Why do you use abbreviations?

Students were asked about the reason of using the abbreviation. 50% said that using abbreviations is time-saving. 20% said that they use the abbreviation for speedy conversation, while the remaining students were uncertain about its use.

Question 11: How is writing affected by texting?

The participants who agreed that their formal writing is affected by texting were asked how their writing is affected by Whatsapp text messaging. They answered that mostly the spellings get affected due to the habit of writing in an informal way in Whatsapp text messaging. This gets reflected in their writing in the form of frequent spelling mistakes and incorrect abbreviations instead of using the full forms of words.

Analysis of Students' Exam Papers

In order to further evaluate the impact of the use of Whatsapp text messaging on the writing skills of students, participants were asked to write an essay in order to study the effects of Whatsapp texting on their writing skills. Upon assessment of student,s essays, it was found that students committed spelling mistakes and opted for short forms of words instead of writing the full forms. These are some of the writing mistakes made by participants:

- have instead of having (short forms)
- buzy in place of busy (incorrect spellings)
- bt for but
- Because spelled as bc
- diffrent for different
- gud instead of good
- extremely in place of extremely
- sth for something
- b/w instead of between
- week in place of weak (confusion in identifying the correct pair of the word)

- then for than
- their instead of there

The above data collected from the essays written by students suggest that the use of Whatsapp text messaging negatively affects the writing skills of students. As a result, they unconsciously adopt the informal method of writing in their academic writings as well. The errors committed by the students in their essays point towards their writing habits of Whatsapp. They use short forms, incorrect spellings and are unable to differentiate between the pair of words due to their poor writing habits on Whatsapp messaging.

Findings and Discussion

Being easy to use the mobile application, Whatsapp is extremely popular among students. The research study clearly shows that the writing skills of students are affected by the use of Whatsapp messaging. As Whatsapp messaging app is used for texting with friends in an informal setup, therefore, the students unconsciously replicate the same informal style of writing in areas where formal writing is required. The language used in Whatsapp messaging deviates from the norms and rules of the standard language. The language habits adopted from Whatsapp harm the writing skills of students in different ways. They become unaware of the difference between the spellings of different pairs of words; they develop the habit of writing short forms of words and forget the correct spellings. Students become irresponsible when writing formally. They start to neglect the rules and the forms which are necessary for producing meaningful texts.

Conclusion

Social media has become an integral and fundamental part of the life of almost every individual having a smartphone. Whatsapp is one of the most popular mobile applications commonly used by almost all students. Its users are increasing day by day. The present study explored the impacts of WhatsApp messenger on the writing skills of students. It identified several writing errors committed by students in formal writing that point towards the writing habits developed by the frequent use of WhatsApp. Two research instruments were used in this research study i.e. questionnaires and tests. The data collected from these two research instruments were analyzed. From the analysis of the collated data, it was concluded that WhatsApp texting negatively affects the writing skills of students. Due to the constant use of Whatsapp texting, Students often unconsciously develop the use of contractions, incorrect spellings, grammatical mistakes, etc in their formal writing. WhatsApp has its own set of advantages, which cannot be neglected, but it also comes with its own package of harms as well. In order to avoid the negative implications of WhatsApp on the writing skills of students, its use should be minimized. Moreover, students need to learn about the use of autocorrect in their WhatsApp applications to develop their writing skills through WhatsApp messaging instead of harming it.

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