

The Impact of WhatsApp on the Communication Style of AUA Students

by

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## Abstract

Various communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, Viber and many more, have replaced face-to-face communication making it more accessible and convenient. WhatsApp is one of the communication platforms that has gained popularity among students for its primitive functions, instant messaging capabilities (IMs), and visual language usage. The application shaped the communication area by making it more appropriate for academic and social interactions and influenced the development of students' social skills, especially English speaking. Therefore, the study aims to discover the differences between online and offline communication, which includes several elements such as the way AUA students express their emotions and feelings face-to-face and while chatting. Furthermore, the paper analyzes code-switching and language use in WhatsApp among multilingual students in the AUA community.

This paper focuses on qualitative and quantitative research methods, including the interviews (12) and survey answers (N=124). The study examines how AUA students interact with each other via IM messages and real-life communication, considering the impact of WhatsApp on communication development. The IM message conversations of AUA students are used as an example of how they talk on digital platforms. Contrary to our hypothesis, survey participants indicated that they preferred face-to-face communication over IM Chat. Nevertheless, the study highlights specific differences between WhatsApp and face-to-face communication, emphasizing their influence on social engagement, language usage and interaction approaches.

**Keywords:** WhatsApp, digital communications, face-to-face interactions, American University of Armenia, AUA students, IM messages

## **Introduction**

One day digital interaction will take the place of face-to-face communication and lead to misunderstandings, fights and disappointments. A common stereotype among the people, who are worried about the extinction of interpersonal communication, as nowadays people are more intended to talk to each other via communication tools, rather than gather together for a quick chitchat. Nevertheless, this is just an assumption, which can't be entirely correct, as the face-to-face communication will be always irreplaceable considering that people are very sociable. Moreover, many of you people may experience anxiety or fatigue while overusing the communication tools, feeling the need to meet other human beings and discuss everything in reality. Therefore, socializing is a key human need which is the core principle of any platform of the modern world.

In the digitized era, people find many ways to interact through communication applications using emojis, sending videos and memes, gifs etc. Time difference and distance aren't barriers anymore for communication, as internet tools and applications completely replace face-to-face communication. Various online platforms reformed the medium of interaction making it more accessible, time-saving and comfortable. Therefore, nowadays, communication has evolved to a new level where the style and manner of interaction have undergone some changes. However, how will these communication applications impact and reform live conversations and what are the main differences in these interactions?

In the 21st century people prefer dedicating their time to digital interaction rather than meeting each other in the real world. People are more inclined toward digital communication as it is comfortable, quick and private. Moreover, many internet users occasionally share personal information while messaging by neglecting the fact that they are communicating with a real person and not their diary (Berger, 2013). Therefore, this is how intimate a social media platform can become for people refusing interpersonal communication. Consequently, because of certain personal reasons, comfort and fast communication, humanity insists on using social media over real conversations, which today's developed technology is fully capable of supporting. The demand for communication apps has drastically increased because of the shift to digitalization and growth in IM messages (Huertas, 2024).

Therefore, many people use social media more frequently for seeking communication, because of the comfort and a stronger bond. Moreover, certain platforms became widely known, gaining their popularity, because of their benefits (Imanuela, Angelia, Purba,2023). Thus, there are many communication applications and channels that are aimed at maintaining business, academic and private interaction. Furthermore, each human stops on an application that is most suitable and beneficial for them considering many factors such as its functionality, design, variety of emojis/gifs, quality and speed of message delivery.

In 2009 two ex-employers of Yahoo (a website/portal) Brian Acton and Jan Koum founded WhatsApp, which quickly became popular (Martin, 2025). Currently, it is controlled by "Meta", which is known as the former Facebook. It has all the vital and useful settings for communication, such as texting, video/audio calling, voice/camera messages, varieties of GIF and emojis tabs, file, geolocation and image share buttons (Martin, 2025). Today, under the regulations and improvements of Meta, WhatsApp can function as a social media, as it also has a

channel for different communities where people can see shared information, news, gather in clubs and meet new people, as well as publish articles and post a status. These innovations led to full access to the world and even rebuilt itself as not only a messaging application but a new social media platform.



(Duarte,2025)

According to the worldwide rankings, WhatsApp is one of the most used messaging applications which enjoys popularity by more than 2 billion people over the globe (Duarte, 2025). WhatsApp is one of the main interaction channels in the online area. This is an application that was developed to support simple online communication mainly through instant and voice messages, as well as multimodal interaction. The goal of the application is to create a comfortable environment for internet users to message and share certain information with each

other. Its usage is essential and widespread, because of having no fee for download, a primitive system, free messages and calls, faster message delivery, an opportunity to have a special business account and a safe internal system. (Rafique, Iqbal, Ashraf, 2023). WhatsApp is an affordable and useful area creating a new level of communication, leading to being always in touch with everyone, who can't meet or feel comfortable with interpersonal contact. That is the main reason why, in more than 60 countries, it is a principal communication app. Therefore, Instant messaging platforms' popularity and their influence on real-time communication are important to be discussed and analyzed which is why our target is WhatsApp communication.

Furthermore, WhatsApp was called the 'heart of the smartphone' and was unique amongst its competitors with the function of tracking the delivery of the text, whether the text was received or on its way (Miller, etc, 2021). This is relevant even for today because it is quite comprehensible to acknowledge whether a person will likely read it soon or open it later due to a lack of internet access. All the significant functions are indicated on their official website which makes their usage even easier and enjoyable. Therefore, because of its primitive functions and services, many people prefer using WhatsApp. Additionally, all WhatsApp messages are being secured and controlled by Meta, which is another reason for people to choose it (WhatsApp,2025).

Students aim to use communication tools that are accessible and time-saving, therefore they would likely focus on a communication medium such as messaging via WhatsApp. Followingly, as students are more keen to utilize the internet and social media operations because of lack of time and energy, it is more preferable for them to use WhatsApp as a means of communication. Thus, the platform is widely used among students because of its ease (Al-Mothana M. Gasaymeh, 2017). Following, WhatsApp and other instant messaging apps have

become quite popular, connecting more people, mostly students and the younger generation in general.

Students use WhatsApp for different purposes such as entertainment, communication channels, education, information, and business. WhatsApp is famous worldwide because it is a free and basic structured application available to everyone. It is easy and convenient to use for all ages and genders. However, the heavy use of WhatsApp may have an impact on the users' real time communication style, which is why more research is needed to investigate the reasons for such influence. For instance, will the overuse of WhatsApp make a person more introverted or will it somehow contribute to their academic focus? Additionally, its influence on face-to-face communication can have different types of effects. The constant online chatting through the app may result in the reduction of social skills, becoming an introvert, etc. In this case, instant messaging adds to the supplementary usage of the digital world and the lack of doing things in real life, even simply interacting with people. However, the main distinguishing features of face-to-face and WhatsApp virtual communication need to be examined in order to outline the primary differences.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for WhatsApp and other communication tools drastically increased, as the global lockdown limited interpersonal interaction. Therefore, for a while online messages, video and audio calls replaced face-to-face communications. Moreover, many workplaces and educational institutions were transitioned to a remote mode that also limited their direct communication (Zarzycka, et al, 2021). Therefore, students were heavily affected by the mass isolation as all their personal and business communication was held via digital tools, including WhatsApp. It was especially applied to the English-speaking students because of being popular in US based universities such as the American University of Armenia

(AUA) in Armenia, where the students would prefer this platform for their interaction. For instance, the prolonged separation initiated the feeling of loneliness and social anxiety among the AUA students, who were already adapted to relying on digital reality (Liu & Lin, 2024). Digital reality was so relevant for that period that even the admission interviews and international exams were required to be taken online. This initiated anxiety and a new medium of communication, influenced in a way that the social skills of students have decreased and they became increasingly accustomed to online communication and messaging (Ganiet, et al, 2023). Therefore, the communication of the current students is highly shaped by the pandemic isolation, with the varying level of impact for each student depending on their educational institution and language background. This reinforces the idea that current AUA students, who were studying in high schools during the pandemic, would prefer WhatsApp more to in-person conversations.

Following the idea of English speaking student communication, the communication barriers of offline and online communication are vividly expressed at the AUA. English-speaking students have unusual vocabulary, in comparison with native student speakers, as they mix the languages and structure their speech without any rules and order. Communication investigation will help to determine the possibilities available to the students from WhatsApp, comparing the level of interaction in real vs virtual life. The research on AUA students' communication habits will build upon academic studies examining WhatsApp's influence on interaction among English-speaking and international students who frequently use the app to stay in contact with one another. While studying at AUA the students' vocabulary drastically changes, leaving its effects on their daily life conversations and interactions. There are phrases in English that don't have direct Armenian equivalents or just don't express the same meaning. These phrases are consequently taught throughout the studies in AUA which shapes the way

students of the university communicate or exchange ideas. Thus, communication style in the context of face-to-face and social media interaction is likely different among students of the American University of Armenia.

Students are the majority amongst the youth using WhatsApp as the most preferred means of communication, because of its primitive tools, accessibility, completely free calls/messages and a space for expressing oneself. AUA is the only English-speaking university in Armenia whose lexicon is different of all the Armenian students, by constantly utilizing English words and slang in their speeches. Thus, AUA will be our laboratory to investigate both online and offline communication from two angles: one will be the message analyses and code-switching, the other discussing differences between digital and direct communication. Being part of the AUA community allows us to be more well-informed in this area and better acknowledge the nuances of two ways of communication. In addition, our empirical knowledge of the messages and code-switching of language usage will assist us in monitoring the process and make the study more insightful. Our project's purpose is to contribute to the existing information and the research from the internet in a way that will demonstrate an actual case study on the online and offline communication differences of bilingual students studying at the American University of Armenia. Moreover, the goal is to investigate WhatsApp's contribution to the AUA students' communication manner, their social and academic impacts.

## Literature Review

### Benefits/Drawbacks of WhatsApp for Communication

Interaction through social media applications has both its advantages and disadvantages. Similarly, certain communication applications such as WhatsApp, also demonstrate their privileges. For instance, one of the benefits of WhatsApp is that it supports students with immediate feedback and opportunities for collaborative learning that support language practice outside of the classroom. A study by Alabasi, K. M., & Alghamdi, F. (2019) researched on Saudi students' EFL perceptions for using WhatsApp in higher education, shows that a few students mentioned drawbacks, like distractions or using WhatsApp for other purposes rather than academic ones, but the prevailing feeling in the responses was that WhatsApp improves accessibility and the level of students' engagement as a supplement to formal EFL instruction. Indeed, it was found that WhatsApp is mainly used for announcing courses, questions to instructors, and discussions with peers. The AUA students' usage of this medium carries certain benefits and drawbacks as well, one of them is keeping the contact in a distance, but losing the sense for the reality leading to academic distractions.

Many students use the WhatsApp platform as a replacement for interpersonal communication for different purposes. Similarly, Muhamad and Kootbodien in their article, discuss how students from Abu Dhabi use WhatsApp as an interpersonal communication for different reasons, exploring the influence of the platform. Although WhatsApp is an assisting tool, it has certain disadvantages that are also important to outline as it was mentioned before. Ali and Kootbodien highlight that the absence of facial expressions and speech tone is the main

glitch while communicating digitally, which in comparison with the real-time conversations, people get a better and clearer outcome from their conversation. Nonetheless, all the authors from the mentioned and previous study insist that the influence of the WhatsApp functions, such as voice and text messaging, as well as emojis usage helps to solve the issues with the tone and face expressions lack. According to the statistics the interpersonal communication didn't suffer from the WhatsApp frequent usage, even with the considerations of these minor problems. (Muhamad & Kootbodien, 2017 ). This study was conducted nearly a decade ago, and the use of emojis and memes has evolved since then. Therefore, we will investigate how AUA students use the various functions of WhatsApp to compensate for the lack of face-to-face communication.

### **Language Role in WhatsApp Communication**

Despite the privileges of WhatsApp usage, this communication medium affects the language and communication style as well. Holtgraves delves into the text messaging by categorizing the words used in their late written texts of the questionnaire participants based on individual and gender differences, linguistic features, relationship status, and their personality. Students show their personality through their chats, expressing their nature. Before considering the positive and negative consequences of WhatsApp's influence on offline conversation, it is necessary to consider the target category of the research and participants, as specific groups and statuses of people have different approaches to texting. The personality that they show in the text and their behavior in real life depend on certain factors. For instance, the text may be used differently such as being lengthened, having negative or positive word usage, containing slang or

abbreviations, and being written referring to closeness with a person. Holtgrave's study underlines the idea that the linguistic analysis of text messages and face-to-face communications will vividly outline the differences in communication. (Holtgraves, 2010) The level of closeness affects the interaction of AUA students as well as how certain miscommunicating features occur during WhatsApp conversations, such as lack of face or voice.

Likewise, Pongsapan described the power and meaning of the slang in the lives of students. Teenagers use slang in their language as a standard way to communicate with their peers. The results showed how much slang students usually use in their speeches while communicating, and with the statistics, he showed the frequency and popularity of the specific slang words or phrases, the one such acronym, compounding, imitative, and clipping. For instance, acronyms have a significant role while structuring a sentence as it is an abbreviated word that stands for a specific definition or a name. Students mainly use acronyms to shorten words and make the conversation briefer. In addition, usually students include compounded words in their conversations, which is mixing two words and creating a new one, to sound more natural and cooler (Palmer, R. , 2023). For instance, they use “elearning”, which means electronic+learning. Imitative is a type of slang that includes words that originated from standard English words, using those in different meanings (Rosvita et al., 2024) . Such as the usage of “wanna” instead of “want to”, “gonna” instead of “going to” . Moreover, clipping is also a type of slang which is the reduction of a lengthy term, usually to only one syllable. Examples are “phone” instead of “telephone”, "gas" instead of “gasoline”.

Without understanding the usage of the slang, the text messages and real life communications would not be analyzed appropriately, as the majority of students' speeches heavily rely on the slang. Slang is the part of the students' interaction that surely has different

forms in the writing and spelling, which demonstrates how they communicate in online and offline diasporas. (Pongsapan, 2022) English-speaking students have their own slang system which comes from social media usage. It is frequently used in daily speeches and messages to show their prestige and the level of stylishness. AUA students have special word choice which they use usually in their written texts and real life communications, which helps them to understand each other better.

As it was mentioned emojis play a critical role as their usage is quite a lot when interacting through social media platforms, or just applications such as WhatsApp, which may serve as a solution for the issue. Virtual communication includes a sense of emotional exchange with the help of emojis. For instance, Veytia-Bucheli et al. (2020) suggest how WhatsApp, together with emojis, are an important means for graduate students to develop intercultural communication at higher education. This study underlines the fact that these tools opened a new, informal dimension in intercultural relationships where one finds visual language, non-verbal, linguistic barriers. Emojis help convey emotion and context and allow students of all cultures to express themselves more fully and connect on another level beyond the actual words. That is to say, digital communication tools develop a feeling of community and shared understanding among the students, complementary to traditional modes of communication within academic settings. AUA students also use virtual faces to express their emotions in their messages, which enhance clarifications to the conversation. WhatsApp provides a "visual language" to AUA students that increases interrelations among people making their dialogues of two realities appear similar or close enough.

## **Social and Psychological Impacts**

Chan, Harmizi, and Yong (2020) demonstrate how WhatsApp affects the communication skills of university students. It's possible for students to face several kinds of effects in their social interaction styles in case of relying on online chatting too much. Although WhatsApp supports the maintenance of social connections, it is important to consider its possible side effects on a person's social skills. It provides an easy and time-saving way to communicate, but it reduces the level and quality of face-to-face interpersonal relationships.

However, besides having an effect on students' communication skills and styles in real life, WhatsApp can have psychological effects on them as well. Academic distraction, addiction to social media are one of them as stated in the article by Irfan, and Dhimmar (2019) on the Impact of WhatsApp Messenger on university-level students. Students use WhatsApp for positive purposes such as interacting with their friends, expressing themselves more openly, overcoming their fear of communicating. However, the disadvantage of WhatsApp usage is the addiction toward such virtual conversations, which limits the desire to communicate in person, using the same manner of words.

## **Consequences of WhatsApp Communication**

There are a variety of social media platforms that extend the opportunities to communicate online. For instance, Al-Khaddam presents how Facebook impacts students' interpersonal communication in one of his articles. There are some positive and negative sides showing that the students using Facebook usually develop less interest in face-to-face

interactions in that study. Students are more open to online communication since there is less social constraint compared to face-to-face interaction. Moreover, social media influences a better balance between digital and face-to-face interactions. A more comparative perspective is considered regarding the comfort and social preference that students have for online communication. WhatsApp may shape communication preferences and interpersonal skills within the more significant discussion of advantages and disadvantages in style of communication (Al-Khaddam, 2013).

In contrast, Imanuela, Angelia, & Purba (2023) describe the alterations of social skills with WhatsApp influence. The elements of interpersonal communication such as openness, empathy and support affect the social skills of the AUA students while being active in WhatsApp conversations. The results of the study highlighted that WhatsApp interpersonal communications impact the social skills of students such as becoming more confident in their speech, setting the boundaries of closeness and opening up more during the interaction. WhatsApp shapes the communication skills applied to real life conversations, which outlines the strong impact of WhatsApp on our lives and the way online communication becomes identical to face-to-face one. The communication application creates similarities in both offline and online talks, which contrasts the other differences that are felt from the conversations.

Additionally, as AUA students are bilingual it means code-switching is very common for them. The majority of AUA students are Armenians who are studying in an English-speaking environment. Hence, it is logical that during the four years of studying they will develop a habit of switching between Armenian and English, as well as mixing them. This is crucial to note as English-speaking students use their native and English languages to formulate their ideas more precisely, which is a natural way of communicating with monolinguals and bilinguals

(GROSJEAN, 1998). According to the study, students change to a specific language, depending on the circumstances and the students with whom they communicate. Therefore, the study of IMessages will demonstrate how AUA students usually mix words and languages in different contexts.

To sum up, we have found numerous studies claiming that online chats have a negative effect on face-to-face communication, but a few scholars have found that online communication has positive impacts on offline communication. Thus, more research is needed on this topic. Today's new modifications and structure allow to broader ways of communication. There are plenty of ways and tools which help students communicate, contribute to collaboration, brainstorm and achieve success in both team work and individual projects, based on our assumption and the scholarly written articles. Nevertheless, we would like to know if this has also reduced communication in real life. Social media platforms have a wide range of consequences on offline communication. The incapacity to communicate genuine emotions and feelings is among the most prevalent effects. However, communication applications have advanced to the point where video calling, emoji sending, and numerous other technologies solve this issue, which Veytia-Bucheli, Gómez-Galán, & Vergara (2020) discuss in their study, yet we would like to have our own proof. Thus, we will be able to construct our own study and contribute more data to the communication field with the help of the research. Online and offline communication styles differ among American University of Armenia students. We assume based on the evidence of the sources there are many benefits and drawbacks, but it's crucial to realize that nowadays, it's almost impossible to avoid offline communication of any kind just because it affects face to face communication in many ways.

We want to learn about the pros and cons of WhatsApp as a tool for communication among AUA students. Most importantly, with the focus of the difference between these two quite different ways of interacting. From our experiences, WhatsApp really appears to establish connection, provide faster information access, and sometimes even feel comfortable in expressing emotions, especially due to the use of emojis, voice notes, and several other tools available in the application. Moreover, the tool that perhaps also seems to help bridge the gap between spoken and written conversations.

Contrarily, we are expecting to observe some challenges as well. For instance, a number of students might show too much dependence on WhatsApp, which in turn could negatively impact their face-to-face communication and be very distracting from academic work. We are eager to analyze whether students actually depend on WhatsApp for making social and academic conversations and how their communication has been altered in face-to-face situations. In short, we seek to examine how AUA students engage in their different online and offline communication types and how WhatsApp has shaped the way they connect with others in their day-to-day life.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the project is to discover the benefits and drawbacks of the WhatsApp interaction between AUA students and how it affects their manner of interpersonal communication. Additionally, the goal of the study is to outline the main effects which WhatsApp has on the social skills and academic/communication performances of AUA students.

The central question will revolve around “How does WhatsApp mediate the interpersonal communication between AUA students?”.

After studying examples of communication burdens, benefits and differences of AUA students, these research questions will be relevant to discuss the impacts of the main communication application influence on the AUA interaction. Therefore, as a first step the project will transfer from general concepts to more specific targets. However, the first question will be more abstract to acknowledge the concept and discover the topic more specifically.

Accordingly, the second question would be more specific such as, “What are the opportunities AUA students get from the WhatsApp communication application ?”. The answer will help to understand the general priorities and privileges of WhatsApp usage according to the AUA students. The introduction includes studies discussing the advantages and disadvantages of online communication, as well as the beneficial opportunities they receive from interaction in the online diaspora.

Followingly, another research question will be concerning the miscommunication, such as “How does WhatsApp Communication shape the interaction styles of AUA students?”. After the general knowledge about the WhatsApp impact and usage, the next question will depict the influence of WhatsApp as a reforming tool of the communication process. The question will assist in examining the usage of emojis, gifs and other visual language tools.

Moreover, “What is the difference between WhatsApp and offline communication ?” is another question that will also be researched. The project will discover the effectiveness of WhatsApp by analysing whether the platform influences communication skills positively or negatively. After discussing all the questions, the last question will conclude and highlight the role of WhatsApp on AUA students' lives.

Additionally, one of the research questions will focus on “How are AUA students using English in their IMs?”. This will examine the words, phrases and the language in general that the students use in their way of communication through instant messages. Afterwards, the details of their language will be examined as well such as a question like “How are they using acronyms/slang?” will be analyzed as well.

Lastly, the discussion will end with the question “ How are building community or asserting an AUA identity?”. This will be analyzed thoroughly for which the language usage of the community members will be analyzed in detail.

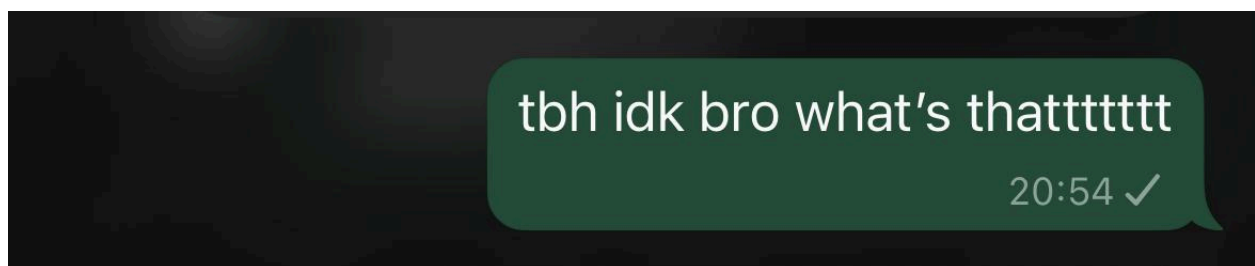
### **The IM message analysis**

The whole WhatsApp communication system is constructed on the basis of Instant Messaging, which creates the proper environment to apply a variety of languages, slang and various styles of interactions. WhatsApp is a creative platform for people to freely communicate in different ways both informally and formally. They get an opportunity to escape from real conversations and be more independent in their speeches by using jargon and various expressions, which would not be typical for their daily vocabulary. Consequently, real-time communication has a different effect in contrast with the conversations that are held on the internet, where students have more space to demonstrate their extroverted nature. Thus, analysis of the Instant Messages (IM) plays a crucial role in assessing the communication style and tone of the AUA students while comparing them with the interview answers.

After conducting the interviews, various IM messages from the WhatsApp chats were requested from the participants as an example of their digital communication. The students of

AUA are bilinguals (people interacting in two languages) using Armenian and English for their communication. Their IM message is an obvious example of code-switching between them, which indicates the way the bilingual brain operates. It's important to highlight that the language operating system of the human brain is complex and its functionality is built on different factors, such as their learning age and language abilities (Mouthona , et al, 2013). Moreover, bilinguals (people interacting in two languages) choose the language for their interaction depending on their location, people and circumstances, and it is common for bilinguals to chat and talk in two languages (Grosjean, 1998). Hence, there is no single explanation or reason for why the context of the messages is mixed in different languages and the IM messages by AUA students we have examined and evaluated might not be totally accurate.

The sudden occurrence of language switching is connected to the topic and context of the message, implying that the content of a certain conversation may impact the activation of a specific language. (Timmer, et al, 2019). Furthermore, the purpose of code-switching is usually to emphasize key points or clarify the meaning of the message.

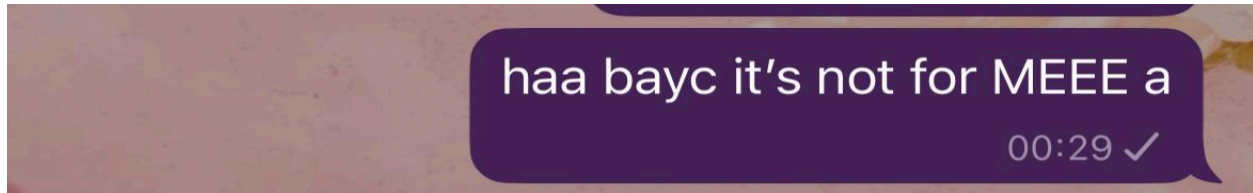


In this specific example, we have the phrase “tbh idk bro what’s thattt” which includes abbreviations and stretched spelling. The text is written by an Armenian person who studies in the American University of Armenia, however the language used is fully English. The use of “tbh” (To be honest) and “idk” (I don’t know) indicates casual speech, although the stretched spelling “thattt” shows an expressive tone. Moreover, the message includes the word “bro” as

well, which is used as a way to call the person they're sending the message to. While receiving this specific IM message, we asked the sender whether they were talking to a guy or a girl and surprisingly they said it was a girl. What's more interesting is that the sender is a girl as well. We interviewed the sender regarding this specific word use, as it is not very common for girls to be using these kinds of words while talking. However, as a result we found out that the sender felt more comfortable using the word "bro" in their second language, as it sounds more natural. Besides, she added that the use of the word has been influenced by the consequent use of the English language at the university. The intention of using the word except as a habit is to show intimacy and communicate in a more friendly manner with the receiver, as mentioned by the lady. The familiarisers "guys," "honey," "buddy," "dude," "dudette," "bro," and "sis" fall under one of the five semantic types of vocatives. According to Leech, they serve three purposes, which are to draw attention, choose an addressee, and increase the speaker-addressee relationship (Flesch, 2023). Furthermore, historically speaking, the word "bro" may have originated from African American Vernacular English, where it can be used to refer to a "Black man" or a "man" (Schwiegershausen 2013). Taking this into consideration we can emphasize the fact that using the word between two girls doesn't have as much significance as the fact that it belongs to a communication style where its use demonstrates friendliness, as stated by the sender.

The absence of Armenian in this message suggests that English alone is sufficient for comprehension within this context. Additionally, such abbreviations are commonly accepted and usable in English, unlike in Armenian. The colloquial expressions of Armenian have a direct and indirect translation, but they pose some struggles in understanding the meaning of the conversation. Therefore, language exploitation is built into the adaptation of the linguistic needs of the conversation (Manurung, et al, 2022). This highlights that AUA students are more

comfortable using straightforward messages with structured and common English slang, rather than challenging Armenian.

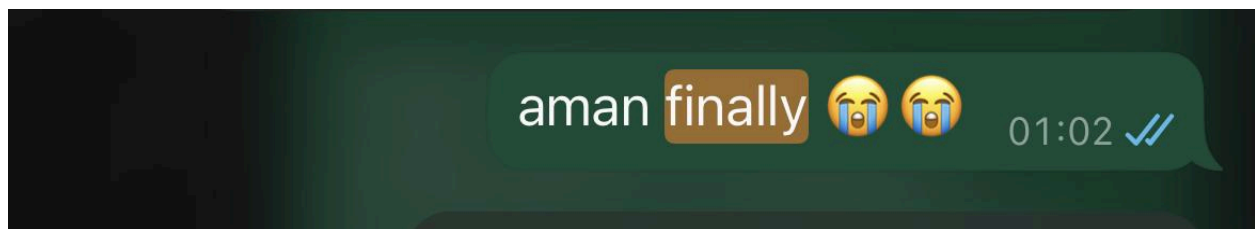


Another expression is “haa bayc it’s not for MEEE a” which emphasizes the effective combination of Armenian and English to express a direct idea. The message is being translated as “Yes, but it’s not for MEEE” which could fully be translated into Armenian as the capabilities of the Armenian vocabulary are rich in these words’ synonyms. However, there are certain phrases in English that can’t be entirely translated because they don’t align with the Armenian words’ meaning, as well as sound awkward. (Kibar,2023). Nevertheless, contextually the “it’s not for MEEE” sounds more indirect and comprehensible, while the formal “ayd indz hamar che” (այդ ինձ համար չէ) or informal “et indz hamar chi” (էտ ինձ համար չի) versions sound unnatural and insufficient, without properly conveying the message. This form of expression will likely ruin the proper environment and the course of conversation, because of the too sarcastic connotation (Gray et al., 2020). At first glance, the personal pronoun “MEEE” visually appeals, as being lengthened and capitalized. The word is eye-catching and visually attractive having a demonstrative element in it for the reader to pay attention to the text instantly.

Moreover, such attention-grabbing messages force the reader to consider the writer fluent in English (Sadighian, and Rahimi, 2011). Notwithstanding, it is less likely that AUA students would like to prove their mastery of English, as both of them are proficient in their language of study. Furthermore, students include such elongated words in sentences specifically to indicate

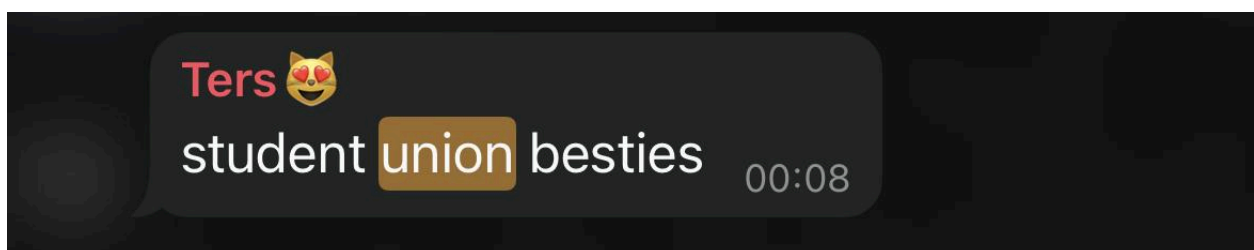
and emphasize the words that formulate the primary idea of the message. Indeed, while interviewing the sender of this message we explored that she avoided talking generally and wished to be more specific. That is the main reason she lengthened the pronoun “me”. Although the expectations were to hear something new, the reality was that it came naturally to her, without any concrete purpose.

Additionally, besides lengthening the pronoun “MEEE” is in the caps lock to also highlight and exaggerate certain phenomena. Therefore, students use words written in all capitals to vividly express their feelings and imitate a shout (or a cry) in a digital conversation (Varnhagen,Pugh, McFall, Zederayko, 2010).



Another important example is “aman finally (2 crying emojis)”, which translates as “Oh my Lord, finally” by its meaning. However, the word “aman” (Ամմի) in Armenian has an additional meaning such as “ a plate”, which is widely used in Armenia with this meaning. However, in this context, the word “aman” has more of a religious connotation for exaggerating the meaning of the text (Kazmi,2023). Therefore, in this message, the AUA student implied the meaning “Oh my God or Oh my Lord”, to demonstrate happiness and excitement for something that finally happened. This is an Armenian colloquialism that doesn’t have a direct equivalent translation, as this is an idiomatic expression that contains cultural and linguistic elements of Armenian in it (Kibar, 2023). That is the reason it is not suitable for direct translation.

When asked about her motivations for code-switching, the WhatsApp user admitted that she doesn't know the exact reason for communicating in this manner. Nevertheless, these words are natural for the Armenians, as they highlight the context and make the speech more understandable. Furthermore, for an even stronger emphasis, the author of the text added two identical emojis, which makes the message more emotional and personal. Even though the message aims to express happiness, seemingly sad crying emojis are used. However, it has an explanation, as such emojis are widely used among teenagers with other connotations such as expressing empathy, love, support or strong emotions of happiness/excitement (Gilmore-Jones, 2024). In this context the message sender explained that she used that emoji to put an accent on her support and excitement for the message receiver. Therefore, emojis can compensate for digital text communication's lack of facial expressions and emotional vocal intonations, expressing all the necessary feelings in one message (Udoudom, et al., 2024). Hence, as the sender explained, her primary reason for using an exaggerated linking word and emojis was to highlight her joy (while crying a tear out of happiness ) and excitement for the result.



Supporting communication within diverse surroundings leads to the creation of certain words or phrases that are only understandable among its members (Manurung, et al, 2022) Those phrases or words belong to a group of people and can serve as either an inside joke, slang or jargon. Followingly, AUA is a strong and unified community that also has its own

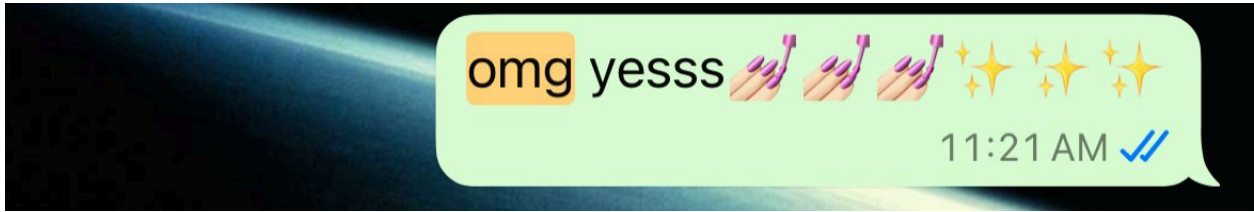
communication language which is enriched with different phrases and words. For instance, AUA students call themselves AUAtsi (AUAցի), which consists of AUA+tsi (ցի), an ending or a suffix that indicates the roots of a person originating from that specific place. In this case, the word implies where the person studies, although it is logical as it is the name of the institution. Similarly, foreigners might have been familiar with the word “Yerevan+tsi” (Երևանցի), which consists of the proper noun Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and as mentioned the ending “tsi” or ‘ցի’ in Armenian describes a person who is originating and living in Yerevan city. Usually, this suffix not only linguistically explains the meaning of the word, but also signifies comfort and the idea of home. Therefore, this is a similar logic that demonstrates the way AUA students want to specify their educational institution and position the university as home.

American and Armenian educational systems differ not only in teaching techniques but also in their vocabulary diversity. The dominant language of both systems is completely different, which is the leading factor that impacts the word usage of students from two universities. Therefore, it is indisputable that AUA students would structure their speech with the usage of English words and terms used in the American system.

Moreover, as the majority of AUA students are Armenian whose native language is Armenian, they most likely would mix languages and Armenianize some English words. For instance, many AUA students use the word “Cafeteria” (to refer to a place for having lunch) instead of saying the equivalent Armenian word “ճամբար” (chasharan). The word becomes so much used that it perfectly blends with the Armenian sentence by saying “ari gnanq cafeteria” (Արի գնա՛նք cafeteria), translating as “let’s go to cafeteria”. This specific word is being Armenianized by AUA students avoiding using the Armenian version of this word. Many students cite English words in their speeches, especially the American English ones, because

they view them as “cool and not formal” (Seyranyan, & Westphal, 2020). Accordingly, the comfort of students and American systemized education contributed to the vocabulary change for utilizing English words in the Armenian context.

However, another term that is widely used is “GenEdi em” (ջեներալի էմ), which translates as “I am in my general education course (or “GenEd”) “. The word specifies what category of class the student is/will be in. Nonetheless, it is a very typical word for AUA students ( coming from an American system), which is not applied in other universities in Armenia, as they don’t use English words. Nevertheless, one of the brightest examples commonly used at AUA is the “student union besties” term, which refers to students who only spend time together when studying at the student union office. Student Union or council is a student association dealing with the problems in the university and organizing different events (Student Affairs, 2025). AUA has provided a student union office for the students to gather, run various clubs, organize meetings and simply spend their leisure time or study. Consequently, students who only limit their interaction with the people with whom they enjoy studying at the student union office, without maintaining further connections outside of the university are called “student union besties”. Students who prefer spending their time studying at the Student Union area usually find like-minded students and become friends only for one purpose. Such term is only used at AUA because it is an English word and such an area is not typical at other Armenian universities. While interviewing the message receiver, she explained that she didn’t hesitate about the meaning and understood it without consciously acknowledging the phrase. Therefore, such phrases and terms are being interpreted intuitively, without consideration of their contextual background and its origin.



The next IM message is “omg yesss, and nail/sparkling emojis”. To begin with the abbreviation, it is important to mention that one of the most commonly used abbreviations is “OMG” (Oh my God). A study shows that the abbreviations "OMG," which reflect stable registers across several media, were used in informal digital communication. In addition, while taking into consideration the format between sending emails and just IM messages it was found out that emails were chunkier and more formal rather than the IM messages. The instant messages include more acronyms and abbreviations, “OMG” being one of them (Merryweather, 2017). Besides, it is important to mention that the specific abbreviation “OMG” would not look formal when used in an email. Moreover, even in real life the expression “Oh my God” is quite common among AUA students most probably because it is one of the most popular American/English phrase. It is widely used by English speakers in order to express how surprised they are. The interesting part is that there is an equivalent word in the Armenian language and it is also widely used, such as ‘Վախ, Աստված’ or “Vax Astvac” (directly translated as “Oh my God”)

The triple use of the letter “s” at the end of the word “yesss” shows the texter’s excitement and emphasizes the word showing its importance in the message. The repeated letters in the IM messages are something we encountered several times, while analyzing and collecting those from the students. In digital communication, expressive lengthening, the repetition of letters within words, such as "yesss" or "nooo" acts as a paralinguistic tool to convey emotions,

emphasis, or subtle meanings that might otherwise be communicated through facial expressions or vocal tones in face-to-face interactions. The word stretching may serve several functions with one of them being to convey informality and playfulness by introducing a lighthearted or casual tone. These changes foster a sense of friendliness and a little bit of closeness between the communicators. Most importantly, the word stretching intensifies the excitement and the feeling in general. For instance, in this specific example the repeated letters in the word “yesss” accurately demonstrate that the sender is cheerful about the situation.

Nonverbal indicators like gestures and facial expressions are useful in expressing emotions in face-to-face encounters. Emojis provide visual representations of emotions that could otherwise be lost while online chatting, fulfilling a similar purpose in digital communication. Emoji-containing online conversations are seen as more intense and emotionally expressive than those without. This implies that emojis enhance the emotional depth of online conversations by functioning as digital signals. Emojis also improve the accuracy and understanding of digital communications. According to Udoudom, et. al, communication is viewed as more believable and intelligible when the emoji matches the emotional tone of the message. Moreover, emojis can serve as a way of describing and indicating emotions. This alignment facilitates more effective information processing and interpretation by the text receivers (Udoudom, et. al, 2024).

Furthermore, emojis are used several times in the IM message example. However, in this specific example not common ones are used, on the contrary to smiley faces these ones can seem a little tricky. For instance, the nail polish emoji used three times has a couple of meanings. In addition to being used to describe photographs of nails and beauty on the internet, the nail polish emoji can be used in a number of online conversations as a tone marker to convey sass,

fanciness, attitude, or confidence (Rusciano,2025). Undoubtedly, in this specific example the nail polish emoji is used metaphorically. As a result, it is fair to draw the conclusion that the use of the emoji three times in the message indicates that the sender is quite confident in what they are saying and in the meaning of it. Following the nail polish emoji, the sparkling emojis (yellow four-point star) are used in the same amount as well. Similarly, these emojis also have their meaning and they are often used to signify freshness or cleanliness as well as a variety of pleasant emotions, such as love, happiness, beauty, gratitude and enthusiasm (Boutet et al., 2021). There are similar emojis that include spark as well, such as the star or the little star in the upper corner. However, surprisingly these ones don't have a meaning behind them like the sparkles emoji and are used for pleasing reasons most of the time. The use of sparkles emoji with the nail polish is a common combination as well, which emphasizes the meaning of the message and helps to convey the emotion in the best way possible while trying to demonstrate it online. The emojis themselves are very uncommon to use, emphasizing the confidence of the person. The explanation is that the new nails give confidence to girls, as they feel prettier which is equal to the slang word "slay", and the sparklings are equal to the word "shine". Therefore, the message is being compared to the words such as "be confident in your actions and slay" and "shine like a star". These are the common interpretations of students and the younger generation of how these emojis work, which is why with their help the receiver understood that the message sender had a supportive tone.



Group chats are a popular and practical way for students to communicate online and collaborate on projects. In the IM message, two students hold a brief discussion about the group assignment. Interestingly, the university is a bilingual community, since the language that the classes are taught is not the native language of the students. Nonetheless, there are a number of multilingual students in the university besides the bilingual ones. Furthermore, the IM message serves as an illustration of how a multilingual student would interact with others in the community. The phrase "Let's do it" =“Ekeq anenq” (եկե՛ք մե՛կե՛մ) is written in Latin letters in the first message, which is entirely in Armenian. The second message, on the other hand, has both English and Russian terms. Although it has an Armenian equivalent, the word "comment" or “meknabanutyun” (մեկնաբանություն) in Armenian, is used in English. Additionally, there is an Armenian equivalent for the word "просто, (prosto)” as well, which is the Russian word in the text that means "just". Nevertheless, Armenian students choose to mix the languages, to enhance the idea of the message.

The text translates to “We should just change a lot of things if we write it, since she has

made a lot of comments”. In addition, the fact that the sender has written the word “comment” in English is another thing that can be affected by a couple of factors. For instance, one of those is that the word “comment” is written in English in the Google, Microsoft and Google Docs platforms as well, in which the students were writing their paper and the “comments” were left by the professor. From this, we can assume that this has influenced the person and it has impressed them since the platforms show the tool of commenting in English.

In multilingual communities, communication relies on working together and supporting each other to reach common goals. People don't let language differences stop them from achieving these goals, and they handle language challenges calmly. More surprisingly, communication in multilingual communities also goes beyond just speaking. The study points out that language is part of a bigger system, working alongside other ways of communicating just to make meaning. Understanding is additionally supported by intuition and even extrasensory perception, demonstrating that communication can seem to be more complex than simply knowledge. This process contributes to the development of strong communication skills and awareness (Canagarajah & Adrian, 2011). Following, the Russian word "просто," (prосто-just) is frequently used among Armenians, which most of the time might demonstrate the purpose of minimising the importance of an action. Therefore, it's possible that the speaker is unconsciously translating this informal or softer tone and not using the English or Armenian version. However, it's also important to note that the usage of this word in Russian among Armenians appears more as a slang rather than an academic way of speaking. On the contrary, the Armenian word “պարզապէս, (parzapēs)” is used in a more academic setting and intellectual way of communication. This illustrates how a word adopted from another language can contribute and enhance the style of the speaker's communication.

The IM messages varied from each other both structurally and contextually being abundant in emoticons, abbreviations, slang and code-switching. Nevertheless, while interviewing and gathering various IM messages we noticed that there were few Russian words used while interacting. During the Soviet Union's reign Armenians learned Russian as the education system was based on the Slavonic language. Consequently, after the collapse of the Soviet Union many Armenians continued using Russian and mixing it with their mother tongue. Nowadays, the speech of Armenians consists of plenty of Russian words, which is absolutely natural and more acceptable for Armenians (Yegparian, 2017). Even though there are not a lot of Russian words used in the messages according to our IM messages, still some of the words used are Russian.

The IM messages demonstrate how non-verbal communication is held in the English language environment and how AUA students mainly interact. The analyses of the IM messages highlighted how AUA students mix their spoken languages and understand each other perfectly, as the interviews showed. The emojis are equal to words expressing a follow-up idea to the main context, as well as enhancing the meaning of the message. Messages were rich in slang, special terms, elongated and foreign words, which support the idea, that AUA students use both Armenian and English to express their ideas, as far as all of them are bilingual and multilingual. The results of the IM messages demonstrated how the communication of AUA students is constructed and how code-switching works for them. Following that, the nature of the messages will help to acknowledge how they interact with each other in the digital world, and with the assistance of the survey and interview answers, compare them with the differences in face-to-face communication.

## Survey Methodology

A conducted quantitative survey aims to build a deeper understanding of how communications vary on face-to-face and digital levels emphasizing the primary differences. It aims to analyze the way WhatsApp as a communication channel modifies the communication style of AUA students, mostly focusing on and exploring the students' usage patterns and purposes, their preferences and faced challenges. The data was collected from the responses of the current AUA students from various majors such as BA in English and Communications, Business, Engineering Sciences, Computer Science, Data Science and Politics and Governance. The questionnaire included open-ended questions and multiple choice to evaluate the communication habits and perception of WhatsApp ensuring anonymous responses and voluntary participation. The distribution of the survey was both online with the assistance of social media chats and directly collecting the answers from the students in AUA buildings.

Even though at the moment AUA is rich with more than 2000 students, the majority refused to participate in the survey because they did not feel comfortable sharing their experience of utilizing WhatsApp. Nevertheless, 124 students with diverse academic backgrounds participated in the questionnaire, simultaneously sharing their stories through the conducted interviews. It seemed that responses among the participants were uneven, however, the number of students from each major was also not equal. Business and English and Communications students outweigh the other programs, which is the reason for their higher percentage of respondents. Nonetheless, negative expectations exceeded the positive reality as the responses were meaningful and insightful.

The survey ensures clarity tested in a small group of students before the massive

distribution, and changed according to their feedback for a better implementation. The structure of the test is unbiased, lacking any leading questions. The testing system is valid but not fully accurate, because of having no control over the written and chosen responses, which could be generated unconsciously or unenthusiastically. Nonetheless, the combination of qualitative (open-ended questions) and quantitative responses guarantees certain accuracy. Furthermore, the interviews are also integrated into the survey analyses for comparing the real-time behavior versus the provided answers in a survey. From each major, a male and a female student with a randomly chosen year of study were selected for the interview, overall 12 people, to discuss their responses collected from the survey more scrupulously. The participants were selected arbitrarily for more objective responses and our expectations are based on the academic articles we read and our own observations.

## **Findings and Results**

In order to collect the opinions and data usage of the students regarding WhatsApp we conducted a survey, which included various types of questions, such as open-ended and multi-choices. Additionally, the survey is divided into sections to categorize the questions.

The questionnaire begins with technical questions for collecting general information about the student, such as their year of study, major, and gender. Firstly, the results of statistics demonstrated that 30% of participants are English and Communications students, and equally the other 30% are Business major students. This is not surprising as these programs have the highest number of students. Additionally, 17% come from the Data Science program, 12% present from

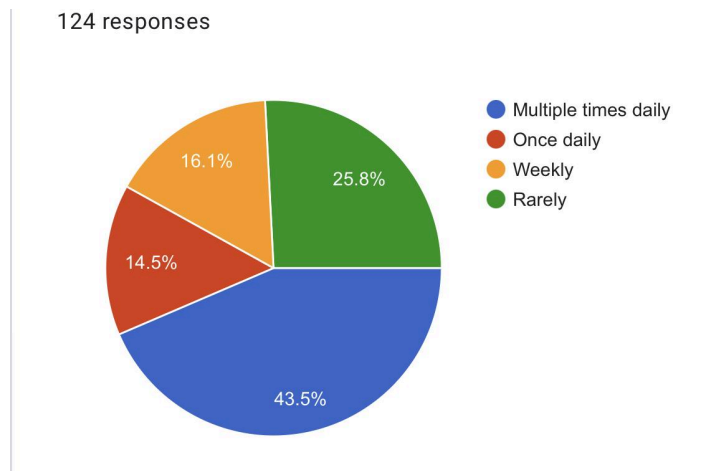
the Computer Science program, and lastly 4.8% from each of the two remaining programs such as Politics and Governance and Engineering Sciences. The indicated data is predictable, as the students from the most voted programs are usually more actively engaged in the organizational and data-gathering processes. Moreover, the enrollment level and capacity of the other programs are relatively low, which explains the numerical advantage of EC and Business responses.

Followingly, 77.4% of the survey participants were females and only 22.6% were males. Apparently, male students are less interested in completing the surveys, as during the process of sharing it many male individuals refused to participate. During an interview with a senior Business male student, he explained, “ Unlike girls, boys prefer more in-person communication because we have more freedom and flexibility to see our friends whenever we want. In contrast, females, especially those being raised by conservative strict Armenian parents, are more limited in meeting their friends.” Therefore, by analyzing his interview, WhatsApp communications and social media chats are not used by male students in comparison with female students, which reinforces the idea of why the number of female participants is higher. Even though the male participant completed the survey, he mentioned that his response was based on his own observation of his friends' reactions and attitudes toward real communication over chatting. Moreover, the number of female participants in the survey is also connected to the higher student female number in AUA. Thus, it provides a logical explanation that females would respond to the survey more than males.

It is important to note, that the age of the student wasn't specified in the survey, as the target age range is between 18 to 25, as well as it doesn't play a leading role in the survey. However, the year of the students, needs to be covered, as the perception of how communication works varies in different years of the study journey. It was expected that freshman students

would more likely enrich our survey with their responses out of their curiosity. Although the academic years of the students are relatively similar, 35.5% were first-year, 23.4 % were second-year, 21% were third-year and 20.2% were fourth-year students.

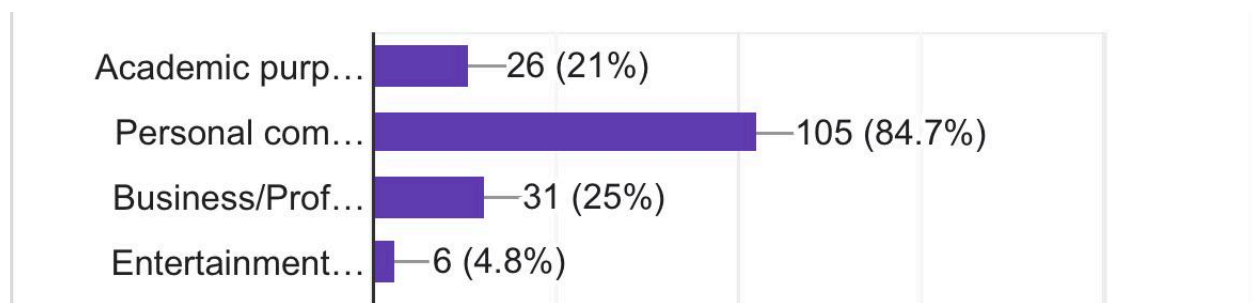
Following the technical questions, another vital part of the survey is regarding WhatsApp usage. Almost 43.5% of students emphasized that they utilize WhatsApp as a communication tool “Multiple times a day”, 25.8% chose the button “Rarely”, 16.1% of students use “Weekly” and 14.5% use WhatsApp daily. However, according to the interviews the majority also utilizes WhatsApp more frequently. An English and Communications sophomore female student emphasized in her interview, “ I have a large group of AUA friends, who constantly use WhatsApp, maybe more than 5 times a day for messaging in private and group chats.” Later she also added, “ We chat a lot via WhatsApp, as we feel that way, that we are together all day long.” She also mentioned that WhatsApp is a popular tool for communication among sophomore AUA students as the majority of their discussions are held in WhatsApp. Even though the answer may be subjective and too confirming, two other interviews were taken with a female freshman in Data Sciences who emphasized, “We are fans of WhatsApp (laughing about it), this is an answer to how frequently we use it ”and a junior-year Engineering male student, who said, “My AUA fellows and I are also ardent users of WhatsApp”. The answers of the interviewees were objective as they were not familiar with each other, meaning the groups of their friends were different. Therefore, it emphasizes that students at AUA indeed use WhatsApp multiple times a day and a week.



“ Figure 1: Responses to the question ‘How often do you use WhatsApp for communication?’ “

Discussing the primary purposes for using WhatsApp, the numbers showed that 84.7% of students’ messages are aimed for personal communication with their friends and families. It is obvious that many of the students would prefer online communication with their friends and family because digital reality also gives opportunities to always be in touch with loved ones. According to sources WhatsApp usage gives additional inspiration to entertain themselves and enjoy each other’s presence even at a distance (Fernández-Robin, et al., 2019). However, 25% voted that WhatsApp acts for business purposes. Many of the AUA students work because of the flexible schedule chosen by them, thus they need a communication medium for business conversations. According to our personal observation, Telegram and Messenger are more used for personal interaction in comparison with WhatsApp. That is the reason some of them choose this platform more for professional communication, rather than personal. Furthermore, 21% of students use WhatsApp for academic purposes. During an interview, with a senior engineering female student, she explained, “The application is used only for the class group chats because

some AUA students lack other social media. My classmates use WhatsApp because it is the only app they use for communication, that's why we have to use this platform for discussing our assignments. Although, I am happy because I like this app. ” She prefers WhatsApp as she explained it is more convenient for studying academic materials, because of its simplicity of use. Moreover, it is a widespread fact that even other university students consider WhatsApp as a useful tool for education to achieve many academic ambitions (Al-Mothana & Gasaymeh, 2017). It is exciting that people primarily use WhatsApp to maintain relationships with their friends, partners, colleagues and teammates, as it assists in shaping their relationships and enhances their ability to communicate in different ways. Additionally, only 4.8% use WhatsApp for memes, videos and other entertainment purposes. Following the above-mentioned interviewee, she introduced her AUA friend's position, who only uses WhatsApp in her leisure time only for fun.



“Figure 2: Responses to the question ‘What are your primary purposes for using WhatsApp?’”

However, the active time spent on WhatsApp also matters in the context of discussing the communication differences in real life and digital areas. It is vital to monitor their activity in digital communication. According to the survey information, 67.7% of students use WhatsApp for less than an hour per day, which is more than half of the participants. Only, 17.7% choose

from 1-3 hours and 7.3% from 3-5 hours. The other 0.8% gave answers such as, “I use weekly”, “almost never”, “less than 5 minutes”, so these students are the ones who don’t prefer using WhatsApp as a means of communication. However, even though the majority emphasized that they use WhatsApp multiple times a day, the number still doesn't increase from 1 hour. Therefore, AUA students are spending more time daily on in-person interactions than WhatsApp conversations.

Regarding the WhatsApp impact in face on face communications skills, the statistical analysis demonstrated that 80.6% of students consider having no impact to their face-to-face communications which was later supported by the interview. During the interview with a data sciences female freshman student, she indicated, “WhatsApp didn’t influence my social and communication skills in face-to-face interaction, as WhatsApp feels to me as a real world on a small screen.” Nevertheless, 13.7% of students specified that their in-person communications skills were improved to a certain level. Followingly, in comparison with face-to-face communication the interview-responder felt that WhatsApp positively impacted her communications skills, assisting her to overcome her social anxiety and shyness while interacting. This is surprising data, which specifies that communication tools such as WhatsApp don’t affect their interaction level, style and manner negatively, but even shape and enhance their skills. This finding contradicts our expectations, as during our research study different sources pointed out that students usually complain about WhatsApp, explaining that it limits their abilities and interpersonal interaction. Nevertheless, as AUA students don't consider a limitation and a threat to their direct communication skills improvement, as the above-mentioned interview also suggested, WhatsApp can’t play any role in their communication skills development as the conversations are mainly informal or are full of emojis, gifs and abbreviations. Thus, it restricts

shaping their communication skills because of an ordinary communication manner, which is not applicable in real life. However, only 3.2% of AUA students chose WhatsApp as a negative influencer on their abilities, which shows that at some point WhatsApp does critically shape the communication skills of students.

As discussed earlier in the IM message analysis section, emojis play a huge role in online communication. They contribute to expressing feelings and emotions. However, as the survey question demonstrates not everyone uses them in case of expressing their emotions. As the result shows, although 82.3% of the students use them to show their feelings, there's still 17.7% of the users who don't use emojis with the purpose of it. Although the 17.7% of people who don't use emojis is not a huge number regarding the other amount of people who use it, still, it goes beyond our expectations. Since emojis are the most practical and reflective means of expressing feelings, we wouldn't anticipate that some users would not use them at all when conducting interviews or creating the questionnaire. However, without the use of emojis, in order to not come off as a dry texter, there's people who use some other kinds of versions for expressing their emotions. For instance, 41.9% of the users choose to write in all caps and/or lengthening the letters is one of them which was mentioned in an interview by several students. For instance, as a Data Scientist male senior student stated, "I prefer not using the emojis since most of the time it's too much effort for me, changing the keyboard."

Other techniques mentioned by the 63.7% of participants include making the words longer as a way to express emotions in WhatsApp communication. Besides the emojis there's a tool available on the WhatsApp application, which is GIFs and stickers. 40.3% of the people choose this technique, which also vividly expresses the emotions of the text sender, like emojis. While mentioning "others" as an option for talking about the tools used in this case, a Russian

word was mentioned “Кружок”( Kruzhok), which means “circle” and is the circle style videoing in the application. This enables the user to send a video, in a small circle, not like a regular one. However, most probably the users would use this technique in case of communicating with closer people, since one should record either their face or just something else. Nevertheless, it’s fascinating how there are people who are quite comfortable with using this tool.

Using abbreviations and acronyms is another way of quickly expressing emotions in digital communication, such as humor or surprise. 36.3% of the users choose this way for emotional expression, which is a time saving way of doing it. For instance, “LOL” is a popular way of expressing laughter, which means “laughing out loud” (Rausch, 2023). This is one of the best ways emoji dislikers to avoid them. Moreover, the 37.1% percent of the participants chose using exclamation marks as a way that they use as well. This is another way of amplifying the emotion behind the message. Exclamation marks such as “! ,??” are ways which can help in showing excitement, confusion, surprise and intensity.

Additionally, the goal of the survey was to also find out WhatsApp’s role in personal communications, especially in a world where digital communication has replaced face-to-face communication on many occasions. Surprisingly, the number of people who mentioned that WhatsApp has helped them to build or maintain social relationships to some extent and the ones who mentioned it had no impact are both 46%. Having an equal result in the case of considering WhatsApp’s impact has turned out as a new aspect for us, since in today’s world digital communication has become a huge part of people and especially for students. Having no impact suggests that WhatsApp has had a partial effect on personal relationships, which means that the respondent has felt some impact but it is not as strong or essential as the 8.1% ones. On the other hand, the users who mentioned that it has had no impact on their relationships, suggests that the

application has not noticeably affected their relationships. Moreover, these kinds of people might not rely so much on digital communication or they use other forms of maintaining and building relationships. Not surprisingly, none of the participants mentioned that it had reduced their in person connections. This meets our expectations clearly as in reality the digital world has contributed to people's connections. It not only gives the opportunity to connect with people who one sees daily but also to stay in touch with people living far away.

Another vital question included in the survey is about the convenience of expressing themselves through WhatsApp rather than in person. 75.8% of respondents indicated that they find it easier to express themselves in real life, than via WhatsApp. Nevertheless, it is surprising that the interview results were different, as the majority of interviewees gave the opposite answer in contrast to the survey. During the interview, 4 students out of 12 responded the same way, and the reason was that they enjoyed real-life conversations and saw all the facial expressions and gestures of the person. Moreover, one of the participants commented, " I feel the person and clearly understand what he means. I don't like to express myself online, because I want to avoid any possibility of having a misunderstanding." The answers of the participants were alike, as all of them mentioned not trusting offline communication more because they don't want to face miscommunications and additionally stress the misleading messages they receive. However, 8 participants out of 12, responded that via WhatsApp they are able to message everything they want, as they are not pressured with the presence of their recipient, more open to using colloquial words and finally are not ashamed of their emotions. The main cause for the majority choosing online communication is the tension they experience in real life while trying to introduce their opinion or show their emotions. The students answered that they are afraid of being criticized or misunderstood. Also, some of them easily don't remember what they have said. Additionally, in

addition to these comments, some of the students stated, "I have more time to think before responding, as well as edit the text whenever I want. You can't change your words in your speech, but you can delete or edit the text." Therefore, through WhatsApp, they can review the chat and articulate their thoughts clearly.

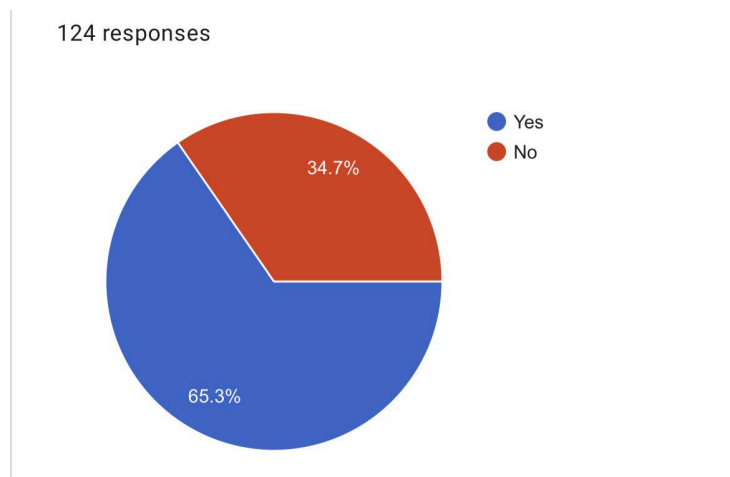
Nevertheless, this numerical data reinforces the idea that our expectations and reality are different. The questions that could be answered more generally while overlooking the intimate moments that make it easier to be emotionally relieved via WhatsApp because of not seeing faces. It is apparent from such a large number of students who deny that they express their emotions on WhatsApp, that it is logical that 80.6% of students voted that they also don't feel emotionally closer to someone when communicating via WhatsApp compared to in-person communication. These questions are intertwined and align with expectations of seeing people not deal with emotional closeness in WhatsApp if they don't like showing themselves.

Notwithstanding, 16.9% of students specified that sometimes they feel an emotional tie and closeness to a person more via WhatsApp. It is natural to immerse oneself in the conversation and position oneself from a new side, that is the reason students may feel the need to become emotionally closer while communicating. Even though 2.4% voted they certainly feel that they obtain a spiritual connection while communicating online.

One of the common things that can happen while communicating in the digital world is misunderstanding the messages. The majority of the students have faced misunderstanding because of the lack of non-verbal cues such as tone, facial expressions etc.,. The result of the question proves this as 65.3% of the students mentioned that they have experienced this kind of issue. This highlights a common challenge among users who utilize texting platforms in order to communicate with each other. However, a junior male interviewee from the Politics and

Governance program mentioned, “In case of misunderstandings voice messaging is the best tool available on the application which helps to understand each other.” On the other hand, another male student studying in the Data Science program stated about awkward situations saying, “I have been in a number of uncomfortable situations where texting has changed the meaning of the message making it almost nonsense.” The student refers to the ambiguity of the text, as he misread the text and the tone. This is one of the examples, which suggests that the lack of non-verbal cues, such as, tone of voice, body language or facial expressions plays a huge role in the interpretation of WhatsApp messages. The majority of people rely on those cues while communicating with each other, and in case of their absence confusion can arise.

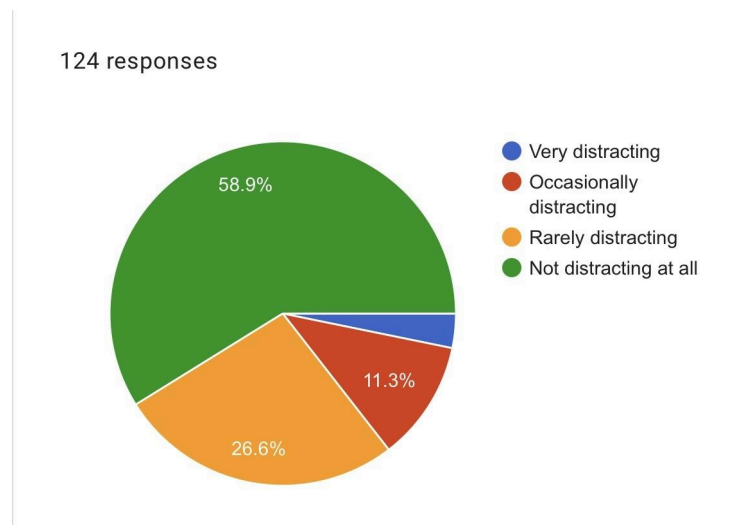
Still, there were 34.7% of respondents who stated that they had not faced misunderstandings while communicating via the application. This demonstrates that a smaller percentage of people are affected by this issue. In this case, besides taking into consideration that people have not really faced this issue we can assume that the people who have answered no have truly adapted to the challenges of text communication. Likewise, they can be so used to the way of people’s texting styles that it leads to their understanding of the message and its possible meaning of it. For instance, this can include those kinds of individuals who use digital ways of cues such as emojis, punctuation or other kinds of tools in order to clarify the tone of their messages. Moreover, the smaller number of participants who responded that they have not experienced the issue of misunderstanding, can also suggest that they feel more comfortable in interpreting the texts without needing extra cues, which in the case of face to face communication are mostly not avoidable.



“Figure 3: Responses to the question ‘Have you ever experienced a misunderstanding due to the lack of non-verbal cues (eg., tone, facial expression) on WhatsApp?’ “

One of the issues that students can face while studying at the university and being an active user of digital applications is getting distracted during academic tasks or lectures. However, it was not expected that a huge number of the respondents mentioned that WhatsApp is not distracting at all. The 58.9% of the students who have chosen that it is not distracting them from their lectures at all, can demonstrate that the students who use the digital communication application, are capable of using it without affecting their ability to concentrate on their academic studies. Likewise, this can also suggest that these users have discipline in the way they use the application and know how to balance it without it badly affecting their studies. This shows that the application is not only negatively affecting students while being a part of their communication lifestyle throughout their academic years. On the other hand, 26.6% of the participants stated that it rarely distracts them from their studies, suggesting that they are able to stay focused on the lectures and academic studies despite having access to the application. The

11.3% of the respondents who mentioned the application as one that occasionally distracts them illustrate that it is not a constant distraction for them but a mild one. This a foreseen result as the students might occasionally check their phones during their studies which may result in brief disruptions in focusing. Overall, the application is not majorly impacting their concentration. As one of the sophomore female interviewees from the Politics and Governance program mentioned, “WhatsApp is very distracting for us in case of lectures and academic studies”, She added “even the fact that we have the application downloaded on our phones, can distract us thinking we have connections that are necessary to keep, conversations that can be ongoing and getting text messages which can seem quite bothersome when trying to concentrate on lectures.” Regarding this, in the survey 3.2% of the respondents mentioned that the application is very distracting for them. As the percentage is pretty small, this indicates that WhatsApp mostly is not a major distraction during studies. Nevertheless, students have ambiguous opinions about whether WhatsApp serves as a distracting tool or not.



“Figure 4: Responses to the question ‘Do you find WhatsApp distracting during academic tasks or lectures ?’ “

Following the discussions about academic purposes, the questionnaire includes statistics about the words that are learned from WhatsApp and applied to real-time conversations. The numbers show that 69.4% of students have never enriched their vocabulary with WhatsApp words. It is an anticipated answer as in the interview process with an EC male sophomore student, who emphasized, “Me and my friends are not big lovers of studying new words used in WhatsApp as they are very informal and not serious which doesn’t fit with our speech style and way.” Additionally, he highlighted that the slang used in WhatsApp is complex and sometimes not understandable for the boys because it is too modern. He added, “I can’t imagine using WhatsApp slang words in front of the elderly, as it is not understandable and well, stupid for me. Although, in WhatsApp, it is fine for me to use them.” However, we have additionally interviewed the above-mentioned EC female student, who also mentioned, “ For me, WhatsApp doesn’t have useful words to learn, which may be used even on a daily basis.” She brought up an example of “K” which stands for “Okay” (an informal way of saying “good, I understood you”), and the word “YOLO” which is an abbreviation meaning “you only live once,” but it is being used in all the contexts as an exclamation mark or an imitation of a sound word. These words are not specifically used in WhatsApp, but they originated in the Internet area and slowly moved to various communication tools. Moreover, the colloquial words utilized in other social media such as TikTok, Twitter and Instagram create a vocabulary for the students (Fauziah et al., 2023). Therefore, there is internet slang which is used in the students’ speech frequently, as they want to be modern, short and precise. The abbreviation of “OKAY” is well known “K”, which formally translates as “Good, or I agree” and it is widely used in conversations, especially among the

students. Therefore, students usually include the abbreviated version of “okay” in their speeches while communicating through communication media such as WhatsApp.

Even though these words are considered slang words, she mentioned that these new words used in WhatsApp are not adaptable in reality, which is why there is no necessity to study them. Therefore, it appears that AUA students avoid using WhatsApp terms in everyday life. Nonetheless, 22.6% of students said that the vocabulary of WhatsApp could be learned and utilized. Following, only 4% of students state that they learn new terms and modern WhatsApp language frequently. Additionally, a minor percentage doesn't recall such cases or don't use them at all negatively commenting on the new WhatsApp communication.

Moreover, there are diverse viewpoints on the issue of whether WhatsApp is better for academic talks than face-to-face conversations. In order to find out about this, we included the question “Do you think using WhatsApp for academic discussions is more effective than face-to-face discussions? Why or why not?”. The majority of participants prefer face to face communication, according to the survey results. They highlighted the enhanced communication and efficiency in showing emotions and facial expressions. They strongly believed that in the case of academic purposes face to face discussions are more suitable and effective. These people took into consideration the cruciality of nonverbal cues such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions in clear communication. Undoubtedly, facial expressions play a huge role in interacting. These cues are part of verbal and non-verbal communication, signals that demonstrate several factors in the person's interaction. These not only enable better communication but also help recognize the person's behavior while communicating. For instance, even gaze-direction is considered one of the important factors while observing a person's behavior. This ability helps to observe what people are looking at, resulting in the

understanding of their intentions and objectives (Frith, 2009). As stated by one of the respondents, in-person conversations enable people to "see each other's raw emotions, catch glimpses of their mimics, and understand each other better." Additionally, the respondents mention about face to face communication being more productive and engaging, contributing to getting real-time feedback and dynamic discussions. Another factor that contributed to the respondents' choice of face to face conversations, as mentioned by them, included the issue of response time.

Many people state that most of the users of the application tend to respond in their convenience. This makes the other person wait and delays the conversation. One respondent explained that "People respond whenever they can, which makes the duration of the discussion ten times longer". Likewise, another respondent also shared a similar opinion stating that while communicating in person "everything gets discussed simultaneously and no questions remain unanswered". Moreover, several of the respondents reported that they preferred FaceTime and Telegram over WhatsApp as digital communication applications. One of the respondents stated that Telegram makes it easier for the students to communicate and since all of the chats opened for academic purposes are in Telegram, making the same ones in WhatsApp would have the same effect. Another one states that face to face conversations are better for projects, or they just use Telegram or FaceTime instead. In case of in person communication being a better version for academic projects, the answers include the misunderstandings prevailing and distractions being another of the concerns as disadvantages of online communication.

Nonetheless, some of the participants recognized WhatsApp's advantages especially in flexibility and convenience as well. Despite the majority of the students preferring face-to-face communication, there are students who recognize the good side of the application as well.

Flexibility, having the opportunity to store the conversations and referring back to them later are some of the advantages mentioned by them. Unlike real-life conversation, the application has the tool of preserving the conversations. This gives the opportunity of not putting so much pressure on memorizing. The application makes the process of reviewing key points and keeping necessary information possible. One respondent mentioned “ "It is efficient, we can communicate at different hours and keep each other updated."

The results follow the answers to another open-ended question which highlights the major drawbacks of WhatsApp that iMessage users encounter. The recorded answers are N=37 mostly short answers, emphasizing the indignation for the WhatsApp functions. WhatsApp users mostly complain about the lack of face-to-face communication, considering that it influences real interaction making it more complex and deteriorating communication skills. Indeed the outnumbered text messages affect communication skills and diminish the wish to interact in real life (Brown, 2013). This seems to bother students because it limits their understanding of how their conversation evolves, which leads to miscommunication.

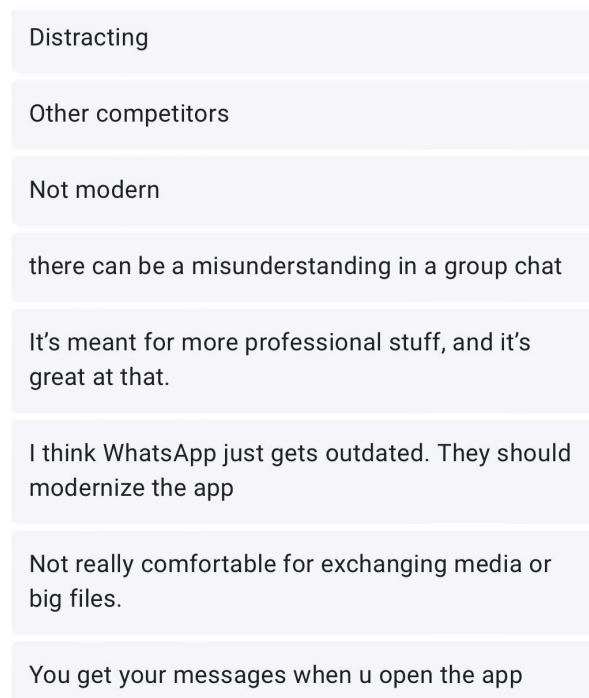
Consequently, a number of respondents suggest that certain messages can be misunderstood or misinterpreted, because of a lack of facial expressions and the body language of the message sender. Another comment is about not feeling the emotions of a person as mentioned because of a lack of expressions and separately seeing emojis as a disadvantage. Moreover, most students complain about the lack of smoothness in interaction referring to WhatsApp functions, negatively comparing the message-receiving process with the more preferred Telegram application. Moreover, some contradictory answers were recorded such as a part of the students who view messages in WhatsApp as shorter ones, which does not allow for more detailed and in-depth discussion as has been expressed. Although, other respondents

consider that in contrast, the communication takes longer, which creates some misunderstandings. In addition to these statistics, during the interviews, 7 participants also considered WhatsApp conversations longer than in real life, and 5 people said that it was the right amount of time and length to message via WhatsApp. However, when we asked them to elaborate on their given answers, all of the participants agreed, that it depends on the situation and type of conversation, more importantly, there is no difference for them whether it is specifically about WhatsApp or Telegram. Some of the users also expressed their dissatisfaction with the design of WhatsApp, which as stated is “horrible and inconvenient”. Interestingly, some of the girls' interview respondents highlighted this issue as well. For instance, a female sophomore in Computer Science responded, “Sometimes because of their offered standard childish backgrounds of the chats and their offered buttons, I just get frustrated, because it is not aesthetically pleasurable for me.” These comments and responses explain the reason people compare it with Telegram and their incline toward that platform.

Additionally, another surprising answer regarding WhatsApp's drawback is the “META”, which is the owner company of WhatsApp. The reports about the functionality of “META” are generally highlighted in the answers as primary disadvantages, such as receiving the message upon its opening. Additionally, another highlighted issue is the message-deleting process, which doesn't permit the deletion of a message without any sign. Usually, after deleting the message an icon appears in the conversation which states that “the message was deleted”. Therefore, WhatsApp does demonstrate all the signs of messages. Last but not least, the other users mentioned in their answer that WhatsApp is “an outdated communication application that needs to be modernized” and transformed into a more convenient platform for interaction. However,

the updates and the models of the phones are different, which influences the application style and even its functioning, which is the reason such comments can't be considered objective.

Followingly, we asked the students whether there were any differences between their communications styles on WhatsApp and real life conversations. There were responses such as "keeping conversations short on WhatsApp," indicating that some students prefer brief and efficient communication when using the platform. Others mentioned "it is more formal on WhatsApp since it's for academic purposes only, with people I am usually not that close with," suggesting that WhatsApp is also often used in a more professional or distant manner. A few responses emphasized the emotional limitations of digital communication, with one student saying, "I can't see the facial expressions, voice tone, mood of the person. Makes me experience unnecessary anxiety." On the other hand, some respondents noted little to no difference in their communication style, saying things like "generally the same as if I were to talk face-to-face," or referencing only a "general difference," such as the presence of visual cues in person. These comments reflect a range of perspectives, from viewing WhatsApp as a limited but useful tool, to experiencing it as emotionally disconnecting, to treating it as similar to in-person interaction. Not surprisingly, a respondent mentioned the necessity of effort while communicating via WhatsApp in case of emotion transferring as well, saying "As it is online, we have to put more effort into conveying our emotions better". In any kind of communication platform, there is a need to find the best possible ways in order to show your emotions for the receiver of the message to grasp the actual feelings, which requires the usage of tools of the platform or other kinds of ways for doing so.



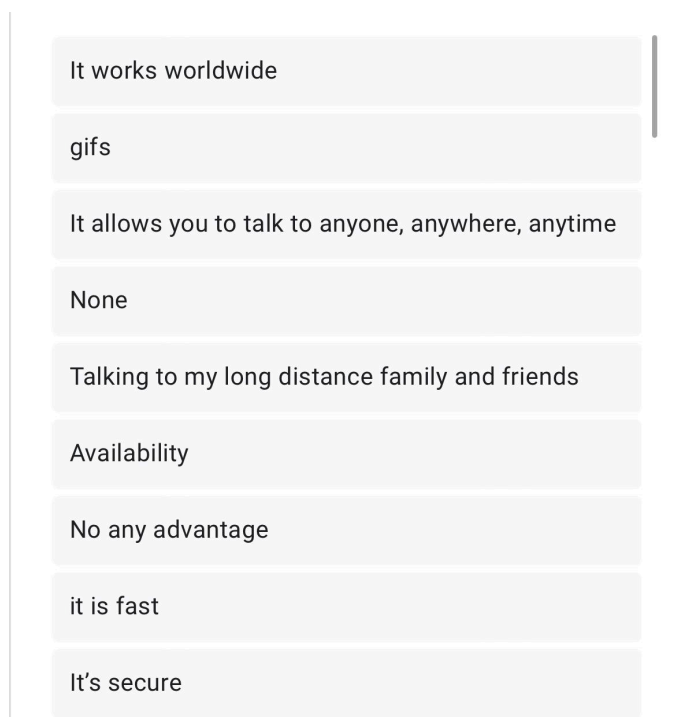
“Figure 5: Responses to the question ‘ What do you see as its biggest drawback ?’ “

Even though there were 37 respondents who specified certain challenges they face while using WhatsApp, the number didn't stop because the following question asking about the advantages had 14 negative answers highlighting “no advantages for WhatsApp”. The target of the research is to find the differences in the communication style of AUA students in real and virtual life, which is the primary reason the survey includes both disadvantages and advantages. Thus, 48 people filled in the question about the greatest WhatsApp advantages, emphasizing what they like in this application. The answers were that “ It works worldwide”, “ It allows you to talk to anyone, anywhere, anytime”, and “I can communicate with long-distant friends”, which

demonstrates that AUA people enjoy communicating via WhatsApp, as it doesn't limit interaction and is a comfortable area where people can communicate constantly. Additionally, students bring attention to the fastness and security that WhatsApp messaging provides, so for students it is a safe area where they can talk to each other and as it was mentioned in the responses they can reply to messages based on their convenience rather than urgency or need. Moreover, one of the answers reinforces the idea that WhatsApp makes distance communication more effective, compared to other social media like Instagram, where students can get distracted by short-form content while texting someone. For example, according to a Computer Science senior male student, " WhatsApp is a fast communication tool for me, where I only chat, without paying attention to other things, also I see only message section, but on Facebook or Instagram, I usually forget checking my DMs because of more interesting content I see there." Therefore, though WhatsApp also has a section with statuses or interesting channels with content, this is also important to note that WhatsApp is a communication medium, where people mostly talk to each other.

Another interesting comment was about being able to review the message before sending and in case of a mistake edit the text. However, this is a general feature available for all the other Instant Messaging platforms. WhatsApp communication also assists students in managing group chats and their time, as they view the message and have additional time for answering, which they don't do in real life as people expect instant answers. Also, for other students WhatsApp interaction is more about comfort and the absence of stress. Nonetheless, as was mentioned 14 people in this field expressed criticism toward WhatsApp, naming it an area where students are limited in scrolling through the entertaining content. Other comments in the same manner, such as "I do not see any advantage in WhatsApp, I do not like the way this app works and its general

design.” or “Nothing impressive”, and so on. The negative responses were not as intriguing as was expected to receive them, although we were waiting for them in the section on disadvantages. Nevertheless, this highlights that some of the AUA students are not satisfied with the functions, operation and design of WhatsApp. However, the majority of the interview participants were mostly praising WhatsApp as a platform for communication, even though some of them were also Telegram users.



“Figure 6: Responses to the question ‘What do you see as the greatest advantage of WhatsApp for communication?’ “

Through a survey and interview analysis, we found specific vivid differences and similarities in how AUA students interact with each other. The findings of this study highlight the significant role WhatsApp plays in the daily communication patterns of AUA students. This research gave us a real and honest view of how AUA students use WhatsApp in their daily lives.

It provided a wide range of responses that reflect the students' communication styles, the differences in how they interact with others, and the various purposes behind their use of the app. Specifically, the interview answers meeting our expectations, were more accurately describing their WhatsApp usage. However, overall we expected to have a more blurred picture in both interviews and surveys, where some of the answers will be identical and some completely different.

Through the survey and interviews, we were able to understand not just how often students use WhatsApp, but also why they use it, who they communicate with, and how it fits into their academic, personal, and professional routines. The collected data and personal insights offered many viewpoints and helped answer important questions about student behavior, preferences, and digital communication habits. Overall, this research created a clear and detailed picture of WhatsApp's role in the AUA student community.

### **Limitations and Future Study**

Although the research was conducted scrupulously, specific improvements would make the study more insightful. For future study, we would suggest controlling the whole process of the survey completion to guarantee more accuracy and avoid unserious and arbitrary answers. Although we have witnessed the number of survey participants filling out the form very attentively and surely state that the majority of the responses are reasonable and accurate, nevertheless, as the survey is not mandatory and is structured by people of equal status, some of the students may not strive to give relevant answers. Therefore, the student's approach to the survey may not have a serious intention, yet in comparison to us it will be shown more

enthusiasm to the scholars and professors. Moreover, the linguistic and psychological aspects of the IM messages or interviews would be more professional to be analyzed by the specialists, as there are specific words or phrases whose usage has a deeper explanation. Even though the analyses made in the paper are entirely based on the studies of the specialists, still the primary source would be more useful.

Additionally, according to our survey responses and IMessages , some of the AUA students prefer Telegram to WhatsApp. Telegram is being used more than WhatsApp among many students from different majors, which is surprising, considering that Telegram has all the Russian connotations. Telegram should have been uncommon for English-speaking students such as AUA because this platform contains many Russian channels and more functions suitable for Russian speakers. Therefore, the study about Telegram gives another picture of how students' communication works in another digital application. As we found out during our survey and interviews that AUA students have a strong appeal towards Telegram, which rised the curiosity towards the application. It is interesting why an American University student finds a Russian based application more convenient than a more internationally designed one. Therefore, research towards their deeper appeal to the application would be necessary. Even though it is the same communication tool the research will likely have similarities. Nevertheless, with all the suggested changes, make the study more informative and educational. Hence, these suggestions will enrich the paper and provide a more precise picture of WhatsApp/Telegram and any other communication platforms' influence on face-to-face interaction.

## Conclusion

WhatsApp is a strong instant messaging platform that has shaped the communication styles of the students at the American University of Armenia (AUA). AUA students have faced the post-pandemic period and its effects, which resulted in them to actively use virtual communication applications for interaction. Our study examines both the responses of the survey participants and the linguistic analysis of iMessages, to define the difference between the intercultural and virtual communications of AUA students. The two methods illustrate how nowadays student communication works, highlighting its nuances and patterns of interaction. The IM messages were part of the research and analysis, demonstrating several language differences. In contrast, the interviews were gathered to contradict the survey and the iMessages which assisted in understanding how precisely their communication is being different in both areas. Hence, the findings demonstrated that students' perceptions of the two forms of communication are diverse.

The IM message analysis demonstrated the style and specific linguistics of the AUA students' digital communication. Students actively use slang, emojis, code-switching, word lengthening and abbreviations to enrich their speech and contextually highlight the meaning of their message. Moreover, the IM chats which contain emojis and are short in their form, emphasize how students strive to express their feelings and show their identity. Additionally, they demonstrate how students control their bilingualism, by mixing Armenian, Russian and English to convey their message in the best way.

Nevertheless, the survey reveals a bigger picture of how AUA students use WhatsApp in their daily lives. The results indicated that WhatsApp is being used mostly for academic, personal and business reasons. Moreover, the results showed that the majority of the participants prefer face-to-face communication, as they may easily express their emotions and avoid any misunderstandings. However, some of the interview respondents highlighted that they feel more comfortable expressing themselves via WhatsApp, as they don't face any inconvenience and have an opportunity to rethink before saying. Therefore, some of the results were quite mixed, which couldn't entirely demonstrate the difference in the AUA students' interaction, however, it emphasized in which part of their communication they are different.

Both methods of study deeply illustrate the preferences of AUA students while communicating. First and foremost, the IM message analysis highlights how they use the language to make it more visually appealing and sounding more creative. Nonetheless, the survey describes how students perceive digital communication by facing certain limitations or being satisfied with online interaction. Thus, the IM messages mainly help to understand what students do while communicating, in contrast the survey highlights how they feel about their communication. Nevertheless, even though many students have adopted their habits of real life into virtual areas, many AUA students consider face-to-face communication as more preferred.

Last but not least, the results of both the IM messages and the survey have several significant key takeaways. Firstly, face-to-face communication will not be replaced by digital interaction, but rather will be more complemented with the internet language. Secondly, AUA students follow certain digital communication standards and localize them by expressing their identity and relationships. Lastly, WhatsApp assists students to overcome their social anxiety and express themselves in a new way. Furthermore, it connects bilinguals in a multicultural

environment.

The paper aims to emphasize how WhatsApp, as a globally renowned communication application, may affect the interaction style of the AUA students. It demonstrates how linguistic and social elements are blended by creating a new communication medium. Furthermore, the study indicates how AUA students interact as bilinguals and the way their communication is being influenced by WhatsApp. Finally, according to our results AUA students don't have a certain pattern or style while communicating, and among all of them it may differ. Hence, the paper indicated how students find ways to interact and connect with each other, even in virtual reality.

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