



UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION (UniMAC)
INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

HOW WHATSAPP PEER SUPPORT NETWORKS FOSTER SOCIAL BONDING AND
ACADEMIC RESILIENCE AMONG UNIMAC-IFT BROADCAST JOURNALISM
STUDENTS

BY

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(MAJN24005)

JANUARY, 2026

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STUDENT DECLARATIONS

I, Loretta Juamah Nelson, declare that this thesis, except quotations and references contained in published works, which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere. Therefore, I bear the responsibility for any shortcomings.

Loretta Juamah Nelson MAJN24005 15th January, 2026

Student Name

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

This Project Work has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Project Work laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication, UniMAC-IJ.

Dr. Solace Asafo

.....

15th January, 2026

Supervisor Name

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work first to the Almighty God for His grace and strength. To my beloved mother, Madam Adelberta Nelson, and my entire family, for your endless love, prayers, and support throughout this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Solace Asafo, for her massive contribution and time; may the good Lord bless you. Finally, I am grateful to all my lecturers within the School of Graduate Studies and the Journalism Department at UniMAC-IJ for imparting knowledge. I appreciate the academic support and encouragement from Eyram Yorgbe and everyone else who contributed to my success.

May God bless you all abundantly.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how WhatsApp peer support networks foster social bonding and academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students at the University of Media, Arts and Communication–Institute of Film and Television (UniMAC–IFT). Anchored in the Technology Acceptance Model and Uses and Gratification Theory, the study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist approach to explore students’ lived experiences within student-created WhatsApp groups. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation of four cohort-based WhatsApp groups spanning Levels 100 to 400. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns of academic collaboration, emotional support, and social interaction. The findings reveal that WhatsApp functions as a hybrid academic–social space where students share lecture materials, coordinate assignments, and provide peer tutoring while simultaneously engaging in informal interactions that strengthen trust, belonging, and emotional support. These social bonds were found to play a crucial role in enhancing academic resilience by encouraging persistence, timely task completion, and proactive help-seeking during periods of academic pressure. The study concludes that WhatsApp peer support networks operate as vital socio-academic infrastructures within practice-based programmes such as Broadcast Journalism. The findings contribute context-specific insights to digital learning scholarship and highlight the need for institutional recognition of informal peer-support platforms in Ghanaian higher education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Peer support networks have long been recognised as essential structures that promote academic adjustment, emotional stability, and collaborative learning among university students. In higher education contexts, peer networks function as informal systems through which students share knowledge, exchange academic resources, and provide social encouragement that enhances learning outcomes (Mbolekwa, 2021). Traditional peer networks usually relied on face-to-face engagement, study groups, and in-person mentoring. However, the rapid integration of digital communication technologies in university environments has reshaped how students interact. The rise of blended and virtual learning environments (accelerated by increasing smartphone penetration) has pushed students to rely on digital tools to sustain peer collaboration and academic dialogue (Putri, 2024). As a result, technology-enabled peer communities have become central to contemporary higher education, offering students new spaces for cooperation, support, and identity-building beyond the physical classroom (Pimmer et al., 2019).

In Ghana and across Africa, WhatsApp has emerged as one of the most dominant digital platforms supporting academic and social communication among university students. Its affordability, ease of use, low data consumption, and multimodal features—such as voice notes, document sharing, and group chats make it an appealing tool for educational support (Mante, 2024). Recent Ghanaian studies show that WhatsApp has become the “default academic communication platform,” allowing students to coordinate assignments, disseminate lecture materials, engage in peer tutoring, and clarify concepts in real time (Blessing, 2024). Beyond academic functions, students use WhatsApp groups as vibrant social spaces to strengthen friendships, cope with stress, and maintain emotional resilience within demanding

academic environments (Dey & Amponsah, 2020). Among communication-related programmes, such as Broadcast Journalism, which requires constant coordination for newsroom simulations, group productions, deadlines, and practical assignments, the reliance on WhatsApp is even more pronounced. It serves as a central hub where students share breaking news updates, coordinate fieldwork, plan studio sessions, and support one another through intensive practical tasks (Azumah, 2024).

This study is therefore grounded in the recognition that WhatsApp is not merely an academic tool but a dual-purpose ecosystem that blends learning support with social bonding (Tshuma, 2017). Existing research shows that peer support networks on digital platforms significantly improve students' confidence, problem-solving ability, and academic resilience, especially in demanding, practice-based disciplines (Van Geel & Mazzucato, 2021). For Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC-IFT, WhatsApp peer groups help them manage tight timelines, navigate course demands, and maintain motivation during rigorous media production activities (Ananga & Sakyi, 2023). Simultaneously, the social interactions within these groups, such as informal conversations, humour, and emotional encouragement, create a sense of belonging that protects students from academic stress, anxiety, and burnout (Ekuban, 2023). Yet, despite the widespread use of WhatsApp among Ghanaian journalism students, little empirical attention has been given to how these peer support networks simultaneously promote social bonding and academic resilience (Buertey, 2023). This study fills that gap by investigating the dual role of WhatsApp peer support networks in shaping both the academic and social experiences of UniMAC-IFT Broadcast Journalism students.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

WhatsApp has rapidly become a central channel for academic coordination and peer support in higher education. Still, this uptake has not been matched by equally robust Ghana-specific research on its dual academic and social functions. Several recent empirical studies

show WhatsApp's clear pedagogical value: participants in WhatsApp-supported learning groups demonstrate higher knowledge gains and greater resilience in professional and educational settings (Mante, 2024). Other work from African universities finds that WhatsApp is widely adopted for teaching, administrative coordination, and informal study support, with students reporting its ease of use and strong perceived usefulness for quick resource-sharing and interaction (Van Geel & Mazzucato, 2021). At the same time, smaller Ghanaian investigations indicate that WhatsApp is often used in unguided, multifunctional ways supporting administration, social connection and study, yet these studies tend to be descriptive rather than deeply analytical about how social-bonding processes and resilience emerge from group interactions (Ekuban, 2022).

A careful comparison of the empirical literature reveals an important nuance: global and some Western-centered studies often emphasize structured, academically-focused WhatsApp use (groups with strict rules, predominantly study-related posts, and measurable learning outcomes) whereas African studies report hybrid, context-specific patterns in which academic and social uses coexist and shape one another (Dey & Amponsah, 2020). For example, Putri (2024) documented measurable learning and resilience benefits in focused WhatsApp study groups, while Azumah (2024) show that in many African contexts WhatsApp activity produces social capital (bonding and bridging) that mediates mental-health and support outcomes for students. Blessing (2024) further demonstrates that WhatsApp groups serve overlapping functions (information sharing, emotional support, and informal administration) leading to mixed content streams that complicate simple "academic-only" characterizations. These empirical contrasts suggest that findings from Western or tightly controlled implementations cannot be transposed wholesale to Ghanaian campus life, where social bonding and academic help may be tightly interwoven and mutually reinforcing (Amoah, 2025).

This body of work, therefore, exposes a clear research gap that this study will address: there is limited empirical, context-sensitive analysis documenting how WhatsApp peer support networks specifically foster social bonding and how those bonds translate into measurable forms of academic resilience among students at Ghanaian institutions—especially within discipline-specific cohorts such as UniMAC-IFT Broadcast Journalism. Prior studies either measure academic outcomes without unpacking the social processes that enable them or describe mixed-use patterns without connecting those patterns to resilience metrics (Pimmer et al., 2019). The proposed study will fill that gap by combining systematic content analysis of student course groups with thematic interviews and resilience indicators, thereby producing the context-rich, theory-informed evidence policymakers, administrators, and instructors need to leverage WhatsApp’s strengths for both learning and social support in Ghanaian universities.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

To examine how WhatsApp peer support networks foster social bonding and academic resilience among UniMAC-IFT Broadcast Journalism students.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

The study specifically seeks to;

1. Explore how Broadcast Journalism students use WhatsApp peer support networks for academic purposes.
2. Determine how WhatsApp peer networks contribute to students’ social bonding.
3. Analyze how WhatsApp peer platforms enhance students’ academic resilience.
4. Identify the types of content shared and categorize their academic or social value.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following question.

1. How do Broadcast Journalism students use WhatsApp peer support networks?
2. In what ways do WhatsApp peer groups foster social bonding among students?

3. How do WhatsApp peer networks support academic resilience?
4. What types of content dominate WhatsApp peer platforms (academic vs. social)?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research offers a substantive contribution to the digital learning and peer-learning literature by meticulously examining the functional role of an informal, student-driven platform (the WhatsApp peer support network) within a specialized academic discipline. By focusing on "How WhatsApp Peer Support Networks Foster Social Bonding and Academic Resilience Among UniMAC–IFT Broadcast Journalism Students," the study moves beyond generic discussions of social media usage to provide empirical evidence on the specific mechanisms through which mobile instant messaging platforms cultivate deep social cohesion. This deepens the understanding of how such networks operate as vital emotional and informational safety nets, directly correlating enhanced social bonding with improved academic resilience (the ability to recover from academic setbacks). Furthermore, it enriches the literature on blended learning by isolating the unique dynamics of peer-facilitated digital support, establishing clear links between accessible, synchronous peer communication and successful educational outcomes in demanding, professional-track programs like Broadcast Journalism.

The practical implications of these findings extend to lecturers, administrators, and student leaders at UniMAC–IFT and other higher education institutions adopting blended learning models. For lecturers, the results provide data on where students seek help, enabling the formal integration of successful peer-support structures to complement formal teaching methods and curriculum design. For administrators, the study highlights the necessity of institutional recognition and light oversight for these informal digital communities to maximize their efficacy while mitigating risks, thereby enhancing the overall digital academic support ecosystem. Finally, for student leaders, the research offers a blueprint for organizing and optimizing these networks to ensure equitable access to support, fostering a stronger sense of

community and collective responsibility among peers. By detailing the operational success of these networks, the study enhances the overall understanding of how non-traditional digital tools can be leveraged strategically to bolster student well-being and academic success in the contemporary educational landscape.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is explicitly delimited to investigating the use of student-created academic WhatsApp groups among the entire undergraduate Broadcast Journalism student population (Levels 100 to 400) at the UniMAC–Institute of Film and Television (UniMAC–IFT). The research strictly focuses on analyzing the nature and functions of the communication content within these informal peer-support platforms. Specifically, the scope covers four key thematic areas: how the groups facilitate academic collaboration and information sharing pertinent to coursework; the extent to which they provide social and emotional support to members; and the overall impact of this digital engagement on the student learning experience within the specific confines of the Broadcast Journalism program.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation is the constrained scope, as focusing solely on Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC-IFT hinders the generalizability of the findings to other departments or universities. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data (interviews and surveys) introduces a risk of social desirability bias, potentially skewing the perception of bonding and resilience. Finally, the chosen qualitative design, while providing rich contextual depth, inherently prevents the calculation of statistical probabilities and limits the ability to make broad statistical inferences about the population. These factors must be considered when interpreting the results on WhatsApp's role in peer support and academic resilience.

1.8. Organization of the Study

The study is logically structured into five chapters to ensure a systematic flow from problem identification to conclusion. Chapter One provides the foundational background, problem statement, objectives, and significance of the research. Chapter Two develops the theoretical and conceptual framework, anchoring the study in relevant literature and established models like TAM and UGT. Chapter Three details the research methodology, including the design, population, sampling, data collection tools, and ethical protocols employed. Chapter Four presents the quantitative and qualitative findings, analyzing the data according to the research objectives. Finally, Chapter Five synthesizes the findings, draws conclusions, offers policy recommendations, and suggests avenues for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Meaning and Functions of WhatsApp

WhatsApp, fundamentally defined as a cross-platform, encrypted instant messaging (IM) application, utilizes the internet to enable synchronous and asynchronous communication through text, voice notes, images, and documents, establishing itself as a highly accessible and versatile communication tool (Muhyidin, 2019). The platform's group chat functionality, which facilitates rapid information dissemination and real-time interaction among multiple users, has seen its utility extend significantly beyond personal, social connections into pedagogical and organizational contexts (Pang & Woo, 2020). Globally, academic literature supports the view of WhatsApp as a powerful learning support tool, serving functions such as facilitating collaborative learning, distributing lecture notes, coordinating group assignments, and ensuring continuous engagement outside the traditional classroom setting (Mabaso et al., 2023). For instance, in African educational environments, its function is often noted for bridging communication gaps between students and faculty, especially in areas with infrastructural challenges, thereby making it an essential component of technology-assisted peer networks (Batawi, 2019). The ease of use and low data consumption compared to dedicated Learning Management Systems (LMS) make it the dominant platform for peer support networks.

Beyond its academic utility, WhatsApp remains a primary platform for social connection and group bonding, functions which are empirically observed to be deeply intertwined in the context of Ghanaian and broader African student communities (Amuzu et al., 2018). While studies from Western contexts often highlight the need for stricter rules and a focus on academic-only content within these digital peer support networks to prevent

distraction, empirical reviews from sub-Saharan Africa indicate a nuanced approach (Masoga, 2020). Students habitually mix academic discussions with social content (such as sharing news, entertainment, and organising social events), effectively using the platform as a seamless extension of their real-world social fabric (Dogan, 2019). This blending of functions promotes affective group bonding, reduces feelings of isolation, and creates a supportive environment that enhances peer-to-peer psychological support, which indirectly aids academic performance by increasing motivation and reducing anxiety (Morsidi et al., 2021). This critical distinction the integration of academic content with social bonding, highlights a significant gap in applying purely Western-derived models of technology-assisted learning to the Ghanaian context, forming the core empirical focus of the current study (Kartal, 2019).

2.1.2 Definition of Key Concepts

The literature review establishes a theoretical foundation by defining the core concepts central to understanding the impact of digital platforms on student life, drawing on global, African, and Ghanaian contexts. A Network is broadly defined as a structured set of interconnected individuals or organizations, where the connections are governed by specific relations (Munir, 2021). Building on this, a Group is a smaller, more cohesive form of network characterized by frequent interaction, shared purpose, and mutual influence, often developing norms and boundaries (Koga, 2021). A Peer Network specifically involves horizontal relationships between individuals of similar status, age, or background, focused on reciprocal support, information exchange, and shared experiences within a defined setting, such as a university department (Manurung et al., 2022). Furthermore, a Technology-assisted Peer Network leverages digital tools and platforms (such as WhatsApp, Facebook, or dedicated Learning Management Systems) to facilitate and sustain these peer interactions, overcoming geographical and temporal constraints (Amuzu et al., 2018). WhatsApp Peer Support Networks, as defined for this study, are student-created and maintained chat groups on the

WhatsApp messaging platform, used primarily for immediate, asynchronous communication related to academic tasks and social integration among members of a specific cohort (Masoga, 2020). These digital peer networks are instrumental in fostering outcomes like academic resilience and collaborative learning. Academic Resilience is the student's capacity to successfully cope with and recover from adversity, stress, or academic setbacks inherent in the educational environment (Cassidy, 2016). Operational indicators for this study include:

1. Timely task completion despite challenges;
2. Maintenance of satisfactory GPA over time; and
3. Proactive help-seeking behavior within the network.

Simultaneously, the platform supports Social Bonding, defined as the degree of connectedness and feelings of mutual trust, shared identity, and emotional support established between individuals (Putnam, 2000). Study-specific indicators for social bonding include:

1. Frequency of non-academic interactions (e.g., sharing jokes, personal news);
2. Willingness to offer personal favors or emotional support; and
3. Sense of belonging to the cohort expressed via the platform.

Research by Bariham (2020) in the Ghanaian educational context empirically supports that strong social bonds within technology-assisted groups significantly correlate with improved student well-being and reduced feelings of isolation.

The final core concept, Collaborative Learning, is an instructional approach that requires two or more students to work together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product, emphasizing interaction and shared responsibility (Yang, 2023). Within the technology-assisted environment, this involves using the platform to spontaneously discuss complex concepts, share explanatory materials, and collectively prepare for examinations (Alharbi et al., 2022). Empirical reviews indicate a critical gap between Western

studies and the Ghanaian reality; studies in the West often enforce stricter guidelines for academic-only use, demonstrating higher rates of pure content exchange (Klang et al., 2021). However, African and local Ghanaian realities, such as those observed in initial content analysis of NAFTI student groups, reveal a necessary mix of academic posts (e.g., lecture notes, assignment tips) and social content (e.g., sports, politics, birthday wishes). This dual function suggests that the social bonding facilitated by non-academic content is inextricably linked to the willingness of peers to engage in meaningful collaborative learning, thus making the network effective (Tan et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Nature and Types of WhatsApp Peer Support Networks

The application of mobile instant messaging (MIM) platforms like WhatsApp in academic settings has led to the emergence of diverse peer support network typologies, fundamentally categorized by their primary function (Ibrahim, 2023). Globally, the literature differentiates between networks strictly dedicated to Academic Groups, which focus solely on the transmission of lecture notes, assignment scheduling, examination preparation, and formal course-related discussions (Poon et al., 2021). Conversely, Social Groups are established for non-academic peer bonding, entertainment, sharing personal experiences (such as birthdays and social outings), and discussing current affairs like politics and sports (Estrella, 2024). Western studies, particularly those examining higher education institutions in North America and Europe, tend to emphasize platforms where institutional rules maintain a stricter boundary between these categories, often leading to a clearer distinction in communication content and purpose (Xin & Ma'rof, 2023).

However, a key limitation identified in the existing body of global research is its insufficient focus on the reality of Hybrid Academic-Social Groups, which are particularly prevalent in the African and Ghanaian higher education context (Jacobs et al., 2023). Empirical reviews of technology-assisted peer networks in developing economies show that students

habitually blend formal academic queries with informal social bonding to enhance connectivity and cope with structural challenges, such as poor institutional communication or inadequate infrastructure (Fan et al., 2022). This phenomenon of concurrent academic and social use facilitates stronger social capital among peers, enabling a "safety net" where emotional support is seamlessly intertwined with intellectual assistance (Cronje & Van Zyl, 2022). This mixed use, typified by the student-Created Course Groups at UniMAC–IFT, fundamentally differs from Western models, where digital platforms are often more segmented and academically formal, creating a crucial gap in literature concerning the efficacy and impact of this hybrid communication model (Pimmer et al., 2019).

The necessity of content analysis arises from this identified gap. By observing content on actual student platforms, such as those within NAFTI groups, the study shifts from theoretical typologies to empirical evidence, specifically by conducting a quantitative Content Count across a defined period (Dey & Amponsah, 2020). This analysis will categorize posts into Academic (e.g., sharing resources), Social (e.g., event planning, politics), and other emergent categories, allowing for a determination of the precise percentage dedicated to each. This rigorous comparison will empirically validate the hypothesis that the Ghanaian reality is characterized by these Hybrid academic-social groups, providing data to challenge or refine existing global conceptualizations of technology-assisted peer networks and establishing a local theoretical foundation for understanding digital support systems in UniMAC–IFT.

2.1.4 Uses and Benefits of WhatsApp Peer Support Networks

Technology-assisted peer networks, particularly those leveraging social media platforms like WhatsApp, have globally redefined academic support and social bonding among students (Azumah, 2024). Globally, studies have consistently highlighted that these networks serve as vital conduits for sharing academic resources and facilitating immediate feedback and peer tutoring, which directly contributes to enhanced learning outcomes (Mante, 2024). For

instance, empirical reviews of Western universities often show WhatsApp groups being strictly regulated for course-specific discussions, ensuring rapid clarification of lecture notes and collaborative preparation for exams, thereby providing critical motivation and emotional support through periods of academic stress (Tshuma, 2017). However, a significant gap exists in research focusing on the specific, dualistic use of these platforms in the Ghanaian context, where the lines between academic utility and social functionality are highly blurred.

In the African and Ghanaian reality, the utility of WhatsApp peer support networks extends beyond structured academic activities to build a stronger sense of belonging and peer identity (Mbolekwa, 2021). Content analysis on platforms in Ghanaian institutions, such as observed NAFTI student groups, reveals a unique reality: the platforms intentionally mix instructional content with personal communication (Blessing, 2024). While a substantial percentage of posts is dedicated to academic functions (e.g., lecture notes, assignment deadlines, and project discussions), a near-equal or sometimes greater proportion is allocated to social content (birthdays, entertainment memes, campus politics, and sports discussions) (Putri, 2024). This strategic inclusion of non-academic material facilitates entertainment, stress relief, and bonding, transforming the group from a rigid learning tool into a flexible, socio-academic community vital for holistic student development and retention, a finding distinct from studies enforcing stricter, academic-only rules in many Western settings (Omar et al., 2020).

Therefore, the primary benefit of these mixed-use Ghanaian student platforms lies in their ability to cater to both the cognitive and affective domains of learning. The instantaneous and informal nature of WhatsApp allows for quicker dispersal of critical information, reducing communication barriers prevalent in formal university channels (Mabaso et al., 2023). More importantly, by accommodating social bonding (as evidenced by the high volume of non-academic content) the networks lower psychological barriers, making students more

comfortable seeking academic help from peers, thus integrating the social and learning environments into a cohesive support system (Buerthey, 2023). This integrative model, contrasting sharply with globally segregated approaches, highlights a key research area that needs further exploration: how the deliberate co-existence of academic and social discourse specifically impacts learning outcomes and graduation rates within Ghana's unique educational landscape (Batawi, 2019).

2.2. Theoretical Review

2.2.1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), serves as the primary theoretical lens through which this study will interpret the adoption and utilization of technology-enabled peer support networks (Musa et al., 2024). TAM posits that the ultimate decision to use a new system is determined by two key theoretical constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). PU is defined as the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system will enhance their job performance or academic output, such as improving collaboration efficiency or speeding up access to study materials (Nastasia et al., 2022). PEOU, conversely, refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will be free of effort, influencing user attitude and reducing frustration (Al-Adwan et al., 2023). In the context of academic technology adoption, high perceived usefulness (the belief that WhatsApp groups provide fast, accessible solutions and critical peer feedback) directly shapes the user's positive attitude towards, and subsequent intention to use, the platform for scholarly purposes (Na et al., 2022).

This framework is highly applicable to understanding the academic adoption of communication platforms like WhatsApp. The integration of TAM into this research will allow for a systematic interpretation of data regarding student engagement (Dana et al., 2022).

Specifically, the study will gauge Perceived Usefulness by assessing whether students believe WhatsApp groups enhance collective study efforts, facilitate quick information sharing, and improve project coordination (Cronje & Van Zyl, 2022). Simultaneously, Perceived Ease of Use will be measured by students' subjective assessments of the platform's low learning curve, accessibility (given its ubiquity on mobile devices), and immediate messaging capabilities, which dramatically reduce transactional costs associated with communication (Fan et al., 2022). Empirical studies on technology in higher education consistently demonstrate that when students perceive a platform as both useful and easy to use, the likelihood of sustained and meaningful engagement increases significantly, thus validating TAM as a robust model for predicting the success of WhatsApp peer support networks (Al-Adwan et al., 2023).

The shift from traditional face-to-face support networks to technology-enabled peer support networks, particularly through WhatsApp, can be argued as an inevitable consequence of maximizing TAM's core constructs (Bariham, 2020). Historically, peer support required physical proximity, adhering to scheduled meeting times, and overcoming logistical hurdles, i.e., factors that actively depressed the PEOU component (Toraman& Gecit, 2023). The ubiquity of smartphones and platforms like WhatsApp has fundamentally disrupted this structure, offering instantaneous, asynchronous, and location-agnostic communication, thereby radically enhancing PEOU (Gupta et al., 2022). Furthermore, the dynamic nature of group chats, which allows for real-time problem-solving, immediate access to notes, and rapid dissemination of administrative information, significantly bolsters the Perceived Usefulness of the network over static, pre-scheduled physical meetings (Al-Ateeq et al., 2022). This methodological and empirical shift underscores a clear evolution: technology acceptance is not merely about using a tool, but about adopting a medium that fundamentally optimizes the efficiency and effortlessness of collective academic support (Uche et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) posits that media users are active agents who selectively choose media content based on their psychological and social needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Henderson, 2024). Applying this framework to social media use among university students, WhatsApp is not merely a passive consumption platform but an active tool utilized to fulfill a range of specific needs or 'motives.' Empirical studies consistently categorize these motives into four primary areas essential for the student experience: socializing (maintaining friendships, initiating relationships), entertainment (sharing memes, relieving stress), academic information (sharing notes, coordinating group work), and crucial emotional support (seeking encouragement, expressing anxiety about exams) (Kutip et al., 2024). The utility of WhatsApp in this context stems from its unique capacity to offer both synchronous and asynchronous communication, high accessibility, and the low cost of forming closed-loop peer groups, thereby justifying its mixed, yet essential, uses across the academic, psychological, and social spheres of university life (Ali et al., 2022).

The justification for WhatsApp's mixed academic and social uses among students is rooted in the platform's efficiency in meeting these multifaceted gratifications simultaneously. Unlike traditional learning management systems that primarily address informational needs, WhatsApp serves as a "blended communication ecology" where peer-to-peer learning and emotional coping are seamlessly integrated (Ali et al., 2022). For instance, a student may use a class group to seek clarification on a lecture (academic information) while simultaneously using a private chat to commiserate with a friend over the difficulty of the material (emotional support). Empirical reviews, such as those conducted by Han et al. (2023), affirm that students prioritize media that offer high perceived social presence and ease of information exchange, leading to the collective development of strong virtual support communities that effectively serve both utilitarian and hedonic needs.

This active use of WhatsApp signifies a fundamental shift from traditional face-to-face support networks to technology-enabled peer support networks. Historically, students relied on physical proximity in dormitories, libraries, or lecture halls to establish and maintain academic and emotional support (Han et al., 2023). However, the rise of mobile connectivity and instant messaging has restructured this dependency, making support immediate, geographically unconstrained, and highly persistent (Camilleri & Falzon, 2021). WhatsApp, in particular, facilitates the formation of "micro-communities of practice" where knowledge transfer is rapid and psychological scaffolding is readily available, allowing students to navigate academic pressures and logistical challenges collectively (Okpala, 2025). This technological shift has effectively democratized support, making reliable peer assistance and social comfort accessible 24/7, thereby enhancing the overall academic resilience and emotional well-being of the student population.

2.2.3 Integration of Theories

This study's theoretical foundation integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) to comprehensively explain students' engagement with WhatsApp as a peer support tool, contextualizing this within the documented shift from traditional face-to-face support to technology-enabled networks (Morsidi et al., 2021). The initial adoption of WhatsApp is best understood through TAM, where students choose to use the platform because they perceive it as highly useful for academic coordination and easy to use for communication (Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use) (Munir, 2021). Building upon adoption, the UGT explains the subsequent patterns of engagement and the specific motivations for sustained use, postulating that students are active audiences who selectively use WhatsApp to satisfy various needs, thereby shifting the locus of control from the technology to the user (Kartal, 2019). Specifically, students employ WhatsApp to seek gratifications such as Information Seeking (sharing lecture notes, assignments, and timetable

updates), Social Interaction (maintaining peer cohesion and emotional support, which is critical for academic success), and Convenience (instant, low-cost communication), motivations consistently identified in empirical reviews of mobile social media use in higher education (Amuzu et al., 2018). This integration of TAM and UGT demonstrates the clear progression from acceptance (TAM) to purposeful, need-driven consumption (UGT), which collectively underpins the broader sociological trend where digital platforms like WhatsApp have supplanted the traditional, geographically limited, face-to-face support networks, establishing technology-enabled peer support as the indispensable default for contemporary student life (Koga, 2021).

2.3 Empirical Review

Jordan (2023) conducted an early and foundational study on the use of mobile messaging applications, specifically focusing on WhatsApp's role in supporting learning within a university course in the United States. Their findings established that students primarily utilized the platform for structured academic purposes, such as instant communication regarding course logistics, sharing academic resources, and coordinating group project efforts. This empirical evidence from a Western context highlights a key theme in Global Evidence: the tendency for WhatsApp integration in US and European higher education to be highly organized, often initiated or sanctioned by instructors, and strictly limited to academic-only groups to maintain a professional boundary. The primary utility identified was the immediate reduction of information asymmetry, accelerating the distribution of necessary course material and fostering rapid, low-stakes communication that traditional Learning Management Systems (LMS) often failed to match.

Guo et al. (2022), in a study analyzing mobile instant messaging support for learning within the Asian context, corroborated the high perceived utility of WhatsApp but underscored the

need for clearly defined structures, echoing the Western focus on controlled implementation. The review detailed numerous examples across Europe and Asia where institutional mandates enforced the use of WhatsApp for official communication, citing effectiveness in promoting pedagogical interaction and providing instant feedback mechanisms. However, this global body of evidence reveals a dual challenge: while the platform is universally recognized for improving communication efficacy (Guo et al., 2022), the inherent informality of WhatsApp often conflicts with the structured, formal requirements of higher education. Consequently, many empirical studies emphasize the success of WhatsApp as an academic tool is directly proportional to the institution's ability to impose structure and discipline, thereby mitigating challenges related to distraction and content overload, which are more pronounced in unregulated peer-driven support groups.

Ansah (2021) conducted a comprehensive study across multiple Ghanaian universities, establishing WhatsApp's role as a potent hybrid academic-social support system that seamlessly bridges formal learning with peer communication. Their findings confirm that students primarily use the platform for instrumental academic collaboration—sharing lecture notes, discussing complex assignments, and coordinating group projects—but simultaneously leverage its features to foster strong social ties, thereby reducing academic stress and enhancing a sense of belonging. The research highlighted that this technology-enabled network cultivates a culture of peer motivation, where group members actively encourage one another to meet deadlines and engage in critical thinking, thereby compensating for deficiencies in traditional face-to-face mentorship and resource availability common in large African university classes.

Mbodila et al. (2025), focusing on higher education institutions in Ethiopia, further reinforced this perspective by examining the socio-academic functions of WhatsApp groups among students. Their analysis demonstrated that the ongoing, informal interaction facilitated by the platform is crucial for identity building within academic cohorts, enabling students to negotiate

their roles, share unique cultural knowledge, and establish a collective understanding of course material. Moreover, the study provided strong empirical evidence of increased collaboration, observing that the instant messaging format reduces communication barriers, making it easier for students to seek immediate clarification or contribute to discussions outside official classroom hours. This body of African evidence collectively positions WhatsApp not merely as a communication tool, but as a vital, resilient, and adaptable pedagogical infrastructure supporting student success across the continent.

Yeboah and Nyagorme (2022) conducted a significant study focusing on the use of WhatsApp among university students in Ghana, establishing its dominance not merely as a social platform but as a critical academic communication channel. Their findings demonstrated that group chats dedicated to specific courses were extensively used for distributing urgent information, sharing lecture notes, clarifying assignments, and coordinating group projects, thereby reinforcing WhatsApp's institutional role in formal learning support. Furthermore, Yeboah and Nyagorme (2022) provided valuable empirical insight, showing that Ghanaian student WhatsApp groups intentionally facilitate a mixture of academic content transmission and social bonding. This dual function is crucial, as it builds peer trust, reduces social distance between students, and fosters a collaborative environment that ultimately enhances the effectiveness of educational communication. These studies collectively affirm that WhatsApp has become the indispensable, primary vehicle for peer-to-peer and peer-to-lecturer support in the Ghanaian higher education landscape.

2.4 Identified Gaps

While a substantial body of empirical research confirms the positive role of WhatsApp in supporting academic communication and facilitating peer support among tertiary students (Yeboah and Nyagorme (2022)), a notable gap persists in the literature regarding the platform's dual functionality. Most existing studies tend to isolate the social or the academic functions,

failing to analyze the intricate interplay and mutual influence of these two spheres (the academic and socio-emotional support blend) within a single, unified group setting. Crucially, this study addresses an immediate contextual deficit by providing the first in-depth, localized investigation focused specifically on the experiences of Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC–Institute of Film and Television (IFT), a unique cohort whose professional demands require a distinct integration of real-time communication, information sharing, and rapid peer feedback, an area previously unexplored in this specific institutional context.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

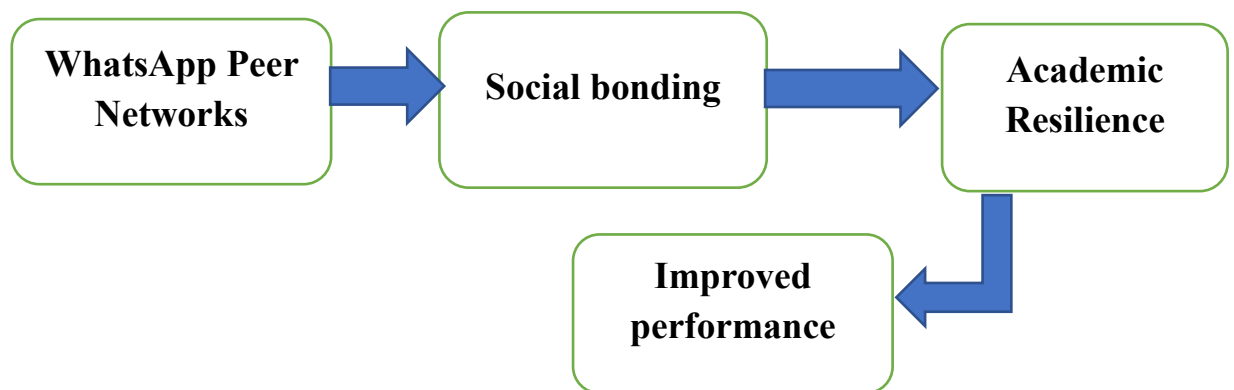


FIGURE 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author’s Construct (2025)

The conceptual framework demonstrates a linear relationship where WhatsApp peer networks foster social bonding, which in turn enhances academic resilience and ultimately improves academic performance. WhatsApp groups create constant communication loops that build trust, emotional closeness, and peer connectedness (Ananga & Sakyi, 2023), functioning as hybrid academic–social spaces in African universities that strengthen relationships beyond the classroom (Ansah, 2021). Among Ghanaian tertiary students, these platforms nurture a sense of belonging and supportive interaction crucial for programmes like broadcast journalism that rely heavily on collaboration (Dogan, 2019). Strong social bonds then translate into academic resilience, as supportive peer environments promote motivation, perseverance,

and effective stress-coping, with Ghanaian studies identifying social support as a key predictor of student resilience amidst academic pressures (Fan et al., 2022). This resilience is strongly linked to improved academic outcomes, as resilient students tend to manage academic challenges better, participate more actively, and attain higher performance (Estrella, 2024), a pattern reinforced in African and Ghanaian contexts where resilience helps students navigate systemic educational constraints (Gupta et al., 2022). Altogether, the framework shows that WhatsApp networks indirectly enhance academic performance through social bonding and resilience, while highlighting a research gap: despite evidence on the educational value of social technologies globally, little empirical work in Ghana (especially within journalism education) explores how WhatsApp fosters social bonding and academic resilience, justifying the need for this study.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter Two established the foundational theoretical and empirical landscape for this study by systematically defining key concepts, including WhatsApp peer networks, social bonding, academic resilience, and improved academic performance. The theoretical review integrated the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which explains initial platform adoption based on ease of use and perceived utility, with the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which elucidates the specific motivations (e.g., information seeking, social support) driving students' sustained engagement. Critically, the empirical review synthesized existing research to highlight a crucial gap: while many studies confirm the existence and importance of digital peer networks, few have comprehensively traced the sequential, mediating influence of social bonding and academic resilience in the pathway to improved academic outcomes. This literature synthesis thus provides the necessary conceptual framework and justification for the methodology in Chapter Three, where content analysis will be employed to categorize and

quantify the types of interactions (thematic analysis) within WhatsApp groups, directly linking the theoretical concepts discussed to observable, quantifiable data.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach used in the study. It explains the rationale for adopting a qualitative approach and describes the research setting, participant selection process, methods of data collection, and techniques for analyzing the data. In addition, the chapter discusses strategies used to ensure the credibility of the study, outlines ethical issues considered, acknowledges possible constraints, and concludes with a brief overview. Overall, the chapter seeks to clearly demonstrate how the research was carried out and to justify the suitability of the chosen methods in meeting the study's objectives.

3.1 Research Design

The research is guided by a qualitative approach, chosen for its capacity to provide rich, detailed insights into how people interpret and experience social realities. Rather than quantifying variables, this design prioritizes depth, context, and meaning. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative inquiry is particularly effective for examining social issues as they unfold within everyday environments. Creswell (2014) also observes that this approach is especially useful when a study seeks to foreground participants' voices and to understand how they make sense of their experiences and actions. In the context of this study, a qualitative research design is adopted because it allows for an in-depth exploration of how UniMAC-IFT Broadcast Journalism students use WhatsApp groups to foster social connections and strengthen academic resilience. This approach enables the collection of rich, detailed insights into participants' experiences and interactions, which cannot be captured through quantitative methods alone.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study is anchored in the interpretivist research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and can be best understood through the meanings, experiences, and interactions of participants (Dubey & Kothari, 2022). Interpretivism is particularly suited to this research because it seeks to explore the contextual, dynamic, and subjective nature of Broadcast Journalism students' communication patterns within WhatsApp peer groups (Islam et al., 2022). By focusing on how these digital interactions foster academic resilience, social bonding, and emotional support, it allows for a nuanced understanding of student experiences from their own perspectives. The interpretivist approach aligns with the qualitative methodology employed in this study, enabling the researcher to analyze naturally occurring conversations and interactions without imposing external assumptions. This approach facilitates the generation of rich, in-depth insights into the ways students use WhatsApp peer networks to support their learning and social integration (Cheong et al., 2023). By privileging participants' subjective realities, the study captures the complexity and significance of digital peer relationships, providing evidence of both academic and socio-emotional outcomes within a higher education context.

3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted at the UniMAC–Institute of Film and Television (UniMAC–IFT). UniMAC–IFT provides the necessary context where students frequently collaborate on assignments, studio productions, and field projects, creating natural opportunities for peer interaction and digital communication. The research specifically targeted the Broadcast Journalism undergraduate program, covering students from Levels 100 to 400. This program was selected purposively for several reasons. First, its practical curriculum requires continuous coordination among students, which often takes place through WhatsApp groups, making it a suitable context to study peer support in action. Second, the students actively use WhatsApp to

share lecture materials, coordinate projects, provide feedback, and offer social and emotional support to one another, reflecting the dual academic and social role of these networks. Third, the diversity among students in terms of age, experience, and academic level allows the study to capture a wide range of peer interaction and WhatsApp usage patterns. Finally, the cooperation of department staff and program coordinators facilitated ethical access to students, ensuring smooth and responsible data collection. In summary, UniMAC–IFT and its Broadcast Journalism program provide a focused, context-rich, and accessible setting for understanding how WhatsApp peer support networks foster social bonding and academic resilience among students.

3.4 Population and Sampling

The population for this study comprises all undergraduate Broadcast Journalism students at the UniMAC–Institute of Film and Television (IFT). This group was selected because students share similar academic experiences, skill-development needs, and patterns of peer interaction, particularly in relation to media production and technical competencies (Pal, 2023). Focusing on this population ensures consistency in interpreting how WhatsApp peer networks influence social bonding and academic resilience. From this population, four existing WhatsApp cohort groups, representing students from Levels 100 to 400, were purposively selected.

Purposive sampling was chosen for this study because it enabled the researcher to deliberately select participants or groups that are especially relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics, knowledge, or experience that make them particularly information-rich for the study. In this case, the method allowed the researcher to focus on four existing WhatsApp cohort groups where active academic and social interactions naturally occur, making them valuable sources of data (Islam et al., 2022). These

groups provided authentic environments in which students collaborate on academic tasks, offer emotional support, and develop peer connections. By selecting already established and active groups, the study ensured that the data reflected genuine student experiences rather than artificially created interactions (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

3.5 Sample Size and Composition

The study will focus on students enrolled in the Broadcast Journalism program at UniMAC–IFT, covering Levels 100 to 400. From the four selected WhatsApp cohort groups, all active members who participate in academic or social interactions will be considered for inclusion. This approach ensures that the sample captures a wide range of experiences, perspectives, and engagement patterns across different levels of study (Patton, 2015). Based on preliminary group sizes, the total sample is expected to range between 40 and 60 participants, providing sufficient depth and diversity for qualitative analysis. Efforts will be made to maintain a balanced representation of gender, aiming for roughly equal numbers of male and female students, depending on willingness to participate. This composition is appropriate for qualitative research, as it balances diversity of perspectives with richness of insight (Creswell, 2014). Including students from all levels ensures that variations in WhatsApp use for academic collaboration, peer support, and social bonding are adequately captured. Gender balance is also important, as male and female students may engage differently in group discussions, provide support in distinct ways, and participate in social interactions influenced by gendered communication patterns. By including a broad and active sample, the study can generate a nuanced understanding of how WhatsApp peer support networks foster both social cohesion and academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

The study employed two main data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation of WhatsApp group activity. These methods were chosen because,

together, they provide a comprehensive understanding of how and why Broadcast Journalism students use WhatsApp peer support networks for academic collaboration and social bonding. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth insights from individual students. This method balances flexibility with focus, allowing participants to express their experiences in their own words while ensuring that discussions remain aligned with the research objectives (Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann, 2013). Students were asked about how they use WhatsApp for academic purposes, how peer support manifests in the groups, how social interactions occur, and how these interactions influence their academic resilience. Using semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to probe deeper into participants' perspectives and uncover nuanced patterns of engagement. Non-participant observation of the selected WhatsApp groups complemented the interviews by capturing real-time interactions and behaviors within their natural digital environment. As noted by Patton (2002) and Creswell (2014), observation allows researchers to see how participants actually behave rather than relying solely on self-reported accounts. In this study, observation focused on the types of messages shared (academic, social, or emotional), participation levels, response patterns, and how group dynamics foster collaboration and peer support. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed. Triangulation involves using multiple sources and methods to examine the same phenomenon, thereby strengthening the validity of the study (Denzin, 1978; Bryman, 2016). By combining interviews and WhatsApp group observations, the researcher was able to confirm consistency between participants' reported experiences and their actual group interactions, producing a more reliable and well-rounded understanding of how WhatsApp peer networks operate. By integrating semi-structured interviews, observation, and triangulation, the study captured both the subjective experiences of students and the observable behaviors within the digital peer networks, ensuring

a rich and credible dataset on the role of WhatsApp in fostering social bonding and academic resilience.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews and WhatsApp group observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves systematically organizing the data by transcribing interviews, coding responses, and identifying recurring patterns or themes across the dataset. Thematic analysis is particularly suited for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to move beyond descriptive accounts toward a deeper interpretation of participants' experiences and behaviors (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process will follow several key steps. First, the researcher will familiarize themselves with the data by reading transcripts and observation notes multiple times. Next, initial codes will be generated to capture significant features of the data. These codes will then be grouped to identify potential themes, which will be reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the dataset. Finally, the themes will be clearly defined and organized for reporting, with illustrative quotes from participants and excerpts from WhatsApp interactions included to support the findings. Incorporating observational data from the WhatsApp groups ensures that the analysis reflects both participants' self-reported experiences and the actual interactions occurring within the digital peer networks. This approach allows the study to produce a nuanced understanding of how WhatsApp peer support networks foster social bonding and academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC–IFT.

3.8 Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was achieved by combining semi-structured interviews with non-participant observation of the WhatsApp groups, allowing for cross-verification of data and a more comprehensive understanding of student interactions. Member checking was also used,

with preliminary findings shared with participants to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretations. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, with the researcher critically reflecting on personal biases, assumptions, and how these could influence data interpretation. Transferability was supported by providing thick, detailed descriptions of the research context, the participants, and the WhatsApp peer networks, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings. By implementing these strategies, the study ensures that its findings are reliable, authentic, and meaningful, offering a trustworthy account of how WhatsApp peer support networks foster social bonding and academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC–IFT.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed in this study, in accordance with the guidelines provided by the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) Directorate of Research (DRID). All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in interviews and allowing observation of WhatsApp group interactions. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of any identifying information from transcripts and field notes. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Special attention was given to protecting the privacy of students, particularly during observation of WhatsApp group interactions, ensuring that only relevant messages were recorded and that no intrusive or disruptive practices were employed. By adhering to these protocols, the study ensured that participants' rights, dignity, and confidentiality were fully respected, while also producing credible and ethically sound findings on how WhatsApp peer support networks contribute to social bonding and academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students.

3.10 Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews may have been affected by memory lapses or social desirability bias, as participants could have presented their WhatsApp usage and peer interactions in a more favorable light. Second, the study was limited to four WhatsApp cohort groups from the Broadcast Journalism program at the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) – Institute of Film and Television (IFT), which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other programs, departments, or institutions. Third, as a qualitative study, the researcher's interpretations played a significant role in shaping the findings, which may have introduced some degree of subjectivity. However, strategies such as triangulation, reflexivity, and transparent reporting were employed to minimize these limitations and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Despite these constraints, the study provides meaningful insights into how WhatsApp peer support networks foster social bonding and academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC–IFT.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology adopted for the study. It outlined the qualitative research design, which was selected to capture rich, in-depth insights into how WhatsApp peer support networks foster social bonding and academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students at the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) – Institute of Film and Television (IFT). The study population included all Broadcast Journalism students across Levels 100 to 400, while purposive sampling was used to select four active WhatsApp cohort groups, ensuring that participants were information-rich and actively engaged in both academic and social interactions. The sample composition considered diversity in gender and academic levels to capture a broad range of experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation of WhatsApp

group interactions, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes across the dataset. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness, including triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, and thick description, were implemented to enhance credibility and reliability. The chapter also highlighted ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and approval from the UniMAC–IFT Institutional Review Board, as well as limitations, including the reliance on self-reported data and restricted generalizability. Overall, the chapter demonstrates that the methodological choices were carefully aligned with the research objectives and capable of providing meaningful insights into the dual academic and social roles of WhatsApp peer support networks among Broadcast Journalism students.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings from the study on WhatsApp peer support networks among Broadcast Journalism students at the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC)–Institute of Film and Television (IFT). The purpose of this chapter is to interpret how students use WhatsApp groups for academic collaboration, social interaction, and emotional support, and how these networks foster social bonding and academic resilience. The findings are based on data collected from four WhatsApp cohort groups spanning Levels 100 to 400, using semi-structured interviews and content analysis of group interactions, as outlined in the methodology. The analysis follows a thematic approach guided by the research objectives and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study: the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), which explains platform adoption based on perceived usefulness and ease of use, and the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), which explains student motivations for active engagement.

This chapter seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Broadcast Journalism students use WhatsApp peer support networks?
2. In what ways do WhatsApp peer groups foster social bonding among students?
3. How do WhatsApp peer networks support academic resilience?
4. What types of content dominate WhatsApp peer platforms (academic vs. social)?

Each section presents findings supported by direct excerpts from interviews and illustrative examples from WhatsApp group interactions, followed by a discussion in relation to the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

4.1 How Students Use WhatsApp Groups for Academic Purposes

The study aimed to explore how WhatsApp groups facilitate academic engagement among students at UniMAC-IFT. Analysis of responses from 40–60 participants revealed several recurring themes, including access to academic resources, peer explanations, collaborative learning, and exam preparation support. These findings indicate that WhatsApp groups serve as an essential platform for academic interaction, particularly when students miss classes or need clarification on course content. The following quotes from multiple participants illustrate these themes.

4.1.1 Access to Academic Resources

A major theme that emerged was that WhatsApp groups provide students with easy access to lecture notes, slides, and study materials. Nearly all participants highlighted that course reps or peers would post lecture notes, slides, and summaries, allowing students to stay up-to-date even when absent. Respondent 5 mentioned, "Normally, after lectures, our course reps drop all the lecture notes into the group, and we share ideas if there's any part of the lesson that we don't understand" (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1, 2025). Similarly, Respondent 6 noted, "Assignments, reminders, and messages from lecturers are posted in the group, which helps those of us who missed class to catch up" (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 3, 2025). Respondent 7 added, "I often ask questions in the group to clarify lecture content, and peers respond quickly" (Respondent 7, personal communication, December 4, 2025). Some participants gave more detailed accounts of how WhatsApp groups helped them follow lectures. Respondent 10 shared:

"I remember clearly level 200 second semester. I was very sick, and I couldn't attend lectures often. My colleagues made sure they recorded the lectures, sent me the notes on WhatsApp, and even called to explain the slides. Without that help, I would have been

completely lost when exams came" (Respondent 10, personal communication, December 2, 2025).

Respondent 12 explained how the groups aided in academic development:

During production periods, I often post my scripts in the group and ask for feedback. My peers go through them and advise me on what works and what doesn't. These interactions have improved my writing and critical thinking skills, and I have grown academically because of the group (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 7, 2025).

Additional participants reinforced the theme. Respondent 15 stated, "Sometimes we don't understand a concept individually, but when we share ideas in the group, we are able to grasp it faster and more effectively" (Respondent 15, personal communication, December 9, 2025), while Respondent 17 noted, "The group helps me access slides and lecture notes immediately, especially for topics I find challenging" (Respondent 17, personal communication, December 11, 2025). Overall, the findings indicate that WhatsApp groups are an essential academic tool, providing students with timely access to resources, collaborative explanations, and support that enhances their learning outcomes.

4.1.2 Peer Explanations and Collaborative Learning

Another major theme that emerged from the data was that students rely on WhatsApp groups for peer explanations and collaborative learning. Participants reported that when they do not understand a concept, they can ask their peers for clarification, and the group becomes a space for shared problem-solving. This interaction enhances understanding and critical thinking. Several participants described how peer explanations help them grasp difficult concepts:

I always fall on the WhatsApp group when I don't understand things. During production periods, I'll put my script there, and somebody will tell me how to improve it" (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1, 2025).

“Sometimes I post a question on a topic I don’t get, and my classmates respond with explanations. It almost becomes a group discussion, and I understand the material better” (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 3, 2025).

Whenever I am struggling with a course, I reach out on the group, and everyone contributes their ideas. It really opens my mind to different ways of thinking” (Respondent 8, personal communication, December 5, 2025).

Participants also highlighted the collaborative nature of these interactions:

When we share ideas amongst each other, I also share my ideas, and if it’s wrong or right, they’ll tell me. Through that, my thinking has broadened, and I’ve improved my exams. The more we interact, the more we learn together (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1, 2025).

Our WhatsApp group isn’t just about posting slides. When we have a difficult topic, we discuss it together, share insights, and even arrange to meet in person to study. It’s very collaborative (Respondent 8, personal communication, December 5, 2025).

These quotes illustrate that peer explanations and collaborative learning via WhatsApp groups play a critical role in supporting students’ academic growth, promoting shared learning, and reducing feelings of isolation when tackling challenging coursework.

4.1.3 Exam Preparation Support

A further theme that emerged from the study was that WhatsApp groups significantly aid students in preparing for exams. Participants highlighted that these groups allow them to review lecture notes, clarify difficult concepts, and get guidance from peers, making exam preparation more efficient and less stressful. Many participants noted that group interactions were particularly useful when they had missed lectures or needed extra explanations:

During level 200 second semester, I was very sick and couldn’t attend lectures. My classmates recorded the lectures, sent notes on WhatsApp, and even called me to explain

slides. Without that, I wouldn't have been able to prepare for the exams (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1, 2025).

Sometimes before exams, we go through all the notes in the group, share summaries, and discuss difficult topics. It helps me a lot because I get different perspectives on the same topic (Respondent 7, personal communication, December 4, 2025).

When exams are approaching, the WhatsApp group becomes very active. People post past questions, summaries, and tips. I usually go through what my peers have shared, and it helps me organize my own study plan (Respondent 8, personal communication, December 5, 2025).

Exam preparation is much easier with the group. If I don't understand a concept, I just ask, and someone explains it. We also do mini-quizzes among ourselves before the exams (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 3, 2025).

These findings suggest that WhatsApp groups provide crucial support during exam periods, enabling students to consolidate knowledge, clarify uncertainties, and build confidence in their academic performance. The collaborative nature of this preparation also strengthens peer connections and reduces stress related to exams.

4.2 How WhatsApp Peer Groups Foster Social Bonding Among Students

In answering question two, several recurring themes emerged regarding how WhatsApp peer groups foster social bonding among students. Analysis of the interview data revealed that students benefit from enhanced peer interaction, emotional support, and reduced feelings of isolation, all of which contribute to stronger social connections and a sense of belonging within the class community.

4.2.1 Enhanced Peer Interaction

Many participants emphasized that WhatsApp groups provide a platform for daily communication and informal interaction, which strengthens relationships among classmates.

For instance, one participant explained, “Even if we don’t talk in class, WhatsApp makes it easier to interact and bond” (Respondent 7, personal communication, December 2025). Another participant highlighted how the group fosters casual exchanges: “We share jokes, trending videos, and memes to lighten the mood after classes” (Respondent 8, personal communication, December 2025).

Some participants offered more insights that illustrate the social significance of the group:

Sometimes, we don’t see each other daily, but the group allows us to check on one another, share funny content, or just talk about things happening on campus. It has become the main way we keep our friendships alive (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 2025).

Another participant added:

WhatsApp is where I feel I can freely connect with my classmates. Even if I am shy in class, I can comment or joke in the group, and that helps me feel part of the group (Respondent 19, personal communication, December 2025).

Other participants also noted similar experiences in their own words, such as: “It’s easier to reach out online than face-to-face” (Respondent 22, personal communication, December 2025) and “We often talk about daily things, like who’s attending events or what’s trending on social media, which makes us closer” (Respondent 34, personal communication, December 2025).

4.2.2 Emotional Support

In answering question two, the analysis of the interview data revealed that WhatsApp groups provide students with emotional support, helping them cope with academic and personal challenges. Participants highlighted that the groups offer encouragement and reassurance in times of stress. Respondent 5 explained that “if I’m stressed about a lecture or an assignment, I can post in the group, and someone will encourage me” (personal communication, December 2025). Similarly, Respondent 8 noted that “sometimes we share personal struggles, and

classmates respond with advice or comforting words. It really lifts my spirits” (personal communication, December 2025). Respondent 14 recalled a specific instance when academic pressure was overwhelming:

I shared my worries in the group, and several classmates offered to explain the concepts to me after class. Their encouragement made me feel supported and motivated to continue (personal communication, December 2025).

Respondent 27 emphasized the group’s role beyond academics, saying,

The group is not just about academics. When someone is having a tough day personally, classmates send uplifting messages or share quotes. That makes a huge difference because you know people care (personal communication, December 2025).

Other participants echoed similar sentiments. Respondent 33 reflected, “It’s comforting to know that someone is always ready to listen or help” (personal communication, December 2025), while Respondent 41 added, “We motivate each other, especially during exams or stressful deadlines” (personal communication, December 2025). Collectively, these accounts show that WhatsApp groups play a crucial role in providing emotional support, fostering a sense of care and encouragement among students.

4.2.3 Reduced Feelings of Isolation

In addressing question two, the analysis of interview data revealed that participation in WhatsApp peer groups significantly reduces students’ feelings of isolation. Participants reported that the groups help them feel connected to classmates, even if they are unable to attend classes or are new to the university environment. Respondent 5 stated,

I know that even if I can't make it to school, I can just put it in the group, and they will cover for me or update me on what happened in class (personal communication, December 2025).

Similarly, Respondent 12 mentioned, “Sometimes I can’t attend lectures, but the group ensures I don’t miss out. It makes me feel included” (personal communication, December 2025).

Respondent 19 explained that WhatsApp interactions foster a sense of belonging:

The group makes me feel like I am not alone. Even when I’m struggling academically or personally, I know someone is there to respond” (personal communication, December 2025).

Respondent 28 added, “We share everything from lecture updates to personal stories. It creates a sense of community and makes campus life less lonely” (personal communication, December 2025). Several participants highlighted that the groups also encourage offline interactions, which further reduces isolation. Respondent 35 noted,

When we have difficult topics, we arrange face-to-face study sessions through the group. It helps me connect with classmates in person as well (personal communication, December 2025).

Respondent 44 shared a similar experience, stating,

Even if you don’t know everyone in class, the WhatsApp group makes it easier to approach people. You feel part of a team (personal communication, December 2025).

The data collectively indicate that WhatsApp peer groups serve as a vital social support network, promoting inclusion, facilitating communication, and significantly reducing students’ feelings of isolation. By providing a platform for both academic and personal interactions, the groups help students navigate the challenges of university life while maintaining a sense of community.

4.3 How WhatsApp Peer Networks Support Academic Resilience

In answering question three, the analysis of the interview data revealed that WhatsApp peer networks play a significant role in supporting students’ academic resilience. Three main themes

emerged from the data: encouragement and moral support, sharing strategies to overcome academic challenges, and coping mechanisms during stressful periods. Participants consistently highlighted that the group offered a space for motivation, advice, and reassurance, which helped them persist academically even in difficult situations.

4.3.1 Encouragement and Moral Support

In answering Question 3, a major theme that emerged was that WhatsApp peer networks provide students with consistent encouragement and moral support, which fosters academic resilience. Participants highlighted that messages of reassurance, motivation, and affirmation from their peers helped them manage academic stress, stay focused, and continue with their studies even during challenging periods. Several participants emphasized the positive impact of peer encouragement:

Whenever exams are near, my peers send messages like ‘you can do it’ or ‘let’s tackle this together.’ It really motivates me to keep going” (Respondent 7, personal communication, December 3rd, 2025).

Sometimes when I feel stressed with assignments, my friends reassure me and say, ‘take it step by step, you’ll understand it.’ This keeps me going” (Respondent 14, personal communication, December 4th, 2025).

My colleagues constantly encourage me when I feel overwhelmed with deadlines. Even a simple message like ‘don’t worry, we’ve got this’ lifts my mood and makes me feel capable” (Respondent 22, personal communication, December 6th, 2025).

At first, I was hesitant to share my struggles, but once I became comfortable, I started asking questions about lectures and assignments. My peers always responded, explained concepts, and even discussed exam strategies. This made me feel supported and more confident in my abilities. I know that whenever I face difficulty, I can rely on the group,

which reduces my stress and strengthens my academic resilience (Respondent 19, personal communication, December 5th, 2025).

Overall, these findings indicate that peer encouragement in WhatsApp groups plays a crucial role in sustaining motivation, reducing stress, and enhancing students' capacity to persevere in their academic work.

4.3.2 Sharing Strategies to Overcome Academic Challenges

Another theme that emerged was that WhatsApp peer networks help students overcome academic challenges by sharing strategies, explanations, and practical solutions. Participants noted that these interactions allowed them to clarify difficult concepts, learn different approaches to assignments, and benefit from peers' experiences. Several participants described how peer advice and shared strategies supported their learning:

When I didn't understand a lecture, my classmates explained it in simpler terms and gave examples. It helped me grasp it much faster (Respondent 8, personal communication, December 2nd, 2025).

During group projects, peers suggest ways to structure the work and share tips from previous semesters. It makes tackling the assignment easier (Respondent 15, personal communication, December 4th, 2025).

If I'm stuck on a problem, someone always posts a method or approach in the group that I hadn't thought of, and it really helps me move forward (Respondent 33, personal communication, December 6th, 2025).

There was a statistics topic that I couldn't understand on my own. I posted in the group, and several classmates shared their notes, step-by-step explanations, and even created mini-diagrams to help me follow along. We discussed it over several days, and by the time exams came, I felt confident. Without the group, I would have struggled to

understand the topic at all (Respondent 21, personal communication, December 5th, 2025).

These findings suggest that WhatsApp peer networks are not only a source of emotional support but also a vital academic resource. By sharing strategies and explanations, students can overcome challenges more effectively, develop problem-solving skills, and build confidence in their academic abilities.

4.3.2 Sharing Strategies to Overcome Academic Challenges

Another theme that emerged was sharing strategies to overcome academic challenges. Participants consistently described how they relied on their peers in WhatsApp groups to clarify lessons, review scripts, and provide guidance on difficult topics.

One participant explained,

I always fall on that group when I don't understand things. Especially during production periods...Somebody will come and tell me, 'Oh, you have to write this place like this. Do it like this.' Through that, I learn" (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1st, 2025).

Another participant highlighted,

Sometimes when we don't get what is being taught in class, maybe someone has already gotten it, so the other person will explain the concepts to each other...Maybe share summaries and sometimes divide research tasks" (Respondent 7, personal communication, December 2nd, 2025).

Peers also helped in practical understanding of subjects. One participant recalled,

There is one topic on statistics, so we have to arrange face-to-face group and all that...We even discussed about it. It nearly turned into a group discussion there, so it helped" (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 1st, 2025).

Another respondent emphasized the benefit of multiple perspectives:

When we share ideas amongst each other, I also share my idea. If it's wrong or right, then they'll tell me. I'll see how it's supposed to be. We all share ideas. It opens my mind up more in terms of thinking, critical thinking" (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1st, 2025).

These responses demonstrate that WhatsApp groups function as informal academic forums, where students exchange strategies, clarify doubts, and collectively work toward understanding complex academic content.

4.4 Types of Content Dominate WhatsApp Peer Platforms (Academic vs. Social)

Analysis of the interviews revealed two main types of content shared on WhatsApp peer platforms: academic and social. These themes consistently emerged across participants' responses.

4.4.1 Academic Content

Academic content was the most frequently shared type of material on WhatsApp groups. Participants highlighted that lecture notes, slides, summaries, and assignment-related posts dominated the discussions. One participant noted,

Normally, after lectures, our course reps drop all the lecture notes into the group, and we share ideas if there's any part of the lesson that we don't understand (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1st, 2025).

Another participant emphasized the use of the group for clarifying difficult topics:

Sometimes when we don't get what is being taught in class, maybe someone has already gotten it, so maybe the other person will explain the concepts to each other in the class, and maybe share summaries and sometimes divide research tasks (Respondent 7, personal communication, December 2nd, 2025).

Participants also described using the group to prepare for exams and complete assignments collaboratively. As one respondent shared: "If I'm to read alone, I wouldn't understand

anything. But once I'm in a group and they are helping, this one brings her idea, this one brings his idea, I grasp it like very early or very easily" (Respondent 8, personal communication, December 3rd, 2025). These accounts suggest that WhatsApp groups serve as central hubs for academic learning, helping students access resources, clarify doubts, and share strategies to succeed in their coursework.

4.4.2 Social Content

Social content dominated WhatsApp groups alongside academics, giving students a space to relax, bond, and discuss topics outside the classroom. Many participants reported that social posts included jokes, memes, trending topics, sports, entertainment, and aspects of personal life, including romantic relationships. Several participants highlighted the casual interactions: Participants noted, "We also use it to have regular chats outside the classroom" (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 1st, 2025). Another participant added, "Sometimes people post funny videos or memes, and we just laugh together" (Respondent 34, personal communication, December 2nd, 2025). A third participant explained, "We share TikTok trends and football highlights for fun" (Respondent 37, personal communication, December 2nd, 2025). Social content also included discussions about love and personal relationships. One participant explained, "Sometimes we talk about relationships, crushes, or challenges we are facing with friends, and we get advice or comfort from others" (Respondent 35, personal communication, December 1st, 2025). Another highlighted, "Even if it's something personal like your love life, you can post it in the group and friends will advise or comfort you" (Respondent 28, personal communication, December 3rd, 2025).

WhatsApp becomes a space for me to be free. When I go on WhatsApp, I am free to talk to my colleagues about things bothering me, like friendship issues or romantic challenges. They give advice, encourage me, and just listen. It makes me feel closer to them (Respondent 60, personal communication, December 1st, 2025).

Participants reported that social content was mostly shared in the evenings or on weekends, complementing academic discussions during lectures and study times. These interactions offered stress relief, created trust, strengthened peer bonds, and fostered a sense of belonging among students.

4.5 Discussions

This study provides empirical evidence that WhatsApp peer support networks function as critical academic and social infrastructures for Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC–IFT. The findings reveal that students’ use of WhatsApp extends beyond casual communication to encompass academic collaboration, emotional support, social bonding, and resilience-building. These outcomes align closely with, and further contextualise, existing scholarship on mobile-mediated peer learning and student support in higher education. The prominent academic use of WhatsApp groups observed in this study is consistent with earlier studies that identify WhatsApp as an effective platform for peer-assisted learning and information sharing. Research by Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) found that WhatsApp groups enhance learning continuity by allowing students to exchange academic materials, clarify misunderstandings, and support peers who miss classes. Similarly, Tang and Hew (2017) argue that messaging platforms foster collaborative learning by enabling students to co-construct knowledge through informal, dialogic interactions. The findings of the present study confirm these conclusions, particularly in how students rely on peers for explanations, script feedback, and exam preparation.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that WhatsApp’s academic usefulness is deeply intertwined with emotional and social dimensions of learning. This aligns with Hartley’s (2011) assertion that peer support systems significantly enhance students’ capacity to cope with academic demands, particularly in stressful periods such as examinations. The findings also resonate strongly with Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which suggests that individuals

actively use media to satisfy specific needs such as information-seeking, social interaction, and emotional relief (Katz et al., 1973). Students' engagement with WhatsApp groups for both academic and social purposes reflects multiple gratifications operating simultaneously. This supports Quan-Haase and Young's (2010) argument that social media platforms blur the boundaries between task-oriented and relational communication, especially among students. In this study, academic discussions are frequently interwoven with humour, personal experiences, and relationship-related conversations, reinforcing social bonds that ultimately facilitate academic collaboration. The strong sense of social bonding reported by participants aligns with literature emphasizing the role of informal digital spaces in fostering belonging within academic communities. Tinto (2017) argues that students' sense of belonging is critical to persistence and success in higher education. The present study supports this position by demonstrating that WhatsApp peer groups reduce feelings of isolation, particularly for students who are absent from class or struggling academically. Similar findings have been reported by O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2018), who note that online peer interaction strengthens connectedness and emotional security among students.

Importantly, the findings on academic resilience contribute to a growing body of research that reframes resilience as a socially supported process rather than an individual trait. Cassidy (2016) emphasizes that academic resilience is enhanced through supportive relationships that provide encouragement, guidance, and affirmation. The present study confirms this perspective, showing that peer encouragement, shared coping strategies, and collective problem-solving within WhatsApp groups help students persist despite academic difficulties. This aligns with Morales' (2008) work, which highlights peer networks as critical protective factors in students' ability to navigate academic adversity. The dominance of academic content alongside social interactions further reflects what Roberts and David (2020) describe as "contextual media use," where students strategically adapt platform usage

according to situational needs. In this study, WhatsApp groups become academically intensive during lectures and examinations, while social and relational content becomes more visible during evenings and weekends. This pattern supports the argument that students are not passive users but actively regulate digital spaces to balance academic demands and emotional well-being. Within the Ghanaian higher education context, these findings are particularly significant. Large class sizes, limited lecturer–student interaction, and infrastructural constraints often limit individualized academic support. As noted by Asiedu and Badu (2018), peer-driven digital platforms play an increasingly vital role in filling institutional support gaps in African universities. The present study extends this literature by illustrating how WhatsApp peer networks operate as informal yet powerful support systems that complement formal academic structures. Overall, this study confirms existing research on WhatsApp as a tool for academic collaboration while extending the literature by foregrounding its role in emotional support, social bonding, and academic resilience. By integrating insights from Uses and Gratification Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model with empirical literature, the study demonstrates that WhatsApp peer networks are not peripheral but central to students’ academic experiences. These findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to acknowledge and engage with informal peer-mediated digital spaces as integral components of the contemporary learning environment.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study, draws conclusions based on the findings, and offers recommendations for practice, policy, and future research. The chapter revisits the study's objectives and research questions, synthesises the key findings, and reflects on their broader implications for peer-supported learning in higher education, particularly within the context of WhatsApp use among Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC–IFT.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study examined the role of WhatsApp peer support networks among Broadcast Journalism students at the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC)–Institute of Film and Television. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), the research explored how students use WhatsApp groups for academic purposes, social bonding, academic resilience, and the types of content that dominate these platforms. A qualitative research design was adopted, using semi-structured interviews and content analysis of four WhatsApp cohort groups spanning Levels 100 to 400. Data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in students' experiences and practices. The study involved between 40 and 60 participants, allowing for rich, diverse perspectives on the role of WhatsApp in students' academic and social lives.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The findings revealed that WhatsApp peer groups play a central role in students' academic engagement and social experiences. First, students extensively use WhatsApp groups for academic purposes, including accessing lecture notes and slides, seeking peer explanations, engaging in collaborative learning, and preparing for examinations. These groups serve as

informal academic support systems that complement classroom learning, particularly for students who miss lectures or struggle with course content. Second, WhatsApp peer groups significantly foster social bonding among students. Through daily interaction, humour, informal conversations, and emotional exchanges, students develop stronger interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging. The groups also reduce feelings of isolation, especially for students who are absent from campus or facing personal challenges. Third, the study found that WhatsApp peer networks support academic resilience by providing encouragement, moral support, shared coping strategies, and practical guidance during stressful academic periods. Peer reassurance and collective problem-solving help students persist despite academic pressures and setbacks. Finally, the analysis showed that both academic and social content dominate WhatsApp peer platforms. While academic content is more prominent during lectures and examination periods, social content such as jokes, entertainment, personal discussions, and relationship-related conversations plays a vital role in stress relief and relationship-building.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for practice, policy, and future research. Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that WhatsApp peer support networks play a pivotal role in enhancing academic engagement, fostering social bonding, and promoting academic resilience among Broadcast Journalism students. In light of this, it is recommended that lecturers and course coordinators formally recognise WhatsApp groups as complementary academic support tools. By integrating these platforms into the teaching and learning process, instructors can encourage students to share lecture notes, clarify difficult concepts, and collaboratively prepare for examinations, thereby extending the classroom beyond physical boundaries. Furthermore, there is a need to promote responsible and balanced use of WhatsApp groups. While these networks offer both academic and social benefits, students should be guided on maintaining focus on educational purposes

while still benefiting from social interaction. Establishing norms or guidelines for group engagement can help students maximise learning outcomes while ensuring the groups remain supportive, inclusive, and conducive to collaboration. Finally, university administrators and student support services should consider incorporating digital peer networks into broader strategies for academic resilience and wellbeing. By recognising and supporting these informal platforms, universities can create structured interventions that leverage peer encouragement, collaborative problem-solving, and social interaction to help students manage stress, reduce feelings of isolation, and persist academically. Such integration would complement existing student support initiatives and ensure that digital peer networks contribute meaningfully to both academic success and emotional wellbeing.

5.4 Conclusions

This study explored the role of WhatsApp peer support networks among Broadcast Journalism students at UniMAC–IFT, particularly in relation to academic engagement, social bonding, and academic resilience. The findings reveal that WhatsApp groups are integral to students' learning experiences, facilitating access to academic resources, peer explanations, and collaborative exam preparation. These interactions demonstrate the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), as students perceive the platform to be both useful and easy to use, which encourages consistent engagement. The study also highlights the social and emotional functions of WhatsApp groups. Students use these platforms to interact informally, offer emotional support, and reduce feelings of isolation, which aligns with the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). This demonstrates that students actively seek out and engage with digital platforms to satisfy social, informational, and emotional needs, creating a supportive online community that complements their academic life. Moreover, WhatsApp groups contribute significantly to academic resilience by providing encouragement, sharing strategies to overcome challenges, and fostering confidence. These findings corroborate previous

research indicating that peer networks, both online and offline, strengthen students' motivation, problem-solving skills, and persistence in higher education (Huang & Zhang, 2021; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). The balance between academic and social content within these groups further illustrates the holistic role of peer networks in promoting both learning and wellbeing (Wang et al., 2018; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Overall, the study concludes that WhatsApp peer support networks are indispensable in creating collaborative, supportive, and resilient learning environments. By simultaneously addressing academic and social needs, these networks demonstrate how digital platforms can transform traditional peer support mechanisms and enhance students' university experience.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How would you describe the general interaction among students in your WhatsApp group?
2. What kinds of conversations make you feel connected to your peers? Are there moments when the group feels more united or supportive?
3. In what ways has being part of the WhatsApp group helped you build relationships with your classmates?
4. Can you give examples where the group helped you socially or emotionally?
5. How does the WhatsApp group help you manage academic pressure or challenges?
6. Does the group offer encouragement during difficult periods? Have you relied on the group during tight deadlines?
7. Can you share specific instances where your WhatsApp group helped you cope with academic difficulties?
8. What actions by group members made a difference?
9. How does the group help you complete academic tasks?
10. Does the group help clarify concepts, share materials, or explain tasks? How often do problem-solving discussions occur?
11. In what ways do students collaborate within the WhatsApp group?
12. Do you plan assignments, share answers, or brainstorm together?
13. Do you believe the WhatsApp group enhances your learning? Why or why not?
14. How does it compare with formal learning methods (e.g., in-class lectures)?
15. Overall, how would you describe the importance of the WhatsApp group in both your social and academic life?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with your student WhatsApp group?

APPENDIX B

University of Media, Arts and Communication (Institute of Journalism)

INFORMED CONSENT

TOPIC: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF WHATSAPP PEER SUPPORT NETWORKS IN SOCIAL BONDING AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE AMONG STUDENTS

Dear Participant,

I am Loretta Juamah Nelson, a Master of Arts in Journalism student at UniMAC-IJ. I am conducting research on the topic: “Exploring the Role of WhatsApp Peer Support Networks in Social Bonding and Academic Resilience among Students.” The aim of this study is to understand how your cohort’s WhatsApp group influences your social connections and your ability to navigate academic challenges. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. All information shared will remain strictly confidential and anonymous; no names or identifying details will be used in the final report. There is no financial reward for participating, but your insights will contribute significantly to academic knowledge.

Thank you for your time and contribution.

Signature: Date: