

**DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND MENTORSHIP: THE USE OF WHATSAPP IN
BISHOP STUART UNIVERSITY**

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DECLARATION

I, Pamela Tumwebaze, hereby declare that this research thesis submitted to the School of Journalism, Media and Communication of Uganda Christian University for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Strategic Communication is my original work and has not been previously submitted to any other institution for any award.

Signature: 

Pamela Tumwebaze

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APPROVAL

This is to certify that this research thesis entitled “**Digital Communication and Mentorship: The Use of WhatsApp in Bishop Stuart University**” was written under my supervision and is now ready for submission for examination as a requirement for the award of Master of Arts in Strategic Communication.

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DEDICATION

To you Daddy, my Chief Springboard,

You left a vacuum

- it is still wide and deep.

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My academic journey has been influenced by people, environments and incidences; the pre-covid period seemed like the season. Social media apps, for me, gushed conspicuously as communication tools for corporate social impact. WhatsApp however became a widespread Instant Messaging app and I also had an opportunity to learn from wonderful people who started ministries using the social media app, particularly Rev. David Kagwa and the Ezra 7:10, and Mr. Anthony Bugembe who has since championed a number of them. These became spaces of fellowship and the much needed refuge during the covid-19 lockdown, they also helped me realize that Ministry and work did not have to be costly. That is how the interest of carrying out this research was sparked.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

BSU: Bishop Stuart University, Mbarara

UCU: Uganda Christian University

UCUREC: Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee

UBOS: Uganda Bureau of Statistics

NPA: National Planning Authority

ILO: International Labor Origination

IM: Instant Messaging

MMA: Mobile Message Application

KPI: Key Performance Indicators

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study sought to investigate the effectiveness of using WhatsApp communication to achieve a successful mentorship experience for both the mentor and the mentee in Bishop Stuart University (BSU). The objectives of the study were (1) To assess ways through which WhatsApp communication is used in mentorship programmes in BSU; (2) to examine the challenges associated with using WhatsApp communication in mentorship at BSU, and (3) to suggest possible solutions to the identified challenges.

Methods: To achieve the purpose of the study, a case study research design was adopted for the study. The study population consisted of 62 participants as the sample size for the study. Data collection methods used were interview guides for Focus Group Discussions and in-depth interviews,

Results: The study revealed that WhatsApp has introduced more potentialities for mentorship programmes in BSU. However, the opportunities come with several challenges such as limited access to digital tools, limited digital literacy among the mentors and mentees, poor internet connection, mentees' and mentors' fatigue, among others. To overcome the existing challenges, the study recommends a number measures including vigilant planning, adaptability, and clear communication.

Conclusion: It was concluded that leveraging technology for successful mentorship programmes is a straight path into unequalled opportunities of personal and professional growth.

Recommendations: The Study recommended that HEIs should develop policy guides for digital mentorship, foster sustainable online learning, incorporate digital literacy trainings in the curriculum, and ensure the protection of students' data and privacy. Students on the other hand should create a distraction-free study space, develop critical thinking skills to evaluate the credibility and accuracy of information encountered, and take regular breaks from screens among others.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Social Media communication has rapidly diffused, been adopted and accepted by millions of users world over, including students, for the great number of purposes which have been advanced to explain this massive adoption in the educational context (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Gasaymeh (2017). On top of teaching and learning, mentorship has been recognized, by Higher Educational Institutions, as an effective way to improving and enhancing students' learning capability, and their preparation for the world and adulthood. WhatsApp has emerged as a commonly used communication engine in the enhancement of meaningful, deliberate mentorship. WhatsApp has also now been embraced as a useful Instant Messaging (IM) tool, in educational settings, not only because it gives students a platform to create humor but also because, through its various affordances, it enhances interactivity and intimacy between users, and their instructors (Ujakpa, 2018; Koçak & Vergiveren, 2019; Yeboah and Nyagorme, 2022). The recent express revolution in the burgeoning and usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) came with changes in different pedagogical and technological applications and processes, like WhatsApp, which has become an important channel for private IM and interactions between family co-workers and friends (Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Zarouali, et.al 2021). Students have applauded the interactive and near to face-to-face-conversation features of WhatsApp as a key vehicle to effectiveness in constructive mentorship communication, an experience that helps them grow their, interpersonal, intrapersonal and cognitive competencies (Seow & Koh, 2019).

Communication plays a vital role in the mentorship of undergraduate students; this interaction may be synchronous or asynchronous, and can be well enabled by WhatsApp, a tool whose ratification may not cause a challenge since students are already exposed to both the knowledge and the hardware technology (Ujakpa, 2018). The smart phone application is a key social media tool that helps students to 'transfer, translate and transform their educational journey' and has therefore been

integrated into pedagogic delivery (Madge, 2019). A 21st Century Higher Education Institution (HEI), has the obligation of preparing her learners through teaching, learning, research and expressive mentorship, to make them more successful as they aspire and prepare for their future (Van Vianen et al., 2018). Mentorship has been known to possess benefits like improved self-efficacy, receiving practical career-related support, exposure to workplace expectations, as well as the essential psychosocial support (Nabi et al., 2021).

This introductory chapter consists of the general background to the study; problem statement; purpose and objectives of the study; the scope and justification of the study.

1.2 Background to the study

The current generation also known as the ‘network generation’ or ‘digital children’ has been known to be dependent on Social Media Networking (SMN) and Instant Messaging (IM), even in the area of scholarship; WhatsApp specifically, has been acknowledged as an extensively well-known and widely used platform which has been utilized as a notable and effective dais to boast, nourish, or support social learning activities (Alqahtani, 2018; Paschetto, 2022; Ujakpa, 2018). This dependence has affected communication, and therefore learning dynamics. In this, WhatsApp has also been credited for being low cost, flexible, easy-to-use, available, and therefore a forthcoming communication learning and mentorship tool. The application also has a number of drawbacks which include the undeniable importance of seamless internet connection which can help users to receive information, when bandwidth is limited receiving and dispatching large quantities of graphic and audio-visual files becomes problematic; another challenge is that members of the group have the liberty of leaving the group even when no prior notifications are given. (Veeramani, 2022). Nonetheless the application has been embraced by most undergraduate students as ‘a way of life’ which comes with many affordances, ‘stickers, statuses, groups, and easy-to-use messages’, and functions like video and audio as well as an opportunity to use on a computer (Lekach, 2020).

Studies by Tang and Hew (2017), and Kumar (2016) revealed that learners expressed a positive attitude towards the incorporation of WhatsApp into teaching and learning; students described it as useful, easy to use and even fun, and they wished it could be integrated into formal teaching and learning. This explains why it has been easy for students to be assisted more easily using the application. Students have been known to improve in their performance in and out of the instruction room mainly because it provides for collaborative communication as well as information sharing (Riyanto, 2013; Albion, 1996). Compared to email, the Mobile Message Application (MMA), allows users to discuss in short-sized messages, while emails are mostly formal and dignified, long and fully framed sentences, which require a longer time of response; instant messages, on the other hand, are similar to oral conversation (Seufert, 2016).

As a communication tool, WhatsApp is simple to start using not just because it is free to download and it does not have a complex registration process, but also because it offers opportunities for one-on-one, one-to-many, group communication, private chats, broadcast, group chats, enabling and disabling feedback, sending and receiving text messages, videos, photographs, voice, a notification when a new message has come or when the sent message has been viewed, emojis, among so many more, for as long as one has a smart phone and internet connection (Seufert, 2016). Marketeers, brand managers and advertisers have also found WhatsApp to be an important and strategic tool when interacting with consumers, and potential consumers (Brahim & Zaroual, 2021). Institutions of Higher Learning also face the same pressure because they have to work towards ensuring that they reach their customer (the student) and offer a fruitful mentorship service in addition to teaching and learning.

Pillon and Osmun (2013) defined mentorship as a communication enabled active, requited relationship between ‘an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the development of both.’ Conversely, mentorship is the expert guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person within an established institution. According Thibault (2020), mentorship is recognized as the best way for students and employees to accelerate their professional development. In essence, the whole idea behind mentorship

arrangements is simply to help a mentee learn from the experience and knowledge of a mentor through an apprenticeship sort of arrangement. Good Communication in mentorship ushers both mentees and mentors into the best of their potential, and the realisation of it, avoiding misinformation and ambiguity; the in addition to being personal, communication channels should be influential enough to support the mentors (French, 2000).

Scholars have traced the history of mentorship from the Homer's classic tale (Ford, 2019), in which it is recorded that before the hero Ulysses took off to wage war, he left his son, Telemachus, into the trusted hands of his friend, Athena, who executed the obligation of guiding the young lad in his absentia. However, by the eve of the 1700's the word mentor had become a renown noun in the English language with the preferred meaning, 'wise counselor', (Balatti, 2001). In contrast, modern-day practice suggests that the word mentor is used to refer to guidance, wise counsel given by a more experienced person to one who is newly introduced in a given field of professional practice. It must be emphasized that mentorship is not something restricted to a lecturer-student arrangement, but is widely practiced at different professional job placements.

Originally, mentorship was carried out in a physical and face to face arrangement. In the views of Dennen (2013), 'apprenticeship is an inherently social learning method with a long history of helping novices become experts in fields as diverse as midwifery, construction, and law.' Right in the heart of the apprenticeship model of mentorship, is the idea that more experienced persons help the novice by providing constructive, insightful and practical guidance. Despite of the numerous advantages of traditional apprenticeship model of mentorship, Mullen (2020) observes that a key challenge one is likely to encounter when practicing the apprenticeship model of mentorship was accessing mentors by mentees, and this challenge was mainly as a result of geographical limitations.

However, due to advancement in technology, digital communication cured a number of challenges especially those which arose in situations where both parties were

geographically located differently. The evidence by Moretta, et al (2022) suggests that globally internet users continue to grow at a very high rate as to a total of 5.03 billion people equivalent to 63.1% of the world's total population that use internet now. But more interesting to this study, almost 94% of internet users now use social media every month. In light of the above, and while acknowledging the value of digital communication in facilitating mentorship within academic arrangement, Corsini, et al (2021) indicated that social media has been key in enabling easy networking and mentorship, chiefly for females pursuing vocations in specialties with relatively sparse female representation, such as cardiothoracic surgery. Furthermore, Latif, et al (2019) and Carlen and Jobring (2005) noted that social media facilitates professional interactions, collaboration and engagements in continuing education and communication of novel research findings.

It is therefore evident that the potential of online communication is valuable since it links students to people in distant lands, thus providing a mentorship experience that is not limited by geographical borders and time zones. However, it is still not fully understood how digital communication orchestrated by social media, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, Viber, WeChat, Twitter and others, has facilitated constructive mentorship arrangement between students and assigned mentors by institutions of higher learning in developing countries. Thus this study sought to examine the effectiveness of using WhatsApp, as a communication tool, to facilitate constructive mentorship in Bishop Stuart University in Mbarara District, in Uganda.

1.3 Problem statement

The age of embracing technological advancement was escalated by the adverse effects of covid-19. BSU, like most academic institutions, moved to the use of digital communication tools like WhatsApp, zoom, Google meet, YouTube, among others. A number of programs in BSU, therefore, were moved to the online operation, including student mentorship, because of the extended lockdown of the covid19 era. HEIs in Uganda, and Africa, have embraced teaching and learning which are technology-enhanced, this mode was re-named Social Media Learning or Flexible Learning (Ng'ambi et al., 2016). Important to note also is that students already use SM and IM

for communication, for expression and for action. According to Kanya (2022), more than 200,000 students in HEIs, in Uganda, are already using ICT tools to study. WhatsApp is used to stimulate student learning, engagement and collaboration, and to effectively develop educational micro-communities with increased participation (Gachago et al., 2015).

According to Alqualtani (2018), WhatsApp, becomes most preferred by students because it is a good platform for students to use when making inquiries which can be addressed immediately, in addition to being a great medium to spread information among participants through collaborative learning (Annamalai, 2019). There is no doubt that the use of WhatsApp, has broken many barriers in enhancing communication between mentors and mentees in a university setting; it is now easier and quicker to communicate with no geographical boundaries.

However, despite of the advantages of WhatsApp communication in facilitating online students' mentorship projects, its effectiveness and efficiency appears still not to be fully understood especially in an environment where ICT infrastructure is not fully developed (Kavitha 2018). As such, this study sought to examine the effectiveness of using WhatsApp, as a communication tool, when ensuring constructive student mentorship at Bishop Stuart University in Mbarara, Uganda.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The overall objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using WhatsApp communication to achieve a successful mentorship experience for both the mentor and the mentee in BSU.

1.5 Specific objectives

1. To assess ways through which WhatsApp communication is used in mentorship programmes in BSU.
2. To examine the challenges associated with using WhatsApp communication in mentorship at BSU.
3. To suggest possible solutions to the identified challenges.

1.6 Research questions

1. In what ways is WhatsApp communication used in mentorship programmes at BSU?
2. What are the challenges encountered when using WhatsApp as a communication tool in mentorship in BSU?
3. How can these challenges be solved in order to have effective communication in mentorship in BSU?

1.7 Scope of the study

1.7.1 Content scope

In this study, the researcher focused on examining the use of WhatsApp as a communication medium in empowering student mentees, analyzing its effectiveness when instilling skill development among student mentees and finally the researcher explored the challenges faced by both the mentees and mentors in using WhatsApp as a means of facilitating constructive mentorship in Bishop Stuart University (BSU), Mbarara.

1.7.2 Time scope

The research covered a time frame spreading over duration of three (3) years starting from 2020 to 2022. The researcher chose this time frame for mainly two reasons; first, it covers a period when most universities out of unavoidable conditions opted to go digital in teaching and learning arrangements due to covid-19 lockdown, and also because during this time frame the number of internet users in Uganda generally increased.

1.7.3 Geographical scope

This study was carried out at Bishop Stuart University (BSU). The university was founded in 2002 by the Ankole Diocese of the Province of the Anglican Church of Uganda. Bishop Stuart University is a peri-urban, private, not-for-profit University, chartered in 2014 and located in Western Uganda 3.5 kilometers (KM) from Mbarara City Centre. The University is one of 'the best and fastest growing universities in Uganda ranked 10th by Webometrics' (Ranking Web of Universities). The researcher chose BSU as a case study because the university runs student mentorship projects a

program in which students are attached to teaching and non-teaching staffs for career and spiritual nurturing.

1.8 Justification of the study

It is not unusual that the unemployment rate is very high in Uganda, according to UBOS (2021) the youth unemployment rate stood at 2.94% by close of 2021. This is very evident with the huge number of graduates that the several universities produce yearly. Despite the large number of graduates, Nakirijja and Nabulya (2020) reiterated that employers also say that most graduates are unemployable because they do not have the required job placement skills. Furthermore, according to Nauffal and Skulte-Ouaiss (2018), the International Labor Organization (ILO) noted that training institutions like universities still keep producing graduates whose skillset does not feed the needs in the job market. This is a gap which makes it very difficult to address youth unemployment. Datzberger (2018) acknowledges that ‘at least nine in every 10 Ugandans who have completed any form of education are unemployed’. According to National Planning Authority (NPA, 2020) statistics, about 87% of unemployed Ugandans are people who are ready and available to work but can’t find a employment. To address this gap therefore, institutions of Higher Learning have the responsibility to be charismatic about mentorship and therefore to use a communication tool which is not only embraced by many, but also can promote meaningful interaction between mentors and mentees.

1.9 Significance of the study

The researcher envisioned the following as some of the significances of the study:

This study aimed at producing empirical evidence about the benefits of using WhatsApp communication to ensure potent students’ mentorship which university policy making organs can use to plan and implement an approach for solving the problem.

The researcher shared study findings with Universities, including BSU where data was collected to help them make informed decisions when dealing with communication in students’ mentorship.

The researcher also envisioned that study findings would create established baseline information for future and further research study in the same topical area.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter of the study focused on reviewing authoritative literatures on the subject under investigation. Along with the theoretical framework, the entire literature review process was informed by the three specific research objectives, the researcher also focused on the attributes of variables mentioned in this research and the theory of communication affordances.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This qualitative research paper used the Theory of Communication Affordances, a theory that was first coined by the psychologist James J. Gibson to mean ‘an action possibility available in the environment to an individual, independent of the individual’s ability to perceive this possibility’ (McGrenere & Ho, 2000, p. 179); an affordance is a readily perceivable interaction possibility. In their work, Conole and Dyke (2004, p. 360) cite Salomon (1993) who describes affordances as ‘the perceived and actual properties of an object, primarily the functional properties that determine just what and how the object could possibly be used.’ It therefore means what the user is able to do with a device or object. Pavlo, Dawson and Sahay (2008, P. 9) classify affordances and actionable possibilities as shown in the table below;

Table 1: Classification of affordances and actionable possibilities

S/N	CATEGORIES OF AFFORDANCES	ACTION POSSIBILITIES
1	Media affordances	Read-ability, write-ability, view-ability, draw-ability, listen-ability, speak-ability, watch-ability, video-production-ability
2	Spatial affordances	Resize-ability, movability
3	Temporal affordances	Accessibility, record-ability, playback-ability, synchronicity
4	Navigation affordances	Browse-ability, link-ability, search-ability, data-manipulation-ability

5	Emphasis affordances	Highlight-ability, focus-ability
6	Synthesis affordances	Combine-ability, integrate-ability
7	Access-control affordances	Permission-ability, share-ability
8	Personal affordances	Personalization-ability, customerlisation-ability
9	Social affordances	Collaborate-ability, Share-ability
10	Metacognitive	Plan-ability, Monitor-ability, Reflect-ability
11	Adaptive	Adapt-ability

Table 1 adapted from Pavlo, Dawson and Sahay (2008, P.9)

This qualitative study looked at affordances of WhatsApp and also established how the mobile application provides personalized guidance and feedback to and from student mentees about their skills and application of knowledge. The researcher therefore examined and described the proficiency and points of view of mentors and mentees, in a higher educational setting, on the affordances of the mobile device application and how it fits in the mentorship process.

2.3 Use of WhatsApp communication in student mentorships

WhatsApp, according to reports, can be used to create and share knowledge. WhatsApp is used for chatting and messaging, tabling comments, as well sharing educational information. In addition, by posting their work in the group, students can use WhatsApp to generate class news and information; mentors and mentees can therefore hold meaningful interactions with each other. WhatsApp increases mentee performance by facilitating online collaboration and communication (Barhoumi, 2015).

In their research, Koçak & Vergiveren (2019), cite a previous study which indicates the intention to use WhatsApp as predominantly for hedonic motivation, principally because users find it pleasurable, gratifying and entertaining. Enjoyment is very important in any mentorship experience. The same research mentions the reality of two types of users the first one being the group which utilizes the application for leisure, academic, work and the second which uses the same application for informative, academic and official reasons. Therefore, the opportunity to generate

and share content plays a key role and explains why IM has traversed the world. This messaging application has become a channel for content production because it supports discourse in mentorship; ‘people can tell stories at any time and place supported by images or videos’ (Ibid).

Popular content created and shared in WhatsApp groups has been found to be of professional nature, with much of it relating to work or school (73.6%), followed by personal happenings and developments (55.1); 52.1% of the users often shared chain messages in groups. A good fraction of the content is gossip, while cultural issues, recent developments and news, politics, humanitarian relief pursuits and commercials also featured as content (Koçak & Vergiveren; 2019). The same research also states that females tend to use the same application to share more personal events while males discuss political issues more.

According to a study by Fattah (2015), many pupils actually dislike writing. Many associate writing in a classroom setting with tedious assignments and a harsh atmosphere of criticism and unfavorable comments. Or, to put it another way, the fun is gone. The ordinary young student sends an astounding amount of texts, status updates on social networking sites, and instant messages, obviously, so much of writing is taking place. The difficulty is in promoting the kind of writing that aids in knowledge acquisition and intellectual growth. While WhatsApp allows circular writing, it is one exercise where students work together to write a story, one text message at a time. A learner can compose one or two sentences before sending them to the next recipient, who then adds a message, and so on, until the narrative is finished. When the course instructor teacher receives the copy he/she can keep track the development of the story. You can try out various text formats, such narratives (as in the example above) or condensed versions like news reports, directions, and cautions (Fattah, 2015).

According to Yeboah and Nyagorme (2022), users can execute desired tasks with the use of WhatsApp's technological and educational affordances, including sending a text, an image, and a voice message, placing or returning phone calls, and carrying out teaching and learning activities including boosting engagement, collaboration, and

learning. Depending on how frequently students use the app, WhatsApp use has an effect on their academic achievement. Studies have demonstrated the benefits of using WhatsApp by college students in their learning and mentorship processes. For instance, WhatsApp facilitates communication through a variety of features like document, audio, video, and image sharing; the social networking application is regarded as advantageous for information and knowledge exchange among students. In addition, WhatsApp allows 'students to create a group chat with up to 512 users in a single group for discussion purposes' (Lee, Chern, & Azmir; 2023 quoted Economic Times, 2022).

In support of the above, Gasaymeh (2017) carried out a cross-sectional study on 154 students at a university in Jordan examining the use of WhatsApp by university students and their attitude regarding its potential incorporation into their education. According to this study's findings, students principally used this social media platform to correspond with their friends and families to share media and other information. Gasaymeh claims that this social media application's popularity is a result of its low cost and ease of use. WhatsApp is utilized for educational purposes, according to the report. Gasaymeh discovered that students utilized the application to publish course-related reports and announcements, asking for help from each other and former students, and sharing links to themes and topics and resources related to the course, even if its adoption for this purpose was restricted.

In their research, Koçak and Vergiveren intimate that IM apps, which have mushroomed in number to over 300 and are available in app stores for download, have been credited for warranting dyad and group messaging amongst users enabling them to 'share any content including photos, videos, texts, and to make video or voice calls' (2019). The massive adoption of mobile phones comes because of 'communication modalities provided by smartphones' through platforms, like WhatsApp, 'which is adopted for personal and business lives, users' expectation on security' and the now prominent need for 'privacy' (ib.id). Their research found out that the content shared in the application was mainly for professional use, personal

events and developments, to share news and current events, to advertise products, to share political views, gossip sharing and for humanitarian reasons as often and at will.

In the medical profession, WhatsApp is used for to get second opinions and sometimes, to share patient information; medical students have used it a lot. Its usage in the developed countries is now common, and has grown even more because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with searches of PubMed on WhatsApp showing a marked increase in papers: 2018–94; 2019–126; 2020–312; 2021 (to 30 August 2021)–323. Imamyartha, et.al (2022) found that WhatsApp, despite its infancy as a curricular and co-curricular platform, had been recognized to breed positive attitudes to learning and mentorship, it therefore posed significant influence even on vocabulary learning, writing skills, and academic success.

Imamyartha, et.al (2022) went on to describe WhatsApp as a ‘social, cultural, and collaborative tool which offers language learners with robust cognitive engagement, authentic communication, and entertainment made possible by the opportunity to store material and share it’. Thanks to the ability to share and store content, WhatsApp is credited for active learning, collaborative learning, sharing community, learning community amplifying learning experiences, and therefore motivating knowledge engagement and dissemination; these traits enhance the mentorship experience and produce visible outcome (Ibid).

WhatsApp enhanced group discussion provides learners a comfortable setting for them to share thoughts (Imamyartha et.al, 2022). Students are becoming increasingly adept at using technology tools and devices. They feel secure and at ease utilizing WhatsApp for individualized instruction. The use of WhatsApp in the classroom is successful because pupils are accustomed to the platform. It has been observed that as students use WhatsApp more frequently as a learning tool, their confidence in academic learning increases (Albion, 1996).

Interestingly, today’s learner chooses to learn through mobile technology because of endless opportunities for virtual communication and collaboration (Annamalai, 2019). Riyanto (2013) says that WhatsApp can be used to for study, for example, one can

learn a language and interact with friends at the same time. A WhatsApp group which has learners and instructors of English language can help a non-English speaking student learn the language if she becomes part of the group; such a student learns more effectively, quickly, amusingly and collaboratively. The mobile phone application makes it possible for instructors to publish assignments and notes, and to instruct learners to accomplish goals by selecting the provided options. Students' English language skills can be improved because since they have read or listen, and therefore respond in the English language. Interestingly, anybody who has a Smartphone can use the application, because WhatsApp is free. According to Rambe and Chipunza (2013), students confirmed that with WhatsApp they could freely express themselves without boundaries and low participation, as characterized by lectures could be done away with. Also, the same study also revealed as students develop technological abilities and skills when they continue to interact with WhatsApp, such skills are useful because they are applicable to other study-related platforms like Couseira and Blackboard, among others.

Traditional physical classroom learning is usually one-way, uninterrupted and reactive while WhatsApp is considered as more proactive and dynamic. Students can watch, listen and learn while in the comfort of their own homes; the learners are able to access and share resources 'in real-time to solidify their learning'. Learners can also accomplish learning goals from their homes, under the guidance and supervision of a guardian or parent; their work can then be submitted to the teacher and even discussed on the class WhatsApp forum. Such benefits are an entry point to deeper, community-oriented learning which creates good results in retention and knowledge up-grade (Gupshup, 2021). Students are able to freely discuss novel ideas and publicly share personal thoughts, thanks to the development of social networking sites. They participate in the online discussions and debates without actually speaking to other participants, this interaction becomes a form of peer mentorship. Humans are accustomed to maintaining close bonds with a select few close friends rather than forming new interactions with strangers.

WhatsApp's first release was in 2010, but since then, its creators have added new capabilities to it that make it suited for facilitating communication in schools and other learning environments (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). Boyinbode et al. (2017) concluded that the application could significantly support educational activities. Similar to this, Yavuz (2016) advises the formation of cooperative study groups to inspire students and improve everyone's performance. It is clear from the discussion above that WhatsApp is a relatively new educational tool that can be utilized to support academic and career ventures. There are, however, not many studies on it.

According to Carlen and Jobring (2005), features of WhatsApp enable interactive collaboration, efficient communication and knowledge sharing in student groups, all of these create a sense of community. When in higher education, learners prefer to work as communities or in teams assignment groups, student support groups and associations and clubs. A learning environment is defined as "a context that provides a supportive framework from which sustainable learning processes are achieved through a dialogue and collaborative building of knowledge by obtaining, creating, analyzing, and structuring information" in a learning community (Ibid, 309). Students are able to participate and learn in real time by exchanging text messages, videos, pictures and voice messages, thanks to the phenomena of employing mobile technologies like WhatsApp for collaborative communication and the ability to create teams among instructors and students in higher education settings.

In support to the above, Cheng (2015) states that the group-based communication feature enables learners to build forums and exchange messages that facilitate group communication, postulates collaborative features of the application, that warrant its adoption when building student groups in societies and clubs in higher education; it also has undeniable positive effects on academic performance. According to Stone, S., & Logan, A. (2018), university students see WhatsApp as a crucial tool for fostering interactive collaboration as well as socialization in their groups. A team is a collection of people who work together cooperatively and freely to complete specific tasks or reach a common goal. Teams can be classified as face-to-face, virtual, or hybrid.

According to the demands and convenience, hybrid teams combine face-to-face and virtual team designs and communication.

To the younger generation, WhatsApp is a common way of communicating; they are able to communicate and interact with family, friends, or coworkers, according to Kibona and Mgaya (2015). According to Bouhnik and Deshen (2016), university students make use of WhatsApp primarily for four purposes: communicating with friends and family, promoting peer discussion of ideas, striking up discussions with associates and acquaintances in a relaxed setting, and fostering and cultivating their social environment. WhatsApp facilitates individualized learning, enables students to learn at their own speed in addition to social communication (Lee, 2016). WhatsApp can be used to foster peer collaboration, strengthen a sense of community, and facilitate the exchange of important knowledge in a learning environment (Minocha, 2009).

2.4 Challenges faced in using WhatsApp communication to facilitate mentorship

In *Teens' Motivations to Spread Fake News on WhatsApp*, Herrero-Diz, Conde-Jiménez, and Cózar (2020) explain that misinformation spreads rapidly on younger people's mobile devices through IMAs like WhatsApp. The same research says that fake news appeals to students' emotions and inspires them to distribute the news impulsively, even though the application is perceived as a convenient communication application. The quick generation of fake news is also echoed by Cheeseman et al, who asserts that the 'spread of misinformation is more acute when it comes to WhatsApp' (Ibid). WhatsApp has also been said to have emboldened political candidates and their proponents to 'spread "fake news"—whether inadvertently (misinformation) or deliberately (disinformation)' (Ibid). The inadvertent and/or deliberate dispatch of fake news through the IMA has windswept trust in increased the risk of tension and violence. In mentorship, the spread of fake news can lead to passing on the wrong or unsupported guidance which can have dire consequences on young lives of mentees.

According to Mendenhall, et.al. (2018), 'lags, or sometimes a complete lack of responses de-motivated global mentors and teachers from participating in mobile

mentoring'. In their study, 'teachers stated that delayed responses from mentors and fellow mentees were a disadvantage because it could take hours or days before a question was addressed'. Mentors and course instructors confirmed that delays in response time, which could be blamed on differences in time zones and delays caused by network fluctuations, were a turn-off and so were the total lack of response from either party. Network glitches seem not to be the only challenge; geographical isolation was identified as detracting from the natural need for human face-to-face interaction. Reliance on the faceless online interaction has led to isolation and seclusion, confusion, and stress ultimately posing a challenge to the attrition and attrition of the students. (Simui et.al, 2028).

In a study, Bertman et.al (2019) discuss challenges like power cuts, which make it difficult to charge digital tools and therefore delays in giving responses and technical challenges like the absence of "threading" of case discussions. The same research observed that 'some of the group conversations were broken up, with multiple cases overlapping' which made it rather difficult to follow up a given conversation.

Scholars have advanced that SNSs have turned into arenas of gross incivility and discourtesy (Ruiz et al., 2011); some SNSs have falsely led users into not feeling any discomfort when sharing information blatantly publicly (Newman et al., 2018). Whereas SNSs like WhatsApp and Telegram are enclosed places for defined categories like friends and other close relations, users tend to treat the platforms as outlets for 'fake news' and other 'problematic content' mainly because the app has 'internal features which create in users a false sense of confidence' thereby making them unyielding to moderating or altering personal etiquette (Frankel, 2018; Sharot, 2017; Newman et al, 2017).

Although cheating, as a problem, has existed ever since the Garden of Eden incident, current technological advancements have made it worse, and social media has been identified as one of the enablers of this vice. Integrity of student submissions is frequently questioned. Because of the use of more modern technology, it is impossible to verify whether the student claiming to be on the other side of the

device is truly that student. In fact, some skeptics rapidly draw the conclusion that online academic dishonesty is widespread and significantly worse than in traditional classrooms despite having no evidence to back up their assertions (Ubell, 2017).

According to a study by Gasaymeh (2017), despite the positives of WhatsApp that were mentioned, university nursing students felt that using the application had an impact on people's behaviors. WhatsApp was shown as a means for students to pursue independence from social and cultural limits levied by the society they live in, despite the fact that students in the context of the current study connected WhatsApp to a separation of individuals in the given groups. Concern was also raised about WhatsApp users' lack of participation in the study, particularly in the groups set up for academic communication.

Similar to this, according to Bouhnik and Deshen (2014), students do not try to join WhatsApp discussions, which hinder communication between them and their teachers. When communications are made at unsuitable times or when they contain inappropriate messages, WhatsApp is disruptive to learners since it has an impact on human behavior. Negative experiences associated with the usage of WhatsApp in the educational context include inappropriate scheduling of the messages, pointless communications, and disrobing texts (Cetinkaya, 2017).

According to studies by Moqbel, M., et.al (2024); Bernal-Ruiz, C., & Rosa-Alcázar, A. I. (2022) and Martinez-Comeche, J. A., & Ruthven, I. (2021), WhatsApp can be addictive, especially when used in conjunction with particular internet activities. Frequent users may become addicted to the internet, and this addiction may become difficult to regulate and treat. Many specifically claim that WhatsApp has eaten up a large portion of students' study time at the expense of their personal lives (Ib.id). The inability to manage time, loss of focus during lectures, difficulty in juggling academic preparation and online activities, distraction of students from completing assignments, and inability to spell and create correct grammatical sentences all contribute to procrastination (Janor et al., 2015).

According to Kibona and Mgaya (2015), rather than using WhatsApp for academic objectives, the majority of students utilize it for their own social and personal

relationships. Additionally, they discovered that 86% of the respondents were so dependent on this program that they had to always be paying attention to their phones, even when in class, in order to swiftly respond to messages, which impaired their ability to concentrate in class. Also, the majority of the students tested had Grade Point Averages (GPAs) lower than 2.5, which suggests a negative impact on students' GPAs from using smartphones and the related applications.

Simok et.al (2021,) also intimate that miscommunication is one of the challenges of using e-mentorship; the studies emphasise that much as the application allows synchronous meetings, 'students tend to turn off their cameras to avoid internet lag, unintentionally blocking critical non-verbal facial signs, leading to misinterpretation and miscommunication'. Faceless relationships sometimes make conversations brief and stiff; one has to be creative to annul such a challenge. The creativity however will need, as the researcher further says, both the mentor and the mentee to be well versed with the skills needed for effective online interaction. The creativity also needs both parties to explore well the affordances of the application in use.

2.5 Possible solutions to challenges of using WhatsApp in Mentorship

Generally, communication is an integral part in student mentorship programs especially when it comes to the learning and growth process; it has the ability to give them a glimpse of practical experiences in the world of real work or job placement context and wholistic development. Kohnke, L. (2020) explored the introduction of a virtual mentoring program due to covid-19 effects as a substitute to the well-known traditional face-to-face mentorship program to provide progressive professional development. Study findings revealed that to achieve fruitful mentor-mentee projects, and for electronic communication between mentors and mentees to be effective, both parties must be knowledgeable and well versed with the systems.

In his study, Blabst (2015) asserted that WhatsApp is an avenue for significant and emotional exchange between people; it is a communication experience which provides for 'spontaneous, personal, informal, contextual, portable, ubiquitous, ambient, unobtrusive or pervasive' exchange of information (Sai, 2016). Such a

communication avenue grows in users the need for maturity as well as honesty in their interaction and to ensure an achievement of the set goals. WhatsApp communication, when well utilized, therefore, can foster an increased sense of self-efficacy and development of leadership skills (Breck & Leedahl, 2018).

Important to note is the benefit of exposing students to mentorship projects; they end up acquiring necessary skills that are very vital in shaping their career growth and development. Some of the vital personnel skills that students need include ability to communicate efficiently and effectively, ability to collaborate and network, leadership and analytical skills, self-awareness skills, among other things.

Bankable communication in mentorship provides career growth opportunities and creates benefits for the livelihoods of both mentors and mentees (Santos, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic came with extended lockdowns which translated into a substantial challenge to physical meetings and therefore face to face communication in educational settings; the then new normal called for more guidance to students such that they may “learn how to learn” and most importantly for them to broaden their talents and skills alongside their academic and life journey (Cheng & Qin, 2021). In line with the above, Cutton and Culp (2020) pointed out that the key to effective communication in mentorship to young adults has to come with possession of qualities which can be utilized to empower student mentees; the study highlighted qualities like worthwhile communication skills, mastery of the professional domain, zeal, and the propensity to fashion a rightful supportive environment for the mentee as some of the qualities mentors should and can pass on to mentees. Such skills when well used can be well adopted by the mentees from their appointed mentors.

Just like other Social Network Sites (SNSs), using WhatsApp does not require expensive digital tools which explains why most students own and know how to use the application and the hardware (Gasarmeh, 2016). Through proper utilization of communication young adults can embrace knowledge and acquire new skills and be motivated pursue education, which in this generation is of a multi-disciplinary nature (Yalcin & KamaliArslantas, 2020). Through WhatsApp communication therefore, the

mentor has the opportunity to enhance and sharpen the mentees personal qualities, life skills and goals (Chadha & Joseph (2018)).

In their research, Shahid and Shaikh (2019) mentioned that face-to-face learning has lost its charm in the passage of time because of the advent of technology and the way smart phones have taken the world by the storm which is why the cost effective WhatsApp application has taken its place among the students. According to the findings of this research, the application was being used to enhance the students' mental capabilities, boost their confidence, improve their creative and cognitive skill levels and was credited for creating a bond between teachers and students. The communication tool has a beneficial impact on the academic accomplishments of young adults if the overriding use is hinged on academic reasons; through WhatsApp, 'lecture materials, other digital information and alert services related to academics' can be shared in addition to the already mentioned functions that favour interaction and collaboration (Afful & Akrong, 2020). The application is equally beneficial for the professional development of the teacher and the mentor. As if to agree, Garcia-Melgar and Meyers (2020), say that when WhatsApp is used in mentorship communication, barriers like low self-esteem in mentees who may have a problem when physically relating with their mentors and lecturers, as well as fellow mentees, are done away with.

In view of promoting a network construction plan of mentor-mentee community and the subsequent endorsement of active mentorship communication, Bussu and Burton (2022) found out that young adult mentees reported to have been satisfied with the adoption of the mobile device application to foster active mentorship and professional network building. According to Dalton, R. (2021) students can build a wide spectrum of collaboration through networks of mentors, and fellow mentees. Good network building is possible when the mentor is experienced and knowledgeable, and can therefore utilize the communication platform to help mentees connect with each other and with her/him in a professional manner.

Network building is central for students it helps them improve on their chances of job placement, growth and other related career benefits. In regards with the aforementioned, Gower and Dantas (2022) further emphasize the importance of communication in mentorship by stating that equipment and mentorship of immigrants and foreign female students provided mentees with a mechanism of establishing livelihoods in Australia, and also helps them to build stamina, and grow knowledge on how they can conquer barriers to the social determinants that come education pursues.

It must be recognized that traditionally, communication between mentors and student mentees was something done on a face to face arrangement and it was effective. However, due to technological advancement and prevailing situations, online communication has become apparent. This makes it quite uneasy to logically conclude that the online communication in mentorship is effective or otherwise, hence this aspect of literature reviews.

Weissheimer, Caldas, and Marques (2018) state that the use of technology in mentorship allows an asynchronous information sharing which has been known to carry benefits for the learners like creating students' sovereignty, confidence building and therefore ample opportunity to be sure before providing feedback. In the same research the scholars admit that technology has shaped both teaching and mentorship and that WhatsApp has been more dominant because more course instructors have qualified it as user-friendly and therefore more helpful.

Measuring effectiveness in mentorship which is done through online communication requires time series to assess, however there are short parameters that can be used to measure the same. It is equally important to appreciate factors that give rise to an effective online environment; managers of such virtual teams need comprehensive skills in leadership, technology and relationship building. According to Roy, S. R. (2012), the use of WhatsApp communication in mentorship brings trust to the table, diversity, a team spirit, and the motivation of team members.

Conversely, study findings by Kovaitė, and Stankevičienė (2020) revealed that any gap in communication through digital channels invariably affects the quality of a mentorship project outcome. In the course of establishing the efficacy of WhatsApp communication in the mentorship of medical students, Kyaw, et al (2019) found low-quality evidence showing that mentorship through WhatsApp communication was as fruitful as the conventional face-to-face mentorship, among the medical student mentees, especially during the training in communication skills. The researcher recommended a blended approach which he recommended can be as least as effective or even much better, than the conventional style when it comes to the learning of communication skills.

There are many skills that a student needs to learn in order to be equipped for the marketplace demands. Some of the skills are so intertwined with the contemporary digitization of education learning platforms in contrast with the traditional physical learning arrangement. In principle, Klein, P et al. (2021) study results disclosed that skills like effective communication and self-organization are positively consistent with perceived learning achievements. In essence this implies that for students undergoing digital mentorship arrangement to be successful, they must have considerate communication skills. In the alternative exposing student mentees to online mentorship arrangement exposes them to learn such skills.

The review of literature seems to suggest there is not enough evidence to make a conclusive remark as to whether mentorship of students through WhatsApp communication is effective. There are many factors in low developed countries that work against the effectiveness of such kind of arrangement starting with the efficiencies of ICT infrastructures, availability of mentors and students, and mentors' ability to correctly use the ICT system to facilitate an efficient mentorship project that would constructively benefit both mentors and mentees.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the procedures, process and methods that were used in carrying out this research study undertaking on the use of WhatsApp communication to enhance student mentorship projects at BSU. Decisions to adopt different study methods in this study were also justifiably explained. Some of the methodological components in this chapter include but are not limited to research design, study population and sampling techniques, ethical issues that were followed in carrying out this research.

3.2 Research Approach

The researcher adopted qualitative research approach in the pursuit of this study. The adoption of this research approach was largely because it enables an in-depth investigation of a social phenomenon by collecting narrative data from the study respondents' point of view in a more versatile manner. According to Rashid et al (2019) using the qualitative research approach gives the research a more exhaustive and wider range of understanding a multidimensional research problem like the effectiveness of using digital platform to facilitate mentorship relationship project between students and their university assigned mentors at BSU.

3.3 Research Design

The researcher adopted a qualitative case study research design to enable the successful execution of the study objectives by collecting the most appropriate type of data. According to Schoch (2020), a case study research design is an in-depth inquiry of a phenomenon. In acknowledging the importance of a case study design, George (2019) reiterated that it enables the researcher to collect a more accurate data compared to other types of research designs which occasions a sweeping statistical data. As such, the researcher will adopt this design because of its unique and flexible characteristics that will facilitate a rich description of using digital communication to facilitate student's mentorship at BSU.

4. 4 Target Population

In any research activity, the researcher must be able to spell out the category of his/her population right before a research process even begins. According to Ingram and Schneider (1991), a target population is the populace, in its entirety or group of population that the investigator has interest in studying. In this study, the target population was undergraduate student mentees at BSU and their mentors. However, the study population from whom data was collected for the purposes of analysis and interpretation included University assigned mentors to students at BSU who have ever taken on a student mentorship responsibility, and undergraduate students at BSU.

3.5 Sample and sampling techniques

3.5.1 Sample size determination

In all research undertaking, researchers heavily rely on samples to carry out their investigation and make logical conclusions. It was observed by Lakens D. (2022) that samples in any research undertaking are basically used to make inferences about the populations of study interest. This proposition makes the identification and determination of the approximate sample extremely vital in order to be able to make valid and reliable inferences.

In social science research, it is not common for researchers to study the entire population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). However, in qualitative research the sample size is always not predetermined and is justified by the attainment of saturation in the data collected. According to Saunders, et al (2018), in qualitative research data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study and when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained. Furthermore, Guest et al. (2006) expounded that a qualitative researcher is justified to stop further data collection when they reasonably judge that they have attained the point of saturation as explained above.

Table 2: Sample size table

Types of respondents	Sample size	Technique	Data collection method
Mentors of students	10	Purposive	In-depth interviews

Students as mentees	50	Purposive	Focus group discussion
Experts in Social Media Communication	2	Purposive	In-depth interviews
Total	62		

3.5.2 Sampling techniques

Sampling techniques are key in identifying and interacting with the correct prospective study participants but also ensuring that the correct sample size and type is identified and interviewed.

Purposive sampling

The researcher adopted and applied purposive sampling method to identify the potential study respondents. According to Etikan, et al (2016), in purposive sampling the researcher places reliance on their judgment particularly when selecting potential samples of the population that can participate in the research study. The justification for the choice of this sampling method is that since the sample size was few and are well known, it will be easier to identify the ones whom the researcher believed had the right information for study. This applied to both the mentors and mentees at BSU.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher received clearance from Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (UCUREC) and Bishop Stuart University (BSU) administration to go ahead and collect data. Questionnaires were used to collect data on the use of WhatsApp communication in mentorship programmes in BSU; Focus Group Discussions were used to examine the challenges associated with using WhatsApp communication in mentorship at BSU, and the interview guide was used to collect data on possible solutions to the identified challenges.

Data was collected on the students' involvement in mentorship programmes, ways in which they had been mentored, how they had benefitted from the programmes and what challenges they had encountered. The data collected was entirely qualitative.

Qualitative data was also collected from mentors using Interview Guides majorly on their experience on the use of WhatsApp to mentor university students.

3.7 Data collection tools and method

The researcher acknowledged the fact that research data collection instruments forms one of the central elements of the entire research process, as such in this study, an interview guide for the Focus Group Discussions, and another interview guide for the in-depth interview as data collection tools.

3.7.1 In-depth interviews

This is a research data collection method which involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on particular ideas, program or situation. According to Kendall (2008), in-depth interview involves a conversation cautiously planned with a purpose to achieve a desirable outcome between the researcher and the interviewee.

The researcher developed and used an interview guide which contained a list of open-ended and closed-ended questions that captured the desired thematic areas from which data was collected. The various thematic areas identified above were derived from the specific study objectives and research questions.

3.7.2 Focused group discussions

As one of the most viable methods in qualitative data collection, the researcher employed a focus group discussion method to collect data in this study. This data collection method was used to collect data from student mentees at BSU. The justification for choosing this method is that it allows participants to contribute jointly in the discussion as more diverse perspectives on the selected topic can be got compared to just when the researcher interviews a single respondent. The researcher used a Focus Group Discussion Guide to facilitate the focus group discussion arrangements. The researcher divided students into five focus groups made of 10 (ten) students who held guided discussions with the researcher. The fifty mentees were randomly selected from a cross section of academic programmes that carry out mentorship initiatives. The 50 were a representation of the purposely selected

population who are slightly half of the mentored students. The researcher used class lists to choose mentees who had attended over 80% of the mentorship programmes.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

In a research project, it is important that the aspect of validity and reliability is seriously taken into consideration in order to produce and authentic study findings.

3.8.1 Validity

In research undertaking, validity is the extent to which a concept, conclusion or measurement is well-founded and likely corresponds accurately to the real world (Eisend & Kuss, 2019). In the ordinary sense, validity refers to how accurately and exactly a given method measures what it is intended to measure. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), content validity is the accuracy and meaningfulness of inferences, which are based on research results. In this study, the researcher carefully identified attributes that precisely measure the key variables in this proposed study; secondly, face validity was ensured by confirming that the proposed study methods are reasonably chosen with logical justification provided based on how they were previously used in similar study undertaking.

3.8.1 Reliability

The concept of reliability measures how consistent data collection instrument is able to steadily measure what it is designed to measure. Revelle and Condon (2019) stated that reliability in research is concerned with consistency, dependability or stability of data collection instrument to collect data. In order to ensure reliability in this study, the researcher carried out a pilot study in which data was collected and responses evaluated to ensure that the questions being asked in the in-depth interview guide and questionnaire solicit for the anticipated data.

3.9 Data analysis

The researcher used thematic data analysis technique in this study. Kiger and Varpio (2020) indicate that thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis within qualitative research. Thematic analysis identifies, analyzes and interprets patterns of meaning within qualitative data. In respect to the above, the researcher

adopted thematic analysis technique to develop different themes that emerged from the data that was collected and analyze them to fulfill the goal of the study and its objectives. The data analysis using this model was performed with the aid of Nvivo software for qualitative data analysis.

3.10 Ethical procedure and consideration

The researcher considered all ethical issues very seriously and endeavored to follow all the known ethical principles while conducting this research. Below are some of the procedures and process the researcher followed;

First and foremost, the researcher endeavored to work very closely with the appointed university supervisor to this study and produced a research protocol. The research protocol was thereafter submitted to Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (UCUREC) for methodological and ethical clearance.

After the UCUREC clearance, the researcher afterwardeed the clearance letter from UCUREC to Uganda Christian University Post graduate studies and obtained an introductory letter to introduce her to the study site at BSU.

The researcher used the post graduate introductory letter above to visit the study site at BSU for administrative clearance.

The researcher also ensured that all the potential study participants undergo the processes of informed consent by also signing the consent forms before any interview started.

Finally, the researcher honored all copyright and intellectual property by citing authors and proving detailed references for all works and materials used to inform this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter explored the implementation of digital communication in mentorship with a focus on the effectiveness of using WhatsApp communication to achieve a successful mentorship experience for both the mentor and the mentee in BSU, challenges and opportunities to help understand the shift from traditional to digital communication. The study sought to answer the three research questions derived from specific objectives; RQ1: In what ways is WhatsApp communication used in mentorship programmes at BSU? RQ2: What are the challenges encountered when using WhatsApp as a communication tool in mentorship in BSU? RQ3: How can these challenges be solved in order to have effective communication in mentorship in BSU? Retrospective of the research questions, necessary data was collected from in-depth interviews and Focused Group Discussions on the implementation of digital communication in mentorship programmes, emphasizing the use of WhatsApp communication. Therefore, this chapter highlights the results and discussions of the study findings.

4.1 Ways through which WhatsApp communication is used in mentorship programmes in BSU

One of the research objectives of the study was to examine the different ways through which WhatsApp communication is used in mentorship programmes in BSU. To substantiate this, the following were found out;

4.1.1 Useful in information sharing

Both mentors and mentees indicated that WhatsApp provided a platform for sharing challenges, opinions, technical and questions among mentees in BSU. The mobile phone application allows increased interaction among mentees, and with their individual mentors to address routine challenges and questions they regularly encounter. In this context, one of the interviewees expressed that digitalizing

communication in mentorship is plummeting and increasing, and there is a migration of student participation to digital platforms, WhatsApp mostly. M8 stated that;

“WhatsApp platform provided me opportunity to ask questions or share a scenario that I encountered in between the face-to-face mentoring visits of my mentor” (Key informant Interview, Mentee 8, November 11 2023).

In a focused group discussion of mentors, M6 pointed out that;

“Digital communication makes work easier, and the mentorship of students becomes easy. He added that digital communication fosters quick and faster learning. The method caters for the needs of students. Secondly, the students went digital, so we had to step up.” (FGD 2, Mentor 6, November 15 2023).

These findings agree with Ellefsen (2015, p.160) who explained that, platforms like WhatsApp are considered by students as main digital media choice and therefore they spend a great part of their time using them on a normal day. From this study finding, it is imperative to state that Digital communication platforms have become an integral part of mentoring routine, the daily life of mentees, offering a wide range of learning opportunities, communication, collaboration and information sharing.

4.1.2 Acts a reminder

Mentees added that discussions on the WhatsApp forum acted were a reminder of what they had learned and an opportunity for getting further clarification of any matter that would arise as related to routine digital communication and media. M21 revealed that;

“My mentor shared a lot of information during the mentoring visit, and at times, I forgot some of those. However, discussions in the WhatsApp group worked as a reminder of information my mentor provided” (Key informant Interview, Mentee 21, November 11 2023).

Similar preposition was reached by M9 by stating that; “Students most often use digital platforms like WhatsApp for recorded tutorials which

provide opportunities for learning tutorials and self-expression and creativity for mentees” (Key informant Interview, Mentee 9, November 22 2023).

4.1.3 Increased interaction and motivation

Both mentors and mentees agreed that WhatsApp gave them an opportunity to share challenges, technical questions and opinions with each other. The platform was credited for allowing increased interaction among mentees, and with their mentors to on address challenges and questions which they encounter as they interact. Respondent M13 from Focus Group 1 stated that;

“The WhatsApp platform gave me an opportunity to share scenarios and ask questions that arouse even in between the face-to-face mentoring sessions with my mentor” (FGD 1, Mentee 13, November 16 2023).

Respondent M18 from Focus Group 1 also added that;

“The discussions we held on WhatsApp improved my self-confidence and morale. I got to learn that I was not the only one encountering challenges in using digital communication services” (FGD 1, Mentee 18, November 16 2023).

Mentees also noted that because they could send and receive text messages; share files, which can be textual, audio visual, moving pictures, links among others; make video or just audio calls, among others, the application was quite interactive and therefore one could easily get creative when sharing project results with a mentor. They also noted that the fact that feedback to their work would be easily received immediately sometimes through the non-verbal signals, they found the digital experience rewarding.

4.1.4 Flexibility

Another golden opportunity that comes with digital mentorship, and probably one of the biggest reasons behind the implementation of digital mentorship, is flexibility. WhatsApp platform has enabled mentees to join the different programmes without requiring mentees to make journeys in order to join. Digital mentorship has reduced,

and in some cases, eliminated travel times to meetings; one can even flexibly collaborate through varieties of tasks and time schedules. The time schedules can be a challenge throughout mentorship, however it becomes an advantage because it would be difficult, especially, for mentors to engage with mentees during working hours, even when mentees may wish to meet during the daytime. On this point, Respondent M33 emphasized that;

“It is usually difficult for mentors to move from their work and daily activities, and drive to a different location just to meet with a team of mentees and get involved in their activities. Mentors find the physical movement inconveniencing; the opportunity of replacing this with an online interaction was viewed as a positive attribute. (Key informant Interview, Mentor 33, November 22 2023).

Respondent M34 further spelt out that;

“I really like it so much. I actually enjoy it; digital mentorship made the whole experience much easier from a time perspective. Face to face mentorship needed time, we would have to look for time first of all just to move to a different physical location, and even more time to be engaged in the activities. Making such a journey during the working hours would be very difficult and fuel consuming. Doing it online is therefore not bad at all.” (Key informant Interview, Mentor 34, November 22 2023)

4.3 Challenges associated with using WhatsApp communication in mentorship

Research objective 2 of the study was to explore challenges associated with using WhatsApp communication in mentorship at BSU. Findings of the study revealed the following landmark obstacles;

4.3.1 Limited access to digital tools

Relocating to a digital setting comes as a challenge, because mentees and mentors do not have similar access to the required digital infrastructure. Many students got access to digital tools while in school, a privilege which has not been available in the post covid-19 era. Mentees may find it very impossible to access digital tools used by

mentors, mainly because there is an infrastructure that may need payments or licenses. In digital mentorship digital infrastructure is key for smooth information technologies and operations, like regular evaluation. Therefore tools like broadband, applications among others become a necessity. Response was obtained on this from Respondent M32 that;

“A supportive digital tool is very important; it will not disturb the mentor. Mentors are happy to effortlessly evaluate their mentees and explain the key concepts when the connection is smooth. I like the programme but it is important for both mentors and mentees to have the right tools, for example I prefer using teams to correspond with mentees. However my mentees do not have teams as because one has to pay for it. We are often forced to compromise and use options that are not very good and this becomes an obstacle to excellent results.” (Key informant interview, Digital Expert 32, November 16 2023)

4.3.2 Inefficient digital tools

Mentorship becomes a challenge when the available digital infrastructure cannot perform specific tasks to a required standard. In such circumstances mentors end up compromising and adjusting to using tools which mentees can afford or access; this compromise may not be helpful since the mentorship process may need specific tools of communication. When standards are compromised, the two big risks will be getting results which are lower than desired and time inefficiency. Not surprisingly, mentors would find themselves in a place where they would have to use a variety of tools for different tasks; unfortunately all these tools have not been integrated in one platform, yet. There are mentors who held regular video calls with their mentees and during these meetings mentees would be helped with programming, when mentees had questions in between video meetings they would be encouraged to use diverse chat applications or emails. This wasn't a very efficient way of managing engaging conversations and questions. When they needed to share files, they mostly used e-mails or other additional documentation tools like Google drive, in addition to

WhatsApp which they preferred only when documents were not so big. Respondent M23 from Focus Group 2 said that;

“There were moments when we needed to support our young people with a lot of coding, we could work around this challenge by sitting and emailing each other. This back and forth email interaction became inefficient because they would send questions and we come up with a response. In such a case I would have surely preferred to use a chat function or holding a physical meeting right away.” (FGD 2, Mentor 23, November 26 2023).

Another Respondent M25 added that;

“The opportunity to share screens allows them to show mentors any issues that need attention, this is great because we can work on solutions. The main issue though is to build efficiency. In physical settings, the mentees are able to approach us quickly, the virtual mode however can be stalling because of different dynamics like looking for network and switching screens” (Key informant interview, Digital expert25, November 23 2023).

4.3.3 Lack of knowledge of using digital communication

During the progression to digital communication, there was a challenge to both mentors and mentees who were not knowledgeable experienced users of digital tools like WhatsApp. Mentors intimated that it was more difficult to collaborate because they would be required to work together on a screen, they had to adapt to using new digital collaboration tools. A mentor also shared that mentees had to learn how to communicate with each other even when they could not physically see each other, this experience exposed mentees to new learning opportunities. Respondent M42 from Focus Group 3 said that;

“Indeed many mentees needed help and advice on how to use digital applications like WhatsApp Web, we had to come up with material which could aid their evolution to the virtual setting. This transition

necessitated for training, even with the volunteers and it yielded good results.” (FGD 3, Mentor 42, November 30 2023).

4.3.4 Access to internet connection

An outstanding challenge which both mentors and mentees pointed out was access to internet connection by the mentees, especially. Most of the mentees had access to internet connection while at school but when the program transitioned to the digital sphere, they couldn't join the program from their homes because of limited or no access to internet. Whereas other problems mentioned have affected the results or efficiency of the mentorship programme, lack or poor internet access was the challenge that barred mentees from joining the program. Respondent M38 from Focus Group 2 had to say that;

“A number of technical issues continued to crop up. Sometimes we would experience power blackouts, something we call it load shedding; this would happen 3-4 times a day when electricity would be routinely shut down. Mentees would naturally not be able to battle with that. As if that was not enough poor internet connectivity would also hinder their ability to log-in and be part of the mentoring programs” (FGD 2, Mentor 38, November 23 2023).

4.3.6 Building a sense of community and accountability

Mentors mentioned the challenge of setting up a sustainable online learning community to give mentors and mentees opportunities to ‘connect, engage, grow skills, and develop their knowledge over time’ (Georgarakou, 2023). Mentors who had previously practiced face-to-face mentorship compared the two experiences and noted the big difference; the virtual experience was qualified as faceless, distant, and lacking communal accountability. A mentor even suggested that in order to create a better mentor-mentee relationships, both parties need to start conversations with an ice breaker in order to encourage free interaction. Respondent M8 from Focus Group 1 coincided that;

“I have mentored many in the past and I confirm that one can build a relationship better and easier when you sit down with someone, in the

same physical space and interact. With working digitally however, one would need at least two hours to be at the same level with mentees and to make them feel comfortable; that warmth was missing and we had to make up for it with extra conversation. Anyway, it all worked out well in the end.” (FGD 1, Mentor 8, November 16 2023).

Respondent M7 in an in-depth interview added that;

“Moments of small talk are what it took for us to get to know each other, much as it is a lot easier in a physical environment. I feel that now it’s a concern that the team we have now does not want to see us once a week but they want to see us every other week. So we will probably not get such good contact there. They may not need more it may go well there anyway but I think it would have been easier if you met, it would have gone faster” (Key informant interview, Mentor 7, November 16 2023).

Respondent M6 in an in-depth interview added that;

“For me, digital mentorship lacked. It did not offer opportunities for building a relation that is needed between a mentor and a mentee. Yes, we tried, as we were required but it was not as effective as it is in physical mentorship.” (Key informant interview, Mentor 7, November 16 2023).

4.3.7 Quantifying Learning Outcomes

Mentors pointed out the challenge of quantifying learning outcomes and ascertaining that degree of achievement. The main gap they said comes when the mentor has to heavily depend on mentees communication to see the success of the project at hand. Measuring outcomes of mentoring programs is important in any organization. A program, like mentorship, should be regularly assessed to align programme goals with the institutions’ brand and students’ expectations and needs. However, the challenge is digital mentorship processes and programs are expensive, both in terms of the time it takes to accomplish the set goals and the direct monetary cost of engaging with the

infrastructure. The challenge for mentees is that they may need to learn new things when using digital communication which is sometimes digressive. Even in the face of challenges however, the opportunity for mentees comes because of the need to work more on troubleshooting and find solutions to problems by themselves, and the demand to report/account in a new way. Mentees might learn different things depending on their environment. Respondent M1 in an in-depth interview announced that;

“In digital communication, mentees always have to, troubleshoot and solve possible challenges by themselves. Working on solutions is good because it helps our young mentees think more.” (Key informant interview, Mentee 1, November 16 2023).

4.3.8 Mentees and mentors’ motivation Fatigue and demotivation

According to mentors, both mentees’ and mentors’ enthusiasm gets negatively influenced by digital communication. Both parties experienced screen fatigue or lack of motivation when they sat in front of a digital tool all day. Digital communication also, sometimes, resembles working or studying from home which can be demotivating. Mentors mentioned that failure to use motivational tools in digital mentorship was affecting students' motivation and mentors’ ability to motivate them. However, mentors also mentioned that they didn't feel like they had to motivate mentees and that mentees had self-motivation to perform the tasks since this was a voluntary program. Respondent M16 from Focus Group 1 corresponded that;

“Motivating a mentee online was difficult. Sometimes students would submit incomplete tasks, especially girls who I noticed were struggling to get through the programme. We had consistent meeting times, but mentees would sometimes miss because of other tasks or would simply forget.” FGD 1, Mentor 16, November 16 2023).

Respondent M14 from Focus Group 1 also expressed that;

“Females would fail to make it for sessions and this challenge would make it difficult to achieve good results. Most of the people who missed out on attending sessions blamed it on poor connectivity and finances

needed to purchase bandwidth. Less bandwidth translated into the inability to turn on videos during WhatsApp calls.”

4.4 Possible solutions for effective Digital mentorship at BSU

Research Objective 3 sought to suggest possible solutions for effective Digital mentorship at BSU. As a result, the following were disclosed;

4.4.1 Integration of preferred digital platforms into academic work

This involves utilizing digital communication platforms for research and information gathering. Respondent 5 from Focus Group 1 said that;

“The digital media platforms have increased access to information. Digital media platforms provide mentees with easy access to a wealth of information both Academic resources and educational content”. This accessibility can enhance students' learning experiences by providing them with diverse perspectives, up-to-date information, and a broader understanding of their subjects. When used effectively, these platforms can support research, deepen knowledge, and improve academic performance for the students.” (FGD 1, Mentee 5, 5 November 2023).

4.4.2 Diversify digital learning platforms in mentorship programs

Online databases, academic search engines, and digital libraries are commonly used to find scholarly articles, research work, and eBooks. Students also employ digital media platforms for note-taking and organization. Tools like Google drive allow them to create and manage digital notes, categorize information, and stay organized. Students also requested the University to support them in using their most preferred platforms. To substantiate this, Respondent 7 from Focus Group 1 from the Faculty of Agriculture said that;

“Universities can foster a supportive online learning environment, they can create online learning communities or discussion forums within the digital media platforms where students can interact, collaborate and seek help from peers and instructions.” (FGD 1, Participant 7, 5 June 2023)

4.4.3 Strike a balance between online and offline learning

Respondents emphasized the need for students to balance online and offline learning, allocating time for offline reading and face-to-face interactions. Respondents also highlighted the importance of setting clear goals and objectives and aligning the use of digital media platforms with academic goals to stay focused and make the most of available resources. Respondent D during the Focus group discussion seven stated that;

“I set goals and deadlines by dividing tasks among my team members to emphasize their importance of active engagement, timely feedback, and open communication to ensure successful collaboration” (FGD 3, Participant 4, 6 June 2023).

4.4.4 Leverage Technology for Mentorship

Respondents stressed the need to increasingly turn to digital interventions for mentorship. Collaboration platforms, video conferencing tools and project management software should become essential in the facilitation of remote mentorship processes. In this case Respondent 11 articulated that;

“Digital tools like Zoom or Google Meet bridge geographical distances and provide opportunities for real-time interactions. Loom, and other asynchronous tools, helps mentees and mentors use pre-recorded videos and audio files to see and hear from each other when they are not able to meet in real-time. Such tools make it easier for mentors to collaborate on tasks, communicate, and share resources. The tools also create a sense of presence, even when both parties are geographically apart from each other.”

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the discussions of the key findings on assessing the effectiveness of using WhatsApp communication to achieve a successful mentorship experience for both the mentors and the mentees in BSU, drawing from the qualitative study and it applied the Theory of Communication Affordances as the primary theory.

5.2 Discussion of findings

5.2.1 RQ1: What are the different ways WhatsApp communication is used in mentorship programmes at BSU?

Both mentors and mentees affirmed that through WhatsApp they got a platform for sharing technical questions, opinions and systemic challenges in BSU mentorship programs. The platform was used for collaboration among mentees, and with their respective mentors to address routine program-related questions. Findings of this research are in agreement with Barhoumi, (2015) who viewed that WhatsApp is essential to create and share knowledge. The same author articulates that WhatsApp is used for chatting and messaging, tabling comments, as well sharing educational information. In addition, by posting their work in the group, students can use WhatsApp to generate class news and information; mentors and mentees can therefore hold meaningful interactions with each other. This implies that WhatsApp increases mentee performance by facilitating online collaboration and communication.

Findings also revealed that WhatsApp platform was used to improve mentors' engagement with peers; it also promoted learning and the discussions through the ability to share experiences and challenges. The finding was inconsistent with some studies on WhatsApp networking; Henson et al. (2011) for example reported that social media users who were older used social media with difficulty and that they found it to be limiting in most programs. According to this study, however, both

mentees and mentors readily participated in the WhatsApp group interactions in spite of their age and Programme.

Mentors and Mentees also acknowledged that mentorship through WhatsApp increased a sense of connection and immediacy since they would have an opportunity to see each other's online status and even get to know the last time a person would have been online. The affordances of visibility and accessibility reportedly fostered a more dynamic and responsive mentorship relationship. For example, the visibility of an online status, according to mentees, creates expectation of an undelayed response which in turn becomes valuable for urgent matters although it could also lead to increased pressure on mentors or mentees to be constantly available (Farman, 2018).

According to the findings therefore, the visibility and accessibility affordances of WhatsApp promote more regular sharing of updates, ideas and feedback. The frequent and dynamic communication causes stronger relationships because it builds sense of connection and convenience as opposed to a more formal traditional face-to-face mentorship style. This connection increases engagement is unaffected by the differences in time zones and geographical location.

5.2.2 RQ2: What are the challenges encountered when using WhatsApp as a communication tool in mentorship in BSU?

Study results indicated that the main problem with digital mentorship through WhatsApp communication was the dependency on access to ICT for communication. Results from the study reveal that 43% of mentors cited mentees' poor or no internet connection, 41% shared about mentees' limited access to the recommended digital tools, while 27% mentioned mentees' lack of computer access. Since some mentees do not have access to computers and internet connection, or are only able to access these two when they are in school, they fail to participate in digital programmes when they are not physically in school. This challenge explains why 54% of the mentors shared that some mentees could not show up for scheduled meetings. This gap explains the digital divide during mentorship which affects students in different ways. This finding was consistent with Deursen & van Dijk, (2019) who expounded that

both mentors and mentees who have access to a computer, would be affected if gadgets did not have ingredients like access to the right tools like paid communication platforms (for example) and web-cameras.

Furthermore, using WhatsApp video calls for communication necessitates a greater upload speed which some mentees may not have the luxury of accessing; in turn mentors experience the negative effects of mentees engagement and motivation. This finding is in agreement with Sari & Nayir, (2020) who clarified that when comparing challenges faced in the physical environment to those in the digital spaces, results showed that mentees experienced more communication-related challenges in the digital environment than in the physical; the same challenges affected a bigger number of mentors. A reason for the mentioned experienced challenges could be that they are not well prepared online settings and more accustomed to face-to-face mentorship (Marshall et al., 2020).

Previous studies of Niemi & Kousa, (2020), Sari & Nayir, (2020) and Marshall et al., (2020), showed that mentors' perception of the digital mentorship situation was not as good in the physical environment; they voiced snags that came with both understanding that students needed help and also understanding students' knowledge level. Additionally, Vygotskij (2022) argues that it is crucial to comprehend the students' current mastery level to appreciate what students need and base on that to develop their knowledge further. Mentors have the responsibility of appreciating the proximal development zone of mentees so that they inspire them to learn more about technology which both opinions aligned with the study findings.

5.2.3 RQ3: What are the strategies to enhance effective WhatsApp communication in mentorship in BSU?

From findings of this study, respondents detailed the importance of setting clear objectives and aligning them to the use of their preferred digital media platforms (like WhatsApp). WhatsApp was credited for having a number of affordances some of which include 'temporality, interactivity, multimediality, and portability', which is in agreement with findings by Yeshua-Katz, et.al (2021). Affordances have helped HEIs

to utilise the virtual technology to provide mentorship, mentees on the other hand maybe swayed by the temptation of using the same technology to facilitate hobbies and other digressive behavior. Therefore much as WhatsApp provides a rich media environment, it is the mentee's responsibility to be intentional and disciplined while utilising the advancing space of technology. Both mentors and mentees need to be sensitised about the varieties of affordances and how they can be utilised to give a rich mentorship experience.

Indeed, majority of the respondents conceded that mentees through using their preferred digital media platforms (WhatsApp), should set study goals and deadlines by dividing tasks among team members to emphasize the importance of active engagement, timely feedback, and open communication to ensure successful collaboration. This is because digital media platforms have a lot of distractions that may divert the attention of students. By harnessing the power of respondents preferred digital media platforms from the study findings, students can enhance their academic experiences, access valuable learning resources, collaborate with their lecturers and peers and streamline their learning outcomes. It is therefore essential for students to strike a balance between productive use of their preferred digital media platforms and avoid distractions to ensure they derive maximum benefits from these resources.

Furthermore, for effective use of the respondents' digital media platforms, mentees highlighted that their peers should be organized and should share all their study materials using cloud storage platforms like Google Drive to keep all academic files, notes, and study resources organized. These platforms allow easy sharing and collaboration with classmates for group projects and study sessions.

Communication in teaching, learning and mentorship plays an important role. Through communication course instructors connect to their learners and vice versa. The communication maybe synchronous or asynchronous, research findings in here encouraged that students should embrace their Learning Management Systems (LMS) or WhatsApp such that instructors/lecturers can continue to work with them and learners can reach out to Instructors as well as their peers.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE STUDY

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study on assessing the Digital communication in mentorship specifically use of WhatsApp to achieve a successful mentorship experience for both the mentor and the mentee in BSU.

5.1 Conclusion

Mentorship, in this digital age, is a representation of an evolution worth noting, from the traditional practice. Technology has changed ways in which we interact, interconnect and communicate with one another. It has introduced more potentialities for mentorship programmes; mentors and mentees are able to interact and connect in ways that were once impossible. Platforms like WhatsApp take advantage of technology to better mentor-mentee interactions and relationships; it provides mentees and mentors with tools which they need to connect, communicate, and track progress. The world has become more and more connected mentorship is also changing, because of technology, thus paving way for exciting trends in mentorship.

Nevertheless, making good use of technology for successful mentorship programmes is a straight path into unequalled opportunities of personal and professional growth. The flexibility, global reach, and access to specialized experts which technology provides, mentees can connect with mentors and work collaboratively to attain set goals. Success in digital mentorship however, warrants vigilant planning, adaptability, and clear communication. It is very important to set the right objectives, to get the right mentor, and then leverage technology to promote meaningful interactions. It is also crucial to foresee of possible challenges as the landscape of using digital mentorship is navigated vigilantly. Grounding on the findings of this study, it's prudent to suggest that digital communication in mentorship through WhatsApp communication can be an effective method for improving frontline mentors at minimal cost. However, in order to generate sufficient proof, a cost-benefit study can be useful in comparing peer mentorship (along with WhatsApp networking), with formal classroom training at BSU.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings recommendations were advanced to foster a balanced and responsible approach to digital communication and use of WhatsApp in mentoring students, promoting their well-being, educational growth, and positive engagement in the digital world in BSU. The recommendations were categorized to; Students, Policy Makers in higher Institutions of learning, College/Department Leader, and Scholars.

Policy makers

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers in higher institutions of learning can create an environment that maximizes the benefits of digital communication usage while addressing potential challenges and fostering responsible, productive, and meaningful engagement with technology for both mentees and mentors.

- Policymakers in BSU making good use of technology for successful mentorship programmes is a straight path into unequalled opportunities of personal and professional growth. With the flexibility, global reach, and access to specialized experts which technology provides, mentees can connect with mentors and work collaboratively to attain set goals. Success in digital mentorship however, warrants vigilant planning, adaptability, and clear communication. It is very important to set the right objectives, to get the right mentor, and then leverage technology to promote meaningful interactions. for mentees, colleges/departments, and mentors regarding responsible and ethical digital communication use. These guidelines should address academic integrity, privacy, data security, and online behavior.
- Policy makers should also be proactive and develop appropriate policies that foster sustainable online learning. In this case, when Covid 19 pandemic broke out, most sector of economy were affected in Uganda and globally, hence, the education sector resorted to online teaching/learning. Therefore, I recommend policy makers to develop policies that will sustain e-learning, and social media learning.

- Higher Education Institutions should be deliberate about incorporating digital literacy training, workshops and seminars into the curriculum to equip mentees with the skills needed to navigate digital communication effectively, evaluate information critically, and use digital communication tools for academic and professional purposes to avoid inappropriate use of online resources by students.
- I also recommend that policy makers in Higher Education institutions should to develop clear guidelines for digital communication platforms to ensure the protection of students' data and privacy. Policy makers can work with relevant stakeholders to establish standards for data collection, storage, and sharing.
- Policymakers should involve mentees in the policy-making process, seek their input and feedback on digital communication use in higher education. Their perspectives and experiences can offer valuable insights for crafting effective policies.
- The effectiveness of implemented policies should be regularly assessed and adapted based on the changing digital communication trends, mentees needs, and emerging research findings.
- Policy makers in universities should ensure that mentees have access to resources and support systems which address challenges associated with digital communication use. This could include counseling services, workshops on responsible online behavior, and resources for managing screen time.
- HEIs should develop strategies that address the potential impact of excessive digital communication use on the mental health and well-being of mentees. Collaboration with mental health professionals to raise awareness about the potential risks and provide resources for seeking help.

College/Department heads have a vital role to ensure appropriate support for mentees.

- I recommend that managers and administrators establish digital communication hubs where guidance and technical support should be availed to mentees.
- Additionally, online training and workshops could be provided for mentees to ensure appropriate usage of digital communication platforms.
- It is also recommendable to managers and leaders to develop monitoring track systems to keep surveillance for proper digital communication usage via online class observation. They should put in place and publish an ethical code for college/department members and students to guide the use of WhatsApp for formal academic interactions.

Students

- I recommend mentees to create a Productive Study Environment through designating a distraction-free study space for academic tasks to minimize interruptions from digital communication during study sessions to enhance focus and productivity.
- As students engage with their preferred digital communication platforms, they should develop critical thinking skills to evaluate the credibility and accuracy of information encountered on WhatsApp platform and be cautious of misinformation, and fact-check information before accepting it as true.
- Mentees who use WhatsApp platform to gratify their communication needs, should protect their Privacy; they should also take caution when it comes to sharing personal information online. They need to regularly review privacy settings on WhatsApp to control who can access their content and ensure online safety.
- Mentees should be mindful of their digital well-being. They should take regular breaks from digital media, engage in offline activities, and avoid excessive screen time to reduce potential negative effects on mental and physical health. Screen time should be managed. Always set boundaries on the time one can spend on WhatsApp to ensure a healthy balance between online and offline activities and

use built-in screen time tracking features or third-party apps to monitor and manage usage.

- **Diversify Content Consumption:** Mentees should follow a variety of sources and perspectives to gain a well-rounded view of topics and engage with content that enhances their knowledge, skills, and interests.

Scholars

- As technology continues to evolve, new digital communication features and content are developing. Therefore, I recommend to scholars that more research is needed regarding the potential use of WhatsApp for communication, mentorship, entertainment, socialization among other needs for the students' gratifications. However, I recommend new researches to address this paradigm shift in students' use of their preferred platforms for their communication needs.

5.3 Further Areas of Research

There are several implications for future research arising from the findings of this study. As discussed in chapter one of this study, not much has been done in relation to studies on the digital communication platforms that mentees use most and how they use them in Uganda. As the subject of digital communication usage is broad, the scope of the findings of this study might not be exhaustive; therefore, more research is needed to supplement the knowledge shared. I would like to recommend further research be conducted on the other digital communication platforms that students use most and how they use them during mentorship.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MENTEES

Programmes of study.....

Year of study.....

1. Are you on a mentorship programme? Please explain
2. For how long have you been on the mentorship programme?
3. Is the mentorship communication face to face or online?
4. Do you have access to WhatsApp communication? Please explain; is it a gadget you own?
5. Have you been mentored through WhatsApp communication?
6. How often does this communication happen through WhatsApp?
7. Does the WhatsApp communication happen during group mentorships or other media of communication? Describe your experience.
8. What challenges have you encountered when using WhatsApp communication in mentorship?
9. How have you managed to go on in spite the challenges?
10. What solutions do you recommend to the current problems?
11. Does WhatsApp communication help to network, in mentorship? Please explain
12. Has WhatsApp helped you in to store content? Please explain
13. Has WhatsApp helped in content sharing in mentorship? Please explain
14. How do you compare WhatsApp communication with other types of communication in mentorship?
15. Does WhatsApp communication in mentorship ably equip you skills? Please explain
16. How does WhatsApp communication in mentorship contributed to your spiritual growth as a mentee?
17. Name and describe the benefits of using WhatsApp communication in mentorship?

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MENTORS

Introduction - of self and the research.....

Introduction of the mentor.....

1. For how long have you mentored students at BSU?
2. How many students have you mentored so far?
3. Are you familiar with WhatsApp communication?
4. How many students have you mentored so far, using WhatsApp communication?
5. In comparison with other methods of communication in mentorship, what is your opinion on WhatsApp as a communication tool in mentorship?
6. Do you ably use WhatsApp for content sharing with mentees?
7. Are you able to store mentorship material on WhatsApp? Please explain
8. Does WhatsApp aid in networking with mentees and other mentors?
9. Have you encountered any challenges when carrying out mentorship communication through WhatsApp? Explain please
10. How have you overcome these challenges?
11. What solutions would you propose?
12. How have you used WhatsApp to nurture your mentees spiritually?
13. Name and describe the benefits of using WhatsApp communication in mentorship?