



Exploring management's perception of WhatsApp as a communication tool in a South African sales company

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Mini-dissertation accepted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree *Master of Business
Administration* at the North-West University

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Graduation: June 2026

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the experiences of management teams using WhatsApp as the primary internal communication tool in a South African sales company. Although mobile instant messaging has become ubiquitous, there is limited research on how managers perceive its use for both formal and informal workplace communication, especially within contexts marked by cultural diversity and varying departmental needs. To address this gap, the research questions aim to establish management teams' perception of the facilitators, barriers, strengths and weaknesses of WhatsApp use for internal communication. Secondary questions explore departmental differences in usage, the effects on managers' motivation and satisfaction, key concerns, and ways to optimise WhatsApp-based communication strategies.

In terms of methodology, the study used an interpretivist paradigm and therefore utilised a qualitative descriptive approach to collect and analyse the study data. Using purposive sampling, eight managers from the operational, sales, finance and HR departments of four regional branch offices of a South African sales company participated in semi-structured interviews. Before the study commenced, ethics approval was obtained from the relevant ethics committee to ensure that ethical conduct was maintained throughout all phases of the study. The data recordings were transcribed verbatim. The study data was analysed using thematic analysis techniques based on the interview transcripts collected during the study. Reflexivity, member verification and peer debriefing were employed to establish trustworthiness and ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality. The Protection of Personal Information Act was also adhered to throughout the study.

Five themes and 15 subthemes were identified. The themes included (1) differences in departmental usage of WhatsApp as a communication tool, (2) WhatsApp's influence on communication efficiency, motivation, and team cohesion, (3) key concerns and challenges in WhatsApp-based communication, (4) strategies and recommendations for improving WhatsApp communication in the workplace and (5) overall perceptions of WhatsApp usage as a communication tool in organisations. The findings revealed both significant benefits and notable challenges. WhatsApp's ease of use, rich media capabilities and group-chat functions promote rapid coordination, flatten hierarchies and foster team cohesion. These advantages make the platform indispensable for sales managers who require real-time feedback and constant motivational messaging. Yet, excessive messaging creates information overload, reinforces an "always-on" culture, and blurs work–life boundaries. Managers report stress, distraction, misinterpretation of tone and concerns about data security and legal compliance when sensitive

information circulates through informal channels. Differences in departmental norms further shape how the tool is adopted and perceived.

The study concludes that WhatsApp can enhance managerial efficiency and engagement, but its downsides necessitate organisational safeguards. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made regarding WhatsApp usage in corporate settings: (1) include formal communication policies (specifying usage norms and after-hours boundaries), (2) digital etiquette and intercultural training, and (3) the adoption of complementary technologies with enhanced auditing and data-protection features. By illuminating managers' nuanced views of WhatsApp, this dissertation contributes to the literature on digital communication in organisational settings. It provides practical guidance on harnessing mobile messaging tools while safeguarding employee well-being and corporate confidentiality.

KEY TERMS

WhatsApp	WhatsApp is a popular mobile messaging application that enables communication and cooperation and has become a tool for teaching and learning in different situations (Mefolere, 2016:2).
Employee motivation	Employee motivation is the psychological drive that compels individuals to engage in goal-oriented thoughts and behaviours within the workplace. This force arises from a blend of internal psychological elements and external contextual influences, which determine the course, strength, and endurance of an individual's work-related behaviours (Shkoler & Kimura, 2020:2).
Business communication	Business communication refers to exchanging information, ideas, and messages among individuals inside and outside an organisation to accomplish business objectives. Business communication can be verbal, written, or non-verbal and can occur within an organisation or outside an organisation and it occurs by using formal and informal communication methods (Mishra <i>et al.</i> , 2021:1).
Internal communication tools	The internal communication tools are the software and tools that help organisations to improve their internal communications and collaborations. The internal communication tools include messaging applications, project management tools, an internal networking platform, video conferencing software and internal emails (Harris, 2023).
Management teams	The primary function of a management team is to manage all aspects of their organisation to meet its goals. Management teams typically consist of a variety of departmental-level managers who report to one another, and they are accountable for making strategic decisions, allocating organisational resources and ensuring operational efficiency (Chaudhary, 2023). A management team is the heart of any business - nobody gets oxygen if the heart struggles to pump blood through the office veins.
Communication Overload	Excessive information flow hinders productivity (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010:1061). This could easily lead to work-related frustration and an imbalanced work-life balance for employees, especially those in management teams.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I thank God Almighty for the opportunity to develop and nurture the talents He has blessed me with.

I am grateful to the NWU Business School for accepting me into this program and allowing me to fulfil my study goals. A huge thank you to my supervisor, Prof. Anna Pelser, who has been with me every step of the way.

A big thank you to Sasha Van Wyk and Nelrie Laing for their continued support and encouragement. I thank all the participants who gave their time and insight into this research. I thank my colleagues in my Alliance group; your supportive nature encouraged me daily.

Thank you to my parents, Prof. Herman Van Vuuren and Ronel Van Vuuren. You instilled in me a desire to learn and continually improve myself. I appreciate my sister for her constant admiration, for daily reinforcing my identity as the 'intelligent one,' and for inspiring me to embody that role.

To my best friends, Leandi and Yogi, thank you for your patience, supportive efforts and for the pride you always have in me. To JP and Tiaan, thank you for being my breakaway in tough times. To my foreign friends, Herman and Janke, thank you for your support from 13,000 kilometres away. Lastly, to my boyfriend, Andries, thank you for your love, patience and support. Your shoulder was never too heavy for me to cry on.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATLAS.ti	Qualitative data analysis software (used for coding/themes).
CEO	Chief Executive Officer (gatekeeper permission).
CRM	Client Relationship Manager
EU	European Union (referenced in relation to digital wellness/"right to disconnect" directives).
GANTT	Gantt chart (project timeline visual).
HR	Human Resources (dept. role and gatekeeper).
MIM	Mobile Instant Messaging (e.g., "MIM-related overloads").
NWU	North West University (Abbreviation)
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013.
SDG 8 / SDG 9	UN Sustainable Development Goals 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth) and 9 (Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure).
SMS	Short Message Service
SSO	Stressor–Strain–Outcome model (used in WhatsApp/overload literature cited).
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model

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CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

WhatsApp, with over two billion users, dominates internal communication in South African organisations, especially in sales groups. WhatsApp communication increased when remote work gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, but its unregulated use could lead to communication overload, unclear professional boundaries, and issues affecting employee well-being. An analysis of WhatsApp communication experiences of South African sales business management teams would therefore be insightful. The management perspective influences the corporate communication culture in terms of employee motivation, productivity and job satisfaction. This study aimed to investigate the extent to which different departments have utilised WhatsApp, the impact on managerial morale and motivation, the problems and risks associated with using WhatsApp, and how it may be leveraged to promote ethics and sustainable business practices. Problems related to over-communication outside working hours, cross-cultural and cross-language miscommunications and fatigue illustrate the need for regulating the usage of WhatsApp. WhatsApp is widely used in South Africa, but there is limited qualitative research regarding the use of the platform for business communication purposes. From a theoretical perspective, this study furthers knowledge of the Technology Adoption Model and Communication Models by introducing new dimensions such as multiculturalism and multilingualism into the research context. From a practical viewpoint, the study makes specific recommendations to management and policymakers regarding the effective utilisation of WhatsApp, reducing communication overload and the establishment of a balance between work and private life.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how managers perceive WhatsApp when they are utilising WhatsApp as the organisation's primary means of communication. Secondary objectives of the study involved the identification of differences among departments in terms of perceptions of WhatsApp; the degree to which workplace satisfaction and motivation are related to the use of WhatsApp; the identification of obstacles or challenges in communication via WhatsApp; and providing recommendations to improve WhatsApp-based communication within organisations. The primary research question assessed management's perception of WhatsApp by examining the factors that enable or hinder its use, as well as its advantages and disadvantages. The secondary questions evaluated the degree of adoption of WhatsApp by different departments, the relationships between the use of WhatsApp and employee motivation, and possible improvements to WhatsApp as an internal communication tool for organisations.

A descriptive qualitative research approach was used in combination with an interpretivist paradigm. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect data from eight selected management personnel, spread across the four branch offices of an organisation. Thematic analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti and inductive reasoning. The study followed all applicable ethical protocols to protect the rights of the participants. These protocols included gaining informed consent, protecting the privacy and anonymity of the participants, and complying with the regulations of POPIA. The study ensured the reliability of the findings by implementing reflection processes, peer debriefing sessions and member verification to eliminate any possible researcher biases and preconceptions.

The location of this study is a South African sales organisation with offices located in Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch, Kathu and Roodepoort. The management personnel (n = 25) were the population of interest for this study. Eight participants from the population were selected through a process of purposive sampling. This sample size is small enough to allow for saturated data while ensuring sufficient representation among both the departmental divisions and the geographic locations. The constraints of this study include a limited sample size, the constrained contextual breadth, and potential researcher bias.

The first chapter establishes the study's theme, theoretical background, research problem, research objectives, research questions, research methodology, possible limitations, and the significance of the research. Chapter 2 will review existing literature on organisational workplace communication and WhatsApp usage.

1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

With technological advancement in modern times, the world seems to be moving at the speed of light. Organisations need to adapt to these technological advancements, especially when it comes to communication technologies, at the same speed to keep up with expectations. Businesses have achieved this by utilising a range of mobile instant messaging apps that enable leaders, employees and customers to communicate instantly with one another. Mobile phone applications ("apps") provide employees and management with the opportunity to use company communications that include department-wide group projects, sharing data, reports, marketing materials and reminders for appointments. Meetings, emails, phone calls, and mobile texts are standard business communication tools to achieve these business communication needs. These methods are being replaced by mobile instant messaging (MIM). Messaging apps like WhatsApp have gradually superseded sending messages in most office interactions (Omar *et al.*, 2020:414).

Text messaging (also known as instant messaging) is a form of real-time internet-based text chat capability. With the proliferation of inexpensive or free messaging apps on smartphones and mobile devices, texting and social messaging apps have been regarded as affordable alternatives to SMS. Some messaging apps support group chats, sharing of images, video, audio messages, stickers, emojis and data, thereby providing a platform for people to share content beyond just words. A case in point is WhatsApp, a well-known instant messaging app that has evolved into the main means of communication for organisations today (WhatsApp, 2023). Instant messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, have also replaced traditional one-on-one conversations and phone calls as a primary means of communication and relationship building within organisations. As a natural consequence of WhatsApp's inherent features and capabilities, WhatsApp will likely influence employees in their interactions and the establishment of new work-related communication and social interaction norms.

In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic led to the creation of digital labour for many knowledge workers, making 2020 the largest experiment of remote working in history, where these digital communication tools enabled workers to accomplish tasks more easily, but may have had unforeseen consequences (Marsh *et al.*, 2022:2). Due to WhatsApp's immediate access, affordability and high degree of functionality, WhatsApp is currently the preferred instant messaging app for professionals with over two billion users globally (Dixon, 2024). Although WhatsApp is highly flexible and immediate in use, the casual nature of WhatsApp and the rapid uptake in usage create a blurring of lines between an individual's personal and professional life. This raises several issues with regard to productivity, well-being, and regulatory compliance of workers. For example, the Australian government has recently introduced the Fair Work Amendment Bill 2023, which provides employees with the ability to refuse work-related communications during their designated non-working hours (Anon, 2023).

This legislation reflects the broader international recognition that organisational digital communication practices require critical reassessment (Josserand & Boersma, 2024:705). Regulatory frameworks employed to govern workplace communication can be significant protective factors to prevent employee burnout and support both productivity and general workforce wellness. An example of this type of legislation includes the landmark French 'Right to Disconnect' law enacted in 2017, and the European Union's proposed new Digital Wellness Regulations (Izabella, 2023:88). Similar legislation is emerging across various nations as governments prioritise worker well-being. Analysing these international regulatory strategies could offer valuable insights for this study.

Existing research examining WhatsApp's role in organisational communication tends to emphasise measurable and quantitative metrics such as how often it is used, its impact on work

output, and overall user satisfaction levels (Wushe & Shenje, 2019:1). International research has shown that WhatsApp effectively supports task coordination in medical settings (Johnston *et al.*, 2015). In another study it was found that WhatsApp enhances learning interactions in education (Durgungoz & Durgungoz, 2022). WhatsApp communication in the workplace was also found to contribute to information overload and burnout (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010). These studies were all done in a non-South African setting and overlook the nuanced experiences of users working in culturally diverse settings like in South Africa. Additionally, there is a notable gap in understanding how organisational leaders perceive WhatsApp's function as both a formal and informal communication medium within corporate contexts.

The growing adoption of digital platforms - such as WhatsApp - in work settings supports global sustainability goals. It supports the promotion of quality jobs and economic growth (SDG 8) and advances innovation and infrastructure development (SDG 9). Strong internal communication systems create a culture of teamwork, boosting organisational performance and supporting worker well-being by reducing misunderstandings and enabling faster decision-making. This research builds on principles of responsible leadership by exploring how managers view WhatsApp as an internal communication solution. The findings will contribute to understanding how digital communication can be implemented ethically while supporting employee welfare and long-term organisational sustainability.

This study focused on understanding the perspectives of managers who rely on WhatsApp for essential workplace communication - such as setting objectives, encouraging teams, providing updates, distributing information, announcing events and meetings, and sending reminders. The goal is to uncover strategies for enhancing organisational communication effectiveness, specifically through WhatsApp. This study holds significance because leadership communication patterns establish the organisational communication culture. When leaders communicate effectively, the entire company will communicate effectively.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rise in smartphone usage has driven South African sales organisations to increasingly rely on WhatsApp for workplace communication. There is a concerning gap - most of these companies operate without established guidelines for WhatsApp usage in professional settings. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend dramatically, pushing WhatsApp into the spotlight as an essential business communication platform. While WhatsApp offers numerous advantages for connecting teams internally, it brings with it a host of communication challenges that organisations cannot ignore. Workers often find themselves overwhelmed by constant message notifications,

forcing them to switch off devices or adjust privacy controls to maintain focus and protect personal boundaries (Gupta & Upadhyay, 2019:473).

Organisations bear the responsibility of defining communication protocols for their workforce. It is therefore essential to develop comprehensive policies that address both internal team interactions and external stakeholder communications. The absence of WhatsApp-specific policies in most South African companies creates considerable vulnerabilities. As mobile technology and messaging applications continue to gain traction in professional environments, organisations must recognise their role in shaping both formal business exchanges and casual workplace conversations (Moreno *et al.*, 2017:646).

WhatsApp's increasing presence in the workplace is due to its ease of access and use, as well as its versatility to support a wide variety of communications methods for organisations (Harris, 2023). Organisations can also develop specific WhatsApp groups based on teams or functions of the teams. Managers and workers are part of multiple group chats, such as departmental chats, regional teams, and executive forum group chats. Group chat participants may receive hundreds of message notifications per day during regular business hours. These notifications can interrupt an employee's personal time. In addition, most social networks and apps pose serious concerns regarding data security and user privacy. The organisation must define boundaries for the use of WhatsApp so that users do not violate organisational policies. Employees may be exposed to an overwhelming amount of messaging while trying to complete their job duties over long periods of time, and may experience burnout and other retention issues (Harris, 2023).

The central problem addressed in this study is the apprehension between the efficiency and connectivity enabled by WhatsApp and the potential for communication overload, miscommunication and ethical lapses in a diverse South African sales organisation. This research will explore the views of managers towards the use of WhatsApp in formal and informal communications to develop ways to utilise it in a way that is consistent with the goals of the organisation and minimise risks.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

To address the research problem, the following aims and supportive objectives were identified.

1.4.1 Primary research objective

The primary aim of this study is to explore management teams' perceptions of using WhatsApp as the main tool for formal and informal communication in a South African sales company. By focusing on managers' experiences, the research seeks to illuminate how WhatsApp influences

motivation, satisfaction, decision-making and team cohesion. The study pursues four supporting objectives, as outlined below.

1.4.2 Secondary objectives

1. To evaluate the use of WhatsApp as the primary communication tool in sales company management departments: Determine departmental WhatsApp usage differences.
2. To determine how satisfied and motivated management teams are using WhatsApp for internal communication: Measure satisfaction and motivation using semi-structured interviews by assessing managers' views on WhatsApp's usability, work-life balance, and communication goals.
3. To identify limitations in South African sales businesses' WhatsApp internal communication strategy: Thematic analysis of interview data can identify and prioritise communication overload, cultural/language hurdles, and technical restrictions by narrative recurrence.
4. To develop and prioritise evidence-based WhatsApp usage optimisation proposals (e.g., policy frameworks, training modules, tool integrations) based on stakeholder feedback and EU 'Right to Disconnect' principles.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

To address the stated aim and objectives, the following main and secondary research questions were developed and will now be discussed.

1.5.1 Main research question

What are management teams' perceptions about the facilitators, barriers, strengths, and weaknesses of using WhatsApp as a communication tool for formal and informal communication in South African sales companies?

1.5.2 Secondary questions

- How do different management departments at a South African sales company use WhatsApp as their primary communication tool?
- What affects management teams' happiness and motivation while utilising WhatsApp as their primary internal communication tool?
- What are management teams' most significant concerns about WhatsApp-based internal communication techniques in South African sales companies?
- How can South African sales companies enhance WhatsApp-based internal communication strategies to align with global best practices and address local challenges,

while offering results-driven improvements in WhatsApp-based internal company communication?

1.6 METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The methodological approach implemented to guide the research process and ensure the credibility and relevance of the findings is discussed in the next section of this study. This includes paradigms and methodologies, research approach, research design, population and sampling methods, data collection and data analysis, and finally, ethical considerations.

1.6.1 Paradigm and methodologies

The research proposal positions its investigation of WhatsApp use in a South African sales organisation within a defined ontological and epistemological framework. It posits that the essence of WhatsApp as a communication platform is reflected in its influence on relationships and interactions within the organisation. Thus, the study employed an interpretivist paradigm to examine managers' actual experiences and subjective interpretations of utilising WhatsApp as their primary communication platform. Interpretivism prioritises comprehending social processes from the perspectives of participants, rendering it particularly appropriate for qualitative research that focuses on meanings and experiences rather than objective metrics (Bell *et al.*, 2021:45). The interpretive research paradigm will allow a detailed examination of the complex human experiences, social interactions and organizational communication processes that are relevant to understanding how WhatsApp impacts relationships in the workplace, decision making and employee engagement. Interpretivist research paradigms do not rely on the positivist approach of developing universal causal laws from quantifiable data, but instead focus on gaining insight into the individual's subjective experience (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:163). The interpretivist paradigm is the most suitable paradigm for examining the effects of WhatsApp on workplace relationships, decision-making and employee engagement.

1.6.2 Research approach

The proposal implemented a qualitative research assessment due to the exploratory element of the subject and the lack of comprehensive information regarding the implementation of WhatsApp by managers as a communication medium. The information provided in the literature deals with qualitative research, where literature is used to obtain insights from respondents instead of highlighting the questions to be asked. The study starts with limited research, but leaves room for ideas to emerge inductively. Creswell and Creswell (2022) state that qualitative methods such as

grounded theory, case study and phenomenology seldom use literature for the contextualisation of the research but rather depend on the responses from participants in terms of gaining insights.

Their study emphasised the necessity of understanding the participants' point of view, as the researcher collects data in real-life situations, where it can be observed as it is happening, as opposed to being conducted under controlled conditions. Data analysis employed an inductive approach, in which data were analysed and systematically organised into patterns, categories, and themes through a cyclical analysis of the dataset and the themes that emerged over time. A qualitative descriptive approach would be used to describe the attitudes of management, sociocultural constraints, and methods of communication within a South African sales company.

The primary method of data gathering, semi-structured interviews, was selected for the research. Semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to provide their subjective experiences in more detail, presenting their views in greater depth. The research design of the study was arranged to ensure integrity between the problem statement, objectives, data gathering instruments, and analysis of the research. The study used an inductive reasoning approach for the development of the theory, as the aim was to draw out patterns and concepts from the data rather than testing established hypotheses (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:210). This approach to reasoning is suitable to use in respect of researching new and under-researched fields, like the management usage of WhatsApp for official communication (Creswell & Poth, 2017:145).

1.6.3 Research design

A flexible, emerging qualitative descriptive research design was employed in this proposal. As is expected with qualitative research design, plans are subject to change. The descriptive design calls for a detailed study, with little dependence on well-established models and the categorisation of information into themes. This flexibility enables the study to incorporate elements of grounded theory and phenomenology, whilst maintaining reflexivity and transparency regarding the choices made to guard against inconsistencies and complacency. When data collection starts, the researcher may change the questions, data collection instruments, participants and venue as they gain an understanding of the phenomenon (Doyle *et al.*, 2020:443-455). A descriptive design is effective where the immediacy of information needed from people experiencing the event is a necessity, and it yields results that are useful for practice and policy.

The design employed semi-structured interviews to gather managers' experiences within their own work environment on the effects of WhatsApp on communication, collaboration and organisational effectiveness. An inductive reasoning approach was used in the analyses of the

variables. Data is analysed for patterns and themes and not used to confirm hypotheses put forward (Creswell & Poth, 2017:145). Induction is appropriate as it allows theory to emerge from evidence, especially in areas lightly researched (e.g., management use of WhatsApp). The design framework encapsulates the rationale of the study, which is based on the problem statement that loosely controlled usage of WhatsApp in South African sales companies leads to communication problems. The methodology integrates a qualitative descriptive design, an inductive approach and a thematic analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight members of the management team. Data analyses involve thematic coding (utilising ATLAS.ti) to note patterns, such as information overload and cultural issues. The findings would yield insights that are contextual to WhatsApp's role, as well as the challenges and opportunities of WhatsApp. Theory development proposed a framework for reconciling immediacy with well-being and cultural sensitivity. Recommendations would cover policy, training and communication tool combinations.

1.6.4 Study setting

The study's setting focused the research on a single sales company with branches in four South African locations. The four branches are in Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch, Kathu and Roodepoort. By limiting the investigation to these locations, the researcher aims to gain a contextualised understanding of WhatsApp's role as a communication tool across different organisational locations. The demarcation aligns with South Africa's cultural and linguistic diversity, which this study acknowledges, and the dataset is structured in a way that records how these factors influence workplace communication.

1.6.5 Population and study field

The population and study requirements define the group(s) of people from whom the data are to be collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:197). The population is the group that is in question, therefore, in the case of this study, it was the entire management team of the selling organisation consisting of approximately 25 people. Managers from all departments, executive management, human resources, operations and sales were included to ensure a thorough understanding of the variances in WhatsApp usage across departments. Each department distinctly employs WhatsApp. The achievement of the objectives, that is, generating practical conclusions that are inclusive of different viewpoints from various functional areas, will therefore apply to all functional levels or departments in the organisation from this point of view.

The population spread across four offices - Potchefstroom, Roodepoort, Stellenbosch and Kathu - indicates geographical differences in the population. The age span is between 23 and 39 years,

which is an excellent indicator of the availability of information in this field and enhances the dataset. To achieve sample saturation, that is, the stage where no additional information becomes available with further inquiry, a minimum of two participants per office were engaged, ensuring participation from all departments across various age groups and in different geographical areas. Creswell (2022:202) alleges that sample saturation is concerned with the quality of the data, and not with the quantitative thereof. The sample technique therefore aimed to recruit a sufficient number of participants to cover the entire spectrum of experiences with WhatsApp usage across the company.

1.6.6 Sampling method

Considering the limited population available, after careful consideration, purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all departments and regions were covered, especially taking into account the type of business. The sampling method commenced by evaluating the entire population of 25 managers, all of whom met the necessary criteria. For the effective management of resources and to complete the interviews, a purposive sample of 8 managers (2 managers per corporate site) was selected. Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of specific individuals, places or events for study (Cohen *et al.*, 2013:464). The sample size for this study was determined by the qualitative descriptive design rather than a set number, and participation was voluntary.

Data collection continued until saturation of the sample was reached. Saturation relates to the quality of data, not the quantity, when further interviews do not elicit any additional insight, data collection no longer adds depth to understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:202). The array of data from eight participants in the study on WhatsApp usage in a sales-oriented company was sufficient in depth and variety of opinions.

The sampling strategy directly aligned with the research objectives, as it encompassed departmental variations by selecting managers from different departments. The procedure enhanced the validity of the research and its applicability to similar business contexts, as it ensured representativeness across these dimensions and ceased data collection at saturation.

1.6.7 Data collection

The primary tool used by the researcher to collect data was semi-structured interviews. This method allowed the researcher to investigate management experiences of WhatsApp while still ensuring a scientific method by using an interview schedule with the advantage of flexibility in the depth and order of questioning. A comprehensive set of interview questions was prepared

beforehand, featuring questions that allowed for detailed responses and designed to match the research objectives. The targeted sample of participants received email invitations, and meetings were scheduled at mutually agreeable times. These sessions took place either face-to-face or through Microsoft Teams, with participants giving informed consent before the interviews took place.

The interview guide explored the research questions, including how often and in what situations participants used WhatsApp, what they perceived as its advantages and drawbacks, how it impacted communication quality and staff involvement, and what improvements they would recommend for WhatsApp-based workplace communication. To strengthen the reliability of the approach, an experienced researcher in qualitative methods reviewed the interview guide. Questions were carefully worded to minimise interviewer bias, using an open question format that gave participants reassurance to answer questions honestly and openly.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher maintained reflective notes and posed neutral, follow-up questions to encourage participants to share their authentic experiences. An independent reviewer examined how the data was interpreted, and interviewees had the chance to check their transcripts for accuracy. Privacy protection measures included storing all recordings and written transcripts on a secure, password-protected device, assigning pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, and limiting access to sensitive data.

1.6.8 Recruitment and research relationships

The study focused on the recruitment and fieldwork at a South African sales company called Nova Life. Though the researcher was an employee, she had no hierarchical power or influence over the participants. Access to mid- and senior-level managers was arranged through the human resources (HR) department, whose manager served as the gatekeeper for this study. As the researcher worked in another department, there was no conflict of interest. In the case that the participants expressed discomfort, there was an option to appoint an unbiased interviewer. Eight management members were selected through purposive sampling and contacted via email, which outlined the study's details. Those that accepted, filled out consent forms and the interview was purely voluntary, should they have wished to delete their names from the list at any time. The gatekeeper ensured ethical access by disclosing the names of participants only after they had given consent for their names to be shared, and emphasised the voluntary nature of the interview. Recruitment initially utilised the company's business data and departmental structures to ensure that a wide sample, as far as possible, was obtained of those in sales, HR, operations and senior management across the four business branches. The researcher herself conducted the semi-

structured interviews, thus ensuring uniformity of approach in data collection, while an oversight committee monitored the ethical validity. Prior ethical clearance was obtained from the organisation, and informed consent was obtained from the participants, ensuring that anonymity was preserved. The company confirmed the right to perform the study in their organisation, with both the CEO and the gatekeeper signing a consent form. Recruitment strategies included casual pre-interview conversations to ensure confidentiality and encourage participants' willingness to participate and disclose their perceptions. The interviews were done personally by the researcher and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes each.

1.6.9 Data coding and analysis

This study employed a predetermined data collection and analysis protocol. Interviews were completed using semi-structured interview techniques, utilising both face-to-face and video conferencing (Microsoft Teams) methods. Interviews were recorded using digital recorders as well as the built-in MS Teams recording functionality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before recording the interviews. The researcher also documented the demographic context and the participant's non-verbal behaviours during the interviews by maintaining field notes. Data analysis was accomplished using a two-step transcription process. First, an automated transcription of the interviews was performed using Otter AI, and second, the researcher manually reviewed the transcript for accuracy in preserving linguistic nuances that include tone, pauses and emotional content.

Thematic analysis was utilised as the primary methodology for analysing the data collected. Thematic analysis is an inductive analytical technique used to identify, describe, interpret, and organise themes within a dataset. Through this type of analysis, the researcher can systematically identify, interpret and organise the themes identified in the dataset. A primary component of thematic analysis includes open coding. Using open coding allows the researcher to break down the individual transcripts into discrete components or segments and assign a code to each segment based upon the underlying theme of the segment. This process enable writers to identify common themes and investigate how the various aspects of the experience are constituted. The open coding also facilitates a more detailed investigation of the different ideas. It enables the identification of themes related to employee engagement, communication, and the organisational culture under study.

The researcher undertook a combination of both thematic and narrative analysis. Thematic analysis, conducted using ATLAS.ti, guided the discovery, coding and categorisation of themes as they emerged. In contrast, narrative analysis focused on managers' narratives and personal

accounts to develop the themes in terms of the real working environment. A thematic map defined the themes that emerged, with themes including ideas on communication effectiveness (speed of decision making, reduced reliance on email, information overload, work–life balance and misunderstanding) and variance across departments (sales, HR, operations and executive management), the organisation's ideas concerning management (harmoniousness, expectations of availability, and policy pressures) and ideas related to the narratives (stress experiences, success narratives and conflict generated from overuse). ATLAS.ti provided evidence of analytical dilemmas, represented interrelationships between themes, and facilitated the exploration of relationships between communication modes and work stress. Field notes provided a contextual understanding and served as a record of non-verbal behaviours, as well as the methodology used to enhance the knowledge of the findings.

The interviewer employed a systematic methodology and data saturation, which was achieved after eight interviews, ensuring reliability and further enhancing validity. Further strategies to ensure anonymity and accurate transcription included the use of pseudonyms, encryption of data, redaction of identifiable material, and adherence to established transcription procedures. All interviews, recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected device and will be deleted after 3 years.

1.6.10 Ethical considerations

The study needed to be carried out in accordance with ethical principles to ensure that the rights and anonymity of participants and their information were protected. For anonymity, pseudonyms or codes were used instead of real identities on all documents and reports. Interviews were conducted confidentially, with only the researcher having access to data. Participants were made aware of how long their personal data would be held and in what format, i.e. that their data would be held securely in password-protected documents for 3 years, and then deleted. The researcher took no prejudiced position and complied with all provisions of the POPIA (Protection of Personal Information Act) in South Africa. The researcher also made sure that all participants understood the privacy arrangements and could withdraw from participation at any time during the study. The researcher undertook to maintain all participant information confidentially and to abide by the directives of North-West University's Ethics Committee.

Before participating in the research study, all participants signed a written informed consent agreement. In addition, the researcher obtained organisational approval from the gatekeeper - specifically, the Human Resource (HR) manager of the company. After receiving approval from the gatekeeper, the participants formally received a descriptive email invitation outlining the

purpose of the research study. At the commencement of each interview session, the interviewer identified herself, outlined the research objectives, explained what the interview would involve and how long it would last, and defined specific terms to assist participants in feeling comfortable and prepared. As a means of appreciating participants' contributions to the study, each participant was offered the option to receive an email copy of the study's findings, illustrating the researcher's commitment to transparency and recognition of the value of participants' contributions.

To reduce any potential influence as a result of the researcher being employed in the same organisation as the participants, the researcher used various forms of reflexivity to ensure the integrity of the research. The researcher maintained a detailed reflexive journal, ensured external monitoring through regular supervisions, used member checking and participated in peer debriefings with a peer academic from outside the university. These methods assisted in maintaining high levels of ethical conduct in collecting and analysing the data, while ensuring the credibility, objectivity, and authenticity of participants' perceptions.

Participants were assured of their voluntary participation and informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time without facing any consequences. The data from the study would be stored securely, using password-protected files, for three years before permanently deleting all data.

1.7 STUDY SIGNIFICANCE

1.7.1 Theoretical contribution

This research makes meaningful contributions. On the theoretical side, it expands our understanding of how people adopt technology and communicate within organisations by factoring in cultural diversity and the challenges of working across multiple languages. Most established frameworks - such as the Technology Acceptance Model or Social Exchange theory - work from the premise that users are fairly similar to one another. These observations matter for anyone interested in organisational psychology, managing across cultures, or studying how we communicate digitally at work. It is worth noting that this research focuses specifically on how one South African management team perceives WhatsApp as a vital internal communication channel. Since the teams studied here are relatively uniform in composition, the findings should translate well to other organisations using WhatsApp for similar purposes.

1.7.2 Practical contribution

The study offers guidance for managers and policymakers on how to use WhatsApp's benefits while mitigating its risks. This study is essential because management teams in an organisation set the tone of the company's communication. If management's morale, motivation and understanding improve through effective communication, it will have a positive impact on any business. Recommendations may include establishing clear communication norms (e.g., restricting after-hours messaging), training managers in cross-cultural digital etiquette, and implementing security protocols aligned with POPIA. The findings of this research may offer valuable insights for organisations to enhance internal communication policies, ultimately improving employee wellbeing and job satisfaction.

1.8 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This research has limitations that warrant a discussion. Data was gathered from eight participants within the identified organisation. Although the purposive sampling approach ensured some variety among participants from the same company, having only eight respondents meant that the range of perspectives - particularly in a culturally diverse setting - remained somewhat narrow.

Because the researcher works at the organisation being studied, the insider status might affect how openly participants shared their views, even though steps were taken to maintain reflexivity and guarantee anonymity. Additionally, WhatsApp's features and the regulatory environment surrounding digital communication continue to evolve quickly, meaning that significant platform updates or legal shifts occurring after data collection could make these findings less relevant over time. This qualitative study prioritises a detailed understanding rather than a wide-scale representation, so the conclusions are best viewed as exploratory.

1.9 CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

Academic writing guidelines and qualitative methodology instructions emphasise that successful qualitative research begins with thoughtful planning of the chapters (Kielmann, 2012:19). The study's planned layout is presented below.

1.9.1 Chapter One - Orientation

This introductory chapter outlines the motivation for the study and situates WhatsApp adoption within broader trends in digital communication and workplace transformation. It has briefly reviewed relevant theory, articulated the problem statement and specified the research aims, objectives and questions. It has summarised the interpretivist methodology and highlighted the study's potential contributions and limitations.

1.9.2 Chapter 2 – Literature review

Chapter 2The literature review synthesises empirical studies on instant messaging in organisations, focusing on the facilitators and barriers of WhatsApp use, the role of digital communication in employee motivation, concerns related to communication overload, miscommunication and security, and strategies to improve practice.

1.9.3 Chapter 3 – Research methodology and methods

This chapter presents the details of the methodological approach, including the research paradigm, sampling, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

1.9.4 Chapter 4 – Data analysis, results and interpretation

This chapter presents empirical findings from the interviews by categorising interview results into themes and connecting the findings to the research objectives regarding WhatsApp's impact on motivation and work–life balance.

1.9.5 Chapter 5 – Discussion and findings

This chapter concludes the study by reviewing key findings, theoretical contributions and practical implications. The chapter provides recommendations for systematic communication protocols in businesses using WhatsApp and suggests directions for future research.

This planned five-chapter outline provided guidance to the research and ensured a logical flow throughout the study.

1.10 TIME FRAME AND RESEARCH PLAN

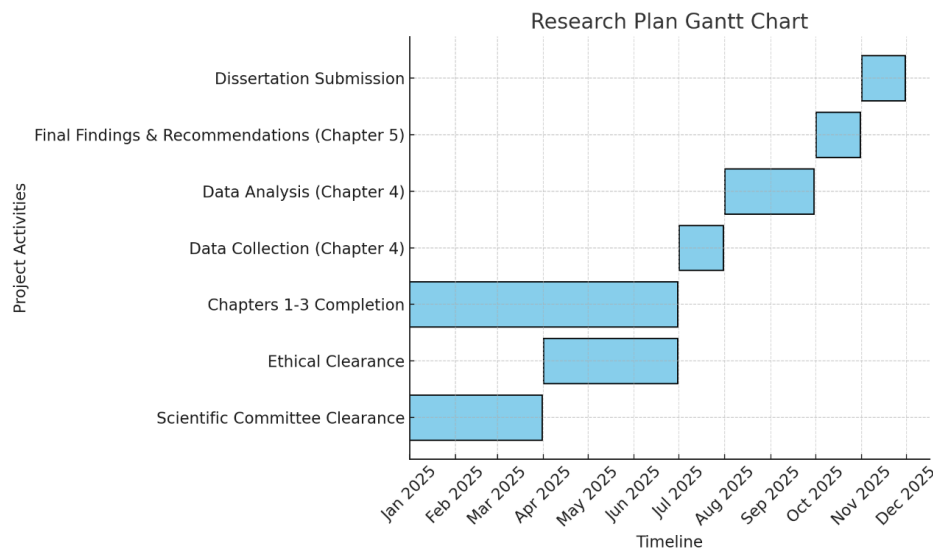


Figure 1: Research GANTT Chart (Own Compilation)

A cross-sectional study design was employed to gain insight into management perspectives on WhatsApp usage. This approach provided valuable insights into how South African sales organisations communicate and operate while using WhatsApp. The researcher had to plan every stage carefully, including finding participants and securing ethical approval to run interviews and analyse results. The research timeline broke down these activities into manageable milestones. In March 2025, the research sought approval from the Scientific Committee. Chapters one to three were completed by August 2025, at which time ethical clearance was obtained. In September 2025, data collection for semi-structured interviews commenced. Data analysis and drafting of Chapter four occurred in October and November 2025. In November 2025, Chapter 5 consolidated the findings and recommendations, followed by dissertation being submitted for examination.

The proposal also included several modifications to address persistent problems. Each phase of the study allowed for a period of one to two weeks to accommodate possible delays due to late recruitment. Ethical approval of the study by the ethics committee was given priority attention to avoid bottlenecks in proceeding with recruitment for data collection. The analysis of the data was simplified by using ATLAS.ti software and using early pilot-testing in the coding process to provide reliability. These and other factors enabled rigour with flexibility, so that despite setbacks, the study would be completed.

1.11 SUMMARY

The first chapter sets the scene for the study by indicating the increasing dependence that organisations show in their attempts to communicate with workers through mobile instant messaging, specifically the use of WhatsApp. The primary objective of the study is to examine the perceptions of management teams regarding the use of WhatsApp as a communication medium. To achieve secondary objectives, factors such as satisfaction, culture, communication overload, productivity, motivation and other relevant aspects were considered, and further suggestions were made regarding the use of WhatsApp. These ultimately contribute to the core research question and secondary questions. This chapter also includes a brief literature review, outlining the approach, type of study, population, demarcation, data collection instrument, data analysis, research plan and a chapter outline.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review that examines the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence of workplace communication using WhatsApp.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review aims to identify the position of current research in relation to the body of knowledge on digital age workplace communication. Specific focus is on the use of instant messaging technology, such as WhatsApp, and how these technologies are being used in the contemporary workplace. The research demonstrates that all types of digital communication technology - including email, instant messaging applications (such as WhatsApp), video conferencing and other similar technologies - create constant connectivity between team members during working hours. This constant connectivity increases the productivity of work operations, collaboration among team members and the overall quality of customer service provided by organisations. Digital communication enables members of organisations to share information rapidly in real time. With increased communication opportunities comes increased pressure for employees to be responsive and available at all times. Rapid information sharing can increase the velocity of projects and enhance employee engagement, but poor communication practices can lead to confusion and contribute to project failures (Afridi *et al.*, 2023).

Due to the low-cost, fast nature, flexibility and capability to provide both formal and informal communication options, instant messaging applications like WhatsApp have become very popular with organisations undergoing a process of digital transformation (Omar *et al.*, 2020). In South Africa, the application of WhatsApp has been particularly prominent in fast-paced sales-oriented environments. There is therefore an increasing need to consider the impact of WhatsApp on organisational communication patterns, workplace dynamics and managerial practices. WhatsApp facilitates the rapid exchange of information, supports group dialogue and enables the fast transmission of images or documents and therefore provides an attractive alternative to more traditional forms of communication, such as email and telephone (Omar *et al.*, 2020).

To arrive at a systematic description of previous research on a specific topic, a literature review is performed. The literature review will explain, define and objectively assess the research which has been conducted, and it may also provide some contextual or background information for the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:27).

To provide a proper scope for the research, a thorough review of the existing literature on effective communication and instant messaging was conducted, as it pertains to the use of WhatsApp as a workplace communication medium in order to be relevant to this study. This literature review aims to highlight the advantages of using WhatsApp in the workplace, as well as the drawbacks, disadvantages, or dangers that accompany it.

Keywords used to search for resources were 'WhatsApp', combined with 'instant messaging', 'effective communication', 'motivation' and 'communication overload'. Academic articles were selected from various electronic databases, accredited academic journals, the NWU library and Google Scholar. This chapter illustrates the relationship between the literature and the research questions by presenting the research questions and subsequently investigating the relevant literature for each question.

2.1.1 Constructs for the literature review

The literature review was divided into five constructs relevant to this study.

- **Effective communication** in organisations and its role in productivity, collaboration and employee well-being.
- **Instant messaging (IM)** as a tool for synchronous, low-cost communication in corporate environments.
- **WhatsApp** as a dominant mobile instant messaging (MIM) platform in South Africa and globally.
- **Motivation and satisfaction** linked to communication protocols in organisations.
- **Communication barriers and risks**, which include communication overload, misinterpretation and challenges associated with cultural or language diversity.

2.1.2 Literature review sources

The literature used in conducting the review included the following:

- **Peer-reviewed journal articles** exploring communication, technology adoption and WhatsApp's workplace impact.
- **Recent South African studies** highlighting internal communication practices and cultural diversity in workplace communication.
- **Global research** on digital communication and workplace wellness.
- **Policy documents** such as the EU's "Right to Disconnect" directives and POPIA regulations.

- **Statistical reports:** Data compilations examining social media uptake patterns across South Africa.

These sources contributed both theoretical understanding and practical knowledge about WhatsApp's function in workplace communication within the South African organisational landscape.

2.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

One primary research question with four secondary questions guided this literature review and is aligned with the research objectives:

2.2.1 Main research question

What perspectives do management teams hold regarding the factors that enable or hinder WhatsApp's effectiveness, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, when used for both formal and informal communication in South African sales organisations?

2.2.2 Secondary questions

- How do different management departments at a South African sales company use WhatsApp as their primary communication tool?
- What affects management teams' happiness and motivation while utilising WhatsApp as their primary internal communication tool?
- What are management teams' most significant concerns about WhatsApp-based internal communication techniques in South African sales companies?
- How can South African sales companies enhance WhatsApp-based internal communication strategies to align with global best practices and address local challenges, while offering results-driven improvements in WhatsApp-based internal company communication?

These questions are designed to address the issues related to the main research question of management teams' perceptions of the facilitators, barriers, strengths, and weaknesses of using WhatsApp as a communication tool for both formal and informal communication in a South African sales company.

2.3 HOW DO DIFFERENT MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANY USE WHATSAPP AS THEIR PRIMARY COMMUNICATION TOOL?

The question examines how management members in different departments utilise WhatsApp to organise work, disseminate information and enhance communication. It examines departmental behaviours and variations in adoption to comprehend the functionality of WhatsApp as an internal communication instrument. Modern organisations have deeply integrated instant messaging into their day-to-day operations, and WhatsApp, in particular, has become a primary channel for internal communication across various departments.

The high level of penetration of WhatsApp in South Africa has made WhatsApp an effective default tool for many organisations. In a 2025 report, 96% of the employees surveyed across multiple sectors, used WhatsApp to communicate professionally and relied on it as much as they did on email (Collard, 2025). This extensive use of WhatsApp at the workplace was likely based on two elements: first, individuals already use WhatsApp as part of their regular daily routines, and secondly, the mobile-based, user-friendly interface of WhatsApp makes it simple to use without requiring extensive knowledge about it.

Managers and supervisors across various business departments use WhatsApp to facilitate workflow organisation and updates, task delegation, and keep team members up to date with project developments. Using WhatsApp, employees and managers can send each other immediate messages regardless of their physical location, which is a significant benefit in fast-paced sales environments where timely information and quick decision-making can be critical to making or losing a deal. Compared to conventional email and formal communication processes, WhatsApp's instant response capability and group messaging options enable teams to respond more quickly to requests. The next section discusses related literature about effective communication methods and how instant messaging platforms may function within a workplace communication framework.

2.3.1 Effective communication in a modern era

Communication methods have evolved from traditional approaches to contemporary digital formats. Such communication influences managerial performance, team dynamics, and overall productivity, with special attention given to instant messaging platforms (Graw, 2023). Communication is viewed as an important tool for businesses to not only function effectively, but also as a way to strategically drive performance through influencing organisational culture. The ability of employees to engage with each other in meaningful ways has become a crucial

component of modern workplaces (Maina, 2013:2). There is a significant relationship between an organisation's level of success and its ability to communicate well, particularly when it comes to employee and customer relationships that can lead to increased revenue, improved business development and growth into new markets (Kalogiannidis, 2020:1).

Poorly functioning communication is often linked to ineffective management practices and ultimately results in subpar business outcomes. As we are living in an ever-accelerating environment, effective communication is now imperative for achieving business success. Businesses are rapidly expanding their usage of all types of communication mediums, such as emails, instant messages, social media platforms, live online platforms, and video conferencing (Nardi *et al.*, 2000:1). In a world where we are moving faster, more information needs to be consumed swiftly, and quick and effective communication is necessary (Colvile, 2016:4).

Employee productivity and the number of tasks employees finish during the workday increase when they are working faster and more efficient, leading to increased output. The amount of work that can be undertaken rises when the activities are correctly arranged and completed. Time is a valuable commodity in businesses, and streamlined communications are essential for time optimisation. The most popular tool for multitasking is instant messaging, as most users who use it also perform other tasks. Instant messaging is more immediate and informal than email, less intrusive than making a phone call, and has the added benefit of being able to detect presence (Maina, 2013:2).

Typically, acquiring fundamental corporate communication skills involves observing and learning from other competent individuals to model one's behaviour based on what is observed in different professionals. Effective delivery of business information is critical, as the value of the information will be lost if it does not reach the appropriate individuals in an organisation quickly enough. Business information transfer (between colleagues, departments, etc.) is a fundamental form of organisational communication. Effective communication methods must be used to facilitate interdepartmental collaboration and enhance employee productivity (Kalogiannidis, 2020:1-2).

Communication provides a basis for most work-related processes, such as coordination, motivation, management and strategy. Communication can also have a significant impact on the relationship dynamics in the workplace (supervisor/employee) and how well they collaborate. Studies show that using real-time messaging platforms to build professional relationships, create better work performance and create improved ways for employees to communicate with each other (Rajendran *et al.*, 2019:1).

Messaging tools like WhatsApp are complementary to an organisation's formal messaging channels and allow team members to maintain continuous contact and respond to questions or concerns quickly. In general, organisations must have effective communication systems to operate successfully daily and maintain long-term organisational success. WhatsApp, in particular, provides a means of rapidly exchanging information, which is a requirement of today's digital work environment.

2.3.2 Instant messaging evolution

Research into messaging within the workplace shows a marked shift from traditional communication methods (emails and phone calls) to instant messaging applications. Although email is still used, it has become secondary or, in some cases, an alternative to WhatsApp for intra-departmental communications. The immediate and informal nature of instant messaging lends itself to the immediate and day-to-day practicalities of administration. It is informal compared to email and is less intrusive than a telephone call, while enabling speedy communication with one or more people. In organisations, it is also seen that WhatsApp encourages multitasking and informal, quick checks. Employees can use WhatsApp for communication and, at the same time, participate in other work, resulting in better time management. One study reported that communication via WhatsApp was more efficient for negotiation and reconsideration of decisions for internal teams than using only meetings or email correspondence (Omar *et al.*, 2020:415-416).

In research by Johnston *et al.* (2015) it was observed that medical emergency teams found great value in phone messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, for increasing communication, as they saved time compared to other mediums of communication. Group chat communication in instant messaging has the benefit that all the members of the group have the same information at the same time, which reduces information silos (Johnston *et al.*, 2015:46).

In South African companies, WhatsApp groups serve as virtual 'offices' where management and their teams are in continuous communication throughout the workday. Departments such as Sales, Customer Service, Marketing, HR and Logistics may have their own specific WhatsApp groups to discuss department-specific matters, as well as interdepartmental groups to handle general company business. The multimodal communication features of WhatsApp, such as voice messages, images, and documents, aid in richer communication. Additionally, it is also important to note that the features of WhatsApp, such as presence indicators to indicate whether communication is online or if a message has been read, and mentions (@) in group chats, help ensure that messages arrive at the right time and is received by intended recipient. Its features cover part of the non-verbal cues in face-to-face teamwork, providing indications of real

availability, and also directing attention to groups by means of @mentions, thereby facilitating coordination with virtual or distributed teams.

An effective internal communication system enables all workers in the organisation to access the necessary information, and they are engaged in a way that allows them to understand the company's goals, their role within the organisation, and how they contribute to its success. Formal communication refers to the use of formal structures, where traditional organisational hierarchies are utilised in the form of recorded communication channels, such as email chains and video conferences. Informal communication occurs spontaneously through social relationships formed and casual contact. Instant messaging, therefore, generally will fall within the informal category of the distribution of information, whereby companies can effectively combine the speed of rapid communications with clarity and professionalism (Seufert *et al.*, 2022:2).

With the introduction of mobile phones, together with the increased popularity of mobile applications, cheap or even free chat or social messaging applications have become a much more affordable alternative to message services based on paid operator text messaging via SMS (Dixon, 2024). In companies, formal messaging is concerned with the communication channels through which those in hierarchical positions relate to other members of the organisation. In informal messaging, information is passed among members of corporations without adherence to these formal channels of communication. Where formal messaging has a much stronger significance regarding the organisation, informal messages may affect the organisation's bottom line (Sakib, 2016:4).

Meltwater is a global leader in media intelligence and analytics, leveraging its artificial intelligence (AI) systems and algorithms to track the media environment in which organisations operate. The article "South African Digital & Social Media Statistics 2025" contains information relative to Meltwater's Global Digital Report 2025 (produced in partnership with We Are Social), which gives measured statistics on several fundamentals, including internet penetration, trends in social media usage, preferences for such platforms, the effects of influencer increase and the growth in mobile devices within South Africa. The statistics interpreting analysis provided by Meltwater provides facts and data to examine the rapidly changing digital landscape in South Africa, which clearly offers wide-ranging technological developments such as reliance on mobile access (furthermore with statistics indicating that 99.3% of users have mobile smart devices), heavy Internet usage (averaging 9 hours and 37 minutes daily) and high levels of social media exposure (26.7 million users with an average of 3 hours and 36 minutes exposure daily) (McInnes, 2025).

The following figures provide context for the study and support theoretical and methodological discussions, enabling alignment of the study with digital behaviour and marketing implications.

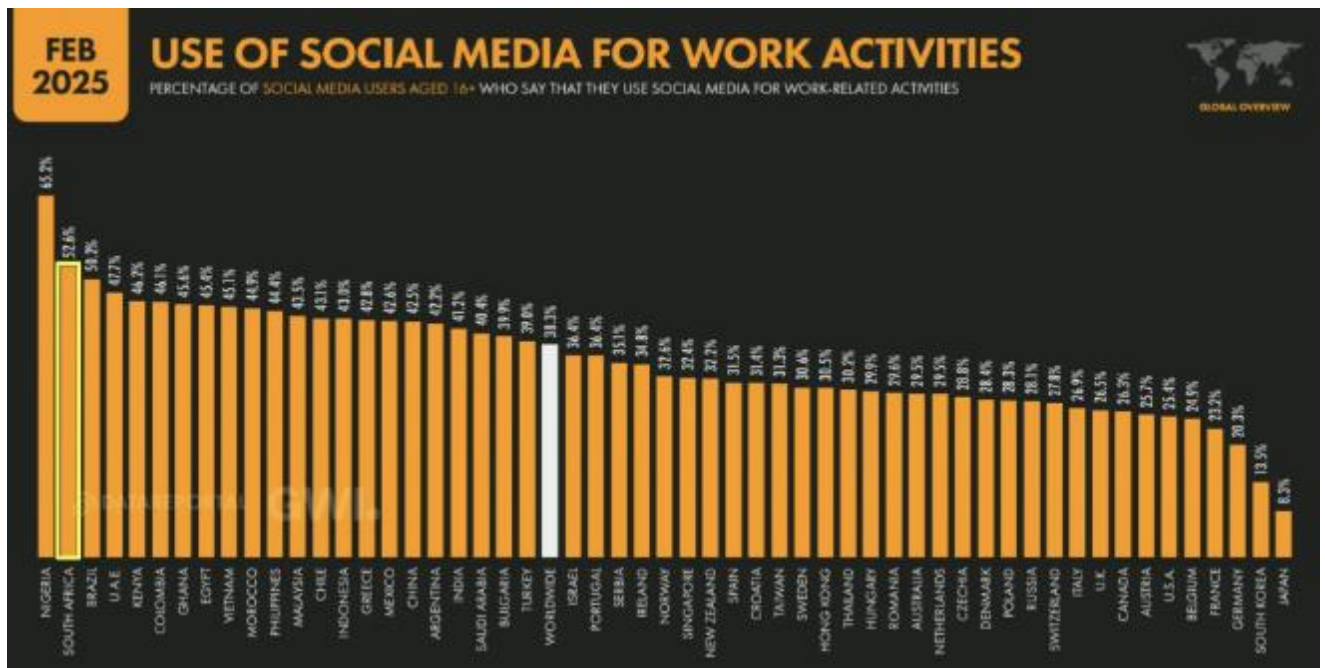


Figure 2: The Meltwater Digital report 2025 (use of social media for work activities in South Africa).

According to this report, 52.6% of South African users report that social media is an integral part of their work activities (McInnes, 2025).

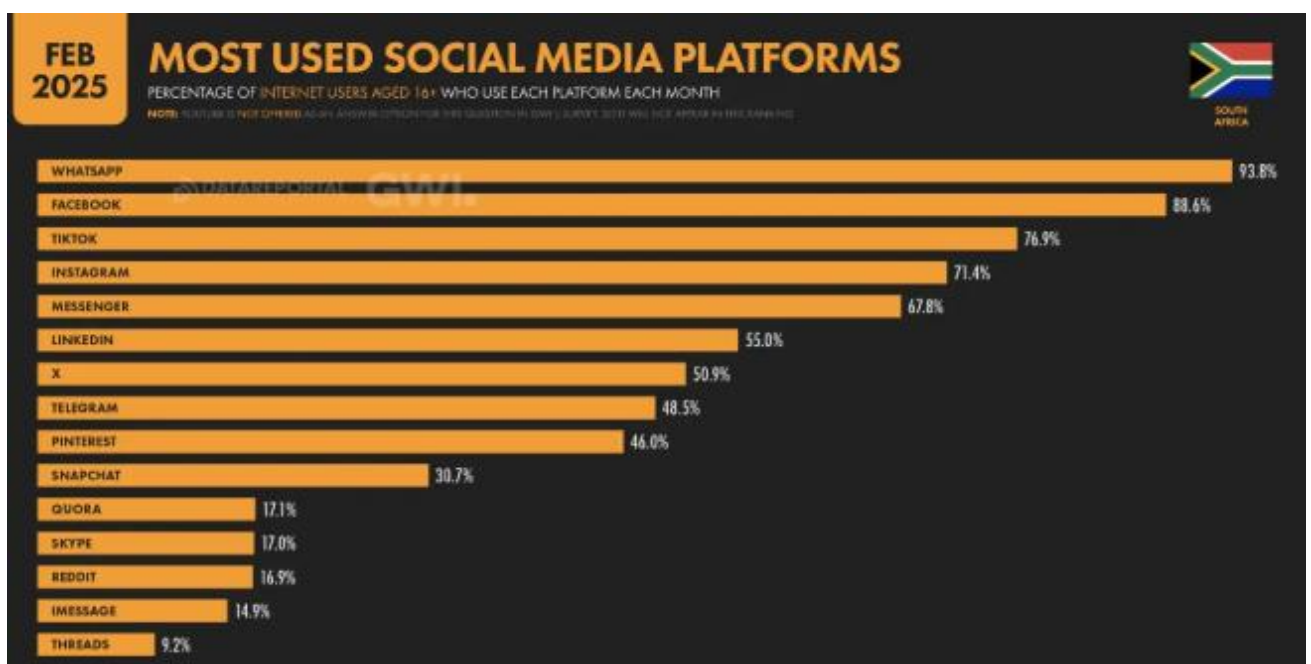


Figure 3: The Meltwater Digital Report 2025 (most used social media platforms in South Africa).

WhatsApp is South Africa's most used social media platform, with 93,8% of the active internet-using population using WhatsApp (McInnes, 2025).

2.4 WHAT AFFECTS MANAGEMENT TEAMS' HAPPINESS AND MOTIVATION WHILE UTILISING WHATSAPP AS THEIR PRIMARY INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TOOL?

This question assesses what contributes to a manager's level of satisfaction when they are using WhatsApp for professional purposes. Research identifies several related elements to consider in relation to the use of WhatsApp at work: WhatsApp's features and user-friendliness, how teams generally use WhatsApp, and how employees view the value of using WhatsApp (including an improved sense of teamwork and higher levels of productivity). In general, management teams tend to be more motivated and positive about WhatsApp when it saves time, improves team connectivity and supports their work goals. Their happiness can decline if WhatsApp use becomes overwhelming or intrusive. Below, key influences on satisfaction and motivation are discussed as a background to the following sections which review literature on WhatsApp's adoption and features, local usage patterns, the benefits of group communication via WhatsApp and empowerment versus overload in WhatsApp usage, and its impact on satisfaction and motivation.

2.4.1 WhatsApp adoption and features

While WhatsApp usage is widespread across all departments in a business, the literature on departmental differences in usage is limited. Most studies treat internal social media use in general, without dissecting how, for example, the HR department's use might differ from the Sales department's use. A recent study of South African municipalities found that WhatsApp was universally embraced for internal communication, where all participants reported using WhatsApp daily for work. However, this and similar studies emphasise that formal policies or guidelines for using WhatsApp internally were often lacking, which affected how different groups used it. For instance, Grawe *et al.* (2023) observed that some departments in local government had innovated their own methods for communicating via WhatsApp. The lack of a formal social media policy led to inconsistencies and possible miscommunication in its use of WhatsApp (Grawe *et al.*, 2023:2-3).

In corporate environments, it is to be expected that functional differences will justify the increased use of WhatsApp in a Sales Department for urgent coordination and motivational purposes (e.g., daily sales goals or quick queries on customer orders). In contrast, departments such as Administration and Finance appear to use the platform less often and typically for quick

confirmation or simple inquiry purposes. These departments continue to use email as their primary method of communication for formal business issues. A study was conducted at a University in South Africa, utilising qualitative methods, which produced findings similar to those of this study. When there are no clear and direct organisational communication guidelines, departments will develop their own "rules" regarding the proper use of digital communication tools. These studies demonstrate that organisations should have policies and procedures to provide consistency in how employees are permitted to utilise workplace WhatsApp (Mushaathoni, 2024:1-2).

Workplace WhatsApp can remove all barriers, both formal and informal, that previously existed to separate workplace communications from personal communications. Department Heads regularly use WhatsApp to communicate with their teams on an official basis (e.g., posting messages announcing assignments or sending reminders about deadlines), but also frequently use the platform to communicate casually (e.g., sending messages expressing gratitude to the team for completing a task, sharing humour, etc.) and can modify their communication style depending upon the circumstances (Woodcock, 2021:7).

One of the primary reasons management teams prefer using WhatsApp is its rich feature set, combined with extreme ease of use. WhatsApp has evolved from being merely a simple text-messaging application to becoming a multifaceted one which enables phone and video calls, photo and video uploads, voice notes, GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format), stickers and short video messages (WhatsApp, 2025). A study in Brazil refers to the application of WhatsApp for managers in the medical profession, where managers consider WhatsApp to be a valuable strategic tool in healthcare management, mainly because of its ability to promote the sharing and integration of information in real-time. They refer to the improvement of communication, facilitating rapid problem-solving, and promoting the cooperation of employees and services. The features of the application of voice, audio and image communications were deemed useful in respect of any work-related aspects for the ability to satisfy updated news on matters involving the organisation in the case referred to, where it was not possible to be physically present (Savio *et al.*, 2021:4-5). The features of WhatsApp enable users to converse in an expressive, real-time manner, thereby replacing numerous conventional communication platforms, such as phone calls. Its cross-device capability (via WhatsApp Web and desktop apps) enhances usability and ease of use, allowing users to transition seamlessly between phones and computers.

Additionally, all those who use WhatsApp, whether at the employee level or at a higher executive level, tend to be familiar with the application's interfaces. The result is that management also feels confident and empowered to use it. Digital communication tools have the potential to be used as an instant communication tool so that managers do not have to question if employees are

checking emails or sitting at their desks to communicate with them. Studies assessing various types of digital communication platforms have concluded that WhatsApp offers greater value than the others due to its simple design and ability to integrate easily into employees' daily routines, which lead to very high levels of satisfaction among users (Alsanossi & Mohammed, 2025:1).

The COVID-19 pandemic created a necessity for the rapid implementation of remote and hybrid working practices throughout most industries. As a result, there was a significant need for instant communication tools to allow teams to communicate immediately while working remotely (Cho & Lee, 2022:1). As traditional office environments were closed and employees were working independently, employers realised the benefits of using WhatsApp to provide a means of communication between employees and the company that would help bridge the gap between individuals who were physically distant from one another. Additionally, supervisors have identified the usefulness of creating specific group channels on WhatsApp for different project or department-specific purposes. These group channels have become an effective method for encouraging employee motivation and collaboration within departments. Departmental WhatsApp groups also serve as a common area for employees to seek answers to their questions, share project updates with their colleagues, and encourage their fellow team members. WhatsApp is almost universally read, frequently quicker than emails, and gives managers a sense of security. This allows managers to verify that urgent announcements, requests, and other messages directed through WhatsApp are likely to be read and responded to immediately, thereby lowering their anxiety and increasing job satisfaction.

One key motivator for management teams is the user-friendliness and versatility that come with WhatsApp, as well as its widespread appeal due to its function as a communication tool that centralises their responsibilities. South Africa, as early as the beginning of 2024, confirms this global trend too, having 26 million active social media users, of which over 93% are using WhatsApp (Collard, 2025).

WhatsApp enables users to communicate instantly via text messages, share statuses, make calls, and have video chats. There is no uncertainty regarding the fact that WhatsApp, with all the changes to it since its foundation in 2009, is in a brilliant position to increase personal functionality, particularly since its acquisition by Facebook (now Meta) on 19 February 2014 (Song *et al.*, 2019:3). WhatsApp has added a variety of functionality features, such as voice notes, graphic content like sharing GIFS and stickers, emojis, as well as sending data and documents, links, and conducting polls. WhatsApp has become a primary communication channel for businesses worldwide, with two billion users actively using its messaging service every month as of January 2023 (Dixon, 2024).

Digital instant messaging is a result of the evolution of traditional communication methods, made possible by technological advancements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these advancements acquired traction and elevated social media and instant messaging to a new level of prominence. As one of the most widely used instant messaging apps for casual conversation, WhatsApp has also begun to be preferred for professional communication in the management of organisations (Alev *et al.*, 2022:1). People who are spread out geographically can now communicate instantaneously and for free, sending infinite messages. Consequently, it should be no surprise that WhatsApp and other messaging apps have gradually replaced traditional message-based business communications.

2.4.2 South African adoption and usage patterns

In South Africa, the use of WhatsApp as an internal communication medium is prevalent. Before the pandemic, the use of WhatsApp was deeply entrenched in social life as well as the business environment, and with COVID-19, the need for and movement to remote working further solidified this mediating social medium. Nearly every employee was already using this communicative medium to some degree within a private context, so it was merely necessary for companies to utilise the tool to ensure continuity of communication, particularly in light of lockdowns and the need for ongoing communicative effectiveness. WhatsApp use has come to be incorporated into departments as well as institutions, to the extent that understanding the use thereof and the satisfaction with the use of WhatsApp has to be appreciated (Sakib, 2016:4-6).

In the departments of a company, WhatsApp obtains most of its use in respect of internal communication, being expedited by the speed and convenience (to its managers) obtained from internal use. Managers can communicate information directly to employees, and everyone in the same group is on the same page. This is of extreme importance, as the desire and environment for favourable business depend on the timely relaying of urgent information (changes in products, alterations in prices, incoming inquiries, etc.), all of which directly affect the performance of these companies.

Research done by Abdelhay *et al.* (2024) in a corporate business study in the Middle Eastern context also proved the effect of the use of WhatsApp, in that with its lateral communication (peer purposes) and diagonal part (cross-level communication) proved beneficial to the carrying of tasks and coordination of teams and thereby producing improved team effectiveness (Abdelhay *et al.*, 2024). The study found that WhatsApp use was positively associated with leader–member exchange quality and team–member exchange, indicating that it helped strengthen communication and trust between managers and subordinates, as well as among team members. These established relationships are related to improved performance and productivity among

employees, indicating that the continued use of WhatsApp for internal communication tends to strengthen the relationships within teams involved in departments.

Despite the universal application of WhatsApp, which suggests familiarity with communication processes across different management departments, there may be subtle differences in the intensity and style of adoption. For example, technologically-oriented departments, or a younger cohort of employees, may use WhatsApp in terms of its more advanced features more (for example, by at times using WhatsApp Web (desktop) facilities, or in allowing the broadcasting features of WhatsApp to be used for one-to-many announcements). Traditional functions may adhere to the rudimentary form of messaging, relying on emails for important interdepartmental conversations. The conclusion in a recent white-paper report on cybersecurity and awareness in South Africa is that WhatsApp has become embedded as a primary internal communication tool in organisations, across departments (Collard, 2025). Additionally, it is likely that in a modern sales organisation, every department will have WhatsApp as part of its communication toolset, as it taps into employees' communication habits in their daily lives and is easily the most convenient communication medium available.

South African social media statistics for 2024 indicate the following numbers:

There are 45.34 million internet users, accounting for 74.7% of the population, 26 million social media users (42.8% of the population) and 118.6 million active mobile connections, which represent 195.4% of the population. Notably, among the 45.34 million internet users in South Africa, 26 million are active on social media. The number of cellular mobile connections is 118.6 million. This indicates that many South Africans probably use multiple devices. The development of South African social media is a reflection of the more general increase in internet penetration, as a growing number of South Africans are establishing a presence online. The average time spent by users on the internet daily is 9 hours and 38 minutes (McInnes, 2025).

South Africa has a large percentage of active users who report using social media for business purposes. In contrast to the global average of 37.9% of users stating that social media is part of their business life, in South Africa, 51.9% of users indicate that social media is a part of their business activities. The preferred and most widely used social media site in South Africa is WhatsApp, with 93.9% of active social media users (McInnes, 2025). The South African context introduces further factors, such as the very high levels of multiculturalism (12 official languages and diverse cultural groupings), and the lack of alternative infrastructures, which probably serve to enhance the convenience of WhatsApp usage.

In conclusion, WhatsApp has almost universal acceptance in South Africa, while its usage pattern indicates that it is also virtually indispensable for everyday business and personal communication. Understanding the patterns of who uses WhatsApp, how, and for what purpose is paramount in determining communication satisfaction and motivation among management teams in using WhatsApp, as these aspects will be influenced by the extent and relevance of WhatsApp in the everyday workflow and the cultural requirements of the specific business environment.

2.4.3 Benefits and group dynamics

In practical terms, features such as group chats allow all members of the department to participate in discussions, which flattens the flow of communication (Seufert *et al.*, 2016:1). Even junior team members can put their ideas or updates forward in the WhatsApp group, as communication is no longer hindered by the hierarchies found in formal meetings, which allows for more sharing of information to take place. WhatsApp groups act as virtual conference rooms, reducing geographic barriers that would otherwise exist between employees of a large sales organisation or those who work out in the field. A manager in one location can quickly forward a customer's question or stock problem to all other managers located hundreds of kilometres away and receive answers within minutes.

Quick communication between employees will make the teams feel closer together. News about one team closing a major sale or reaching a significant milestone travels very fast via a management group chat. Everyone else gets to celebrate almost immediately. Sharing important updates and issues quickly creates a collaborative atmosphere throughout the company among different departments (Seufert *et al.*, 2016:5). With the ability to use WhatsApp from a PC via the "WhatsApp Web" feature, staff no longer have to get up from their desks to respond to messages continually. In addition to providing the convenience of communicating directly from a computer, staff can continue to stay connected via their mobile phones, ensuring they are always available if needed. Due to its wide acceptance, employees are likely to find it easier to communicate via WhatsApp for business purposes compared to standard email. Since most staff have access to a computer at their workstation, they may prefer using WhatsApp instead of email for workplace communications. Staff can easily communicate with each other in groups where all participants can witness what is being communicated and take part in the discussion. Employees can quickly share information, ideas and provide immediate feedback on project tasks (Johnston *et al.*, 2015:2).

From a motivation theory perspective, fulfilling the social needs of managers and employees, such as the need for belonging and recognition, can enhance job motivation. WhatsApp provides the opportunity for quick praise (simply a text, such as "Well done on closing that deal!" in the

group), as well as the ability for peer support, which can shield against work stress. A survey of the effectiveness of internal communication at a university reported that effective informal communication media resulted in a greater feeling of belonging and satisfaction among employees (Alev *et al.*, 2022:2).

Teams can communicate fast and conveniently if they set up a WhatsApp group at work. When it is necessary, as in the case of project deadlines or when a manager requires an immediate reply, this is very valuable. A WhatsApp group at work can therefore serve as a valuable medium of communication, but it can also foster a more congenial atmosphere and promote a sense of team spirit among coworkers. In that group chat, it is possible to foster relationships and enhance the working atmosphere, as it provides team members with a less formal opportunity to discuss ideas, share stories, and exchange jokes (Abdelhay *et al.*, 2024:2). WhatsApp is the most popular application, being downloaded worldwide on both iOS and Android digital platforms. It can also create group platforms to facilitate enhanced conversation among multiple people. In a study by Dos Santos, it was emphasised that the group feature on WhatsApp was noted as very popular and that it enhanced effective conversation with several people simultaneously. Managers are happy to be able to talk to the whole team at once and also see how members help one another in the group, which encourages the supportive team culture (Dos Santos, 2021:2).

2.4.4 Communication empowered or communication overloaded?

In moderation, WhatsApp can empower employees and managers to have latitude in how and when interaction occurs, thereby increasing engagement. A study by Wushe and Shenje reported a correlation between moderate WhatsApp use in the workplace, increased employee engagement and decreased turnover rates (Wushe & Shenje, 2019:2-3). This suggests that when WhatsApp is part of work-related communication channels, people feel more connected and, consequently, more engaged. WhatsApp creates a continuing feedback mechanism whereby employees share knowledge and continuity, keeping employees "in the loop" of information and enhancing feelings of inclusion and importance. On the other hand, when used in excess or improperly, it frequently reduces satisfaction. If management feels the constant barrage of messages or the obligation to be online all hours, this in itself detracts from motivation due to stress. A study suggested that social media abuse reduces productivity and is a strong indication that employees might seek alternative jobs (Bizzi, 2018).

Yang and Feng (2025) introduced another dimension. Their study on mobile instant messaging (IM) at work found that increased interaction due to IM reduced perceived workload (quick interactions clarify or eliminate the possibility of backlog or errors), which is a favourable condition. Still, increased immediacy was associated with a greater perceived workload and stress (Yang &

Feng, 2025:2-9). They point out that increased quality of communication/IM interaction has a smoothing effect on the distracting effects, which allows for the beneficial impact of interaction to be enjoyed without the distracting component being as noticeable. This indicates that if management teams can formulate "best practices" in terms of appropriate usage (e.g., muting non-urgent groups during controlled periods of "quiet" focus, or respecting leisure time boundaries), the effect of WhatsApp communication on morale remains positive. Managers are happiest with WhatsApp when it is enhancing productivity, team spirit and responsiveness. These factors make them feel effective in their roles, and when it is not infringing excessively on their personal time or causing information fatigue. In short, the balance of these factors will determine overall motivation levels.

2.5 WHAT ARE MANAGEMENT TEAMS' MOST SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS ABOUT WHATSAPP-BASED INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES IN SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANIES?

Despite WhatsApp's numerous advantages, using WhatsApp in the workplace presents several challenges. Management teams have raised a number of concerns regarding WhatsApp-based internal communication, which can be broadly categorised as communication overload and work-life boundary blurring, information security and compliance risks, and miscommunication or cultural challenges. In the South African context, these issues are often pronounced due to high WhatsApp usage rates and the diverse, always-connected nature of the workforce. Below, we explore the major concerns documented in recent studies and reports, and why they matter to management teams.

2.5.1 Communication overload and stress

While using WhatsApp as a means of communication with coworkers has many advantages, it also has several drawbacks. The primary advantage of using WhatsApp to communicate with coworkers is that it provides you with a quick way to send messages to others. This instant messaging provides a means to resolve problems and reach decisions quickly. The major disadvantage is the potential for communication overload, which occurs when an individual feels overwhelmed by an excessive number of messages and/or notifications. The same characteristic that creates value in WhatsApp can be detrimental if no limits are placed upon this function. Managers often have multiple group chats and/or message threads they need to monitor constantly, resulting in what seems to be a never-ending flow of new information. For example,

regional sales managers may be part of multiple groups representing separate sales teams, as well as participate in a company-wide leadership group chat and possibly join cross-departmental chat groups. A regional sales manager can easily be part of over 50 work-related WhatsApp group chats. The number of messages that flow into these groups can create too much information for individuals to process, thus creating a barrier to focus on more complex tasks and disconnect from work at the end of the day.

Employee fatigue, decreased productivity and increased dissatisfaction may be due to the extreme demand for employee communication. An investigation carried out in South Korea utilising an equivalent messaging app (KakaoTalk) showed that when managers were overwhelmed by information saturation through messaging apps, it resulted in managers experiencing higher degrees of uncertainty in respect to their duties and resulted in conflicting demands, which again resulted in emotional exhaustion and an increased desire to leave their jobs (Cho *et al.*, 2019:2-3). While Cho's research was conducted before 2020, subsequent studies have reinforced these findings and demonstrated that unlimited message volume is associated with increased workplace tensions. Another study which researched the effect of message load on job stress levels using WhatsApp, found that both communication and information load caused by an overabundance of messages from WhatsApp contributed to job stress levels. Importantly, Samsura *et al.* further noted that once controlling for overload variables, the amount of time spent on WhatsApp itself did not independently affect the experience of stress (Samsura *et al.*, 2024).

An additional organisational challenge presented by WhatsApp is the expectation of employees to be available at all times. WhatsApp's instant nature has created an implicit pressure on both employees and their supervisors to respond immediately to messages, regardless of the hour. Many managers report that the distinction between professional and personal time has been increasingly distorted. As a result, both they and their team members often feel obligated to acknowledge WhatsApp notifications outside of business hours. Due to the use of WhatsApp for both personal and professional purposes, people need to manage their boundaries between these different roles to avoid work-life conflict and stress (Schouten & Bartels, 2017:2-3).

The functionality of collective discussions and the visibility of online status facilitate communication among team members who are physically dispersed, while features such as direct mentions and automated alerts facilitate the delivery of information to the intended recipient(s) when required. The system's functionality also facilitates increased efficiency by reducing the need for email communications and telephone calls, enabling rapid feedback loops and efficient document sharing and collaboration. Casual interaction through informal communication enables a sense of community, enhances teamwork and collaborative relationships, and provides

enhanced customer service as employees at the frontline of customer contact receive rapid internal authorisation (Schrader, 2025).

There are inherent risks in sending messages via WhatsApp. All-day notifications for incoming messages can distract employees, although most messaging applications contain settings that reduce distraction, such as a "sleep" setting. Messaging applications with inadequate security represent a security risk to the users of the application, therefore, end-to-end encryption and strong user authentication should be implemented. In addition, problems related to integration will exist when various departments within an organisation utilise different messaging applications and create silos of information. Finally, an over-reliance on messaging through WhatsApp creates an impersonal communication method, and therefore it is preferred to communicate important information and/or sensitive issues using a more formal communication channel (Schrader, 2025).

The result is technostress and potential demoralisation. Management teams are also concerned not only about their own well-being, but also that of their subordinates. Stressed employees and overstretched teams are less productive and more prone to making mistakes. In a study by Willie, a narrative review of WhatsApp being operational in South African workplaces stressed that the informality and at times the constant stream of messages sent via WhatsApp create dilapidated professional boundaries, which may lead to stress suffered by employees and an imbalance between work and private life (Willie, 2025). Indeed, the "right to disconnect" has become a pressing issue worldwide. A South African law commentator on employment aspects noted that internationally, the movement towards a "right to disconnect" is growing, and even urged local employers to codify their expectations regarding hours spent on messaging apps, with a view to reducing the chances of fatigue and burnout (Cachalia, 2024). These issues have become prominent in the employment of people in the sales line, where several eschewed groups are present, and the velocity of messages being sent/received is high. Issues like control of notifications and quiet hours have a significant bearing on the perceived workload. WhatsApp creates an always-on culture, where employees remain mentally distracted from their jobs. This leads to chronic stress, and therefore, burnout is inevitable. Overload and blurring of boundaries between work and home are urgent issues, with a cry for intervention from organisations to amend these circumstances.

2.5.2 Miscommunication and diversity context

A new area of concern relates to miscommunication, misunderstanding and the cultural implications of using WhatsApp. Text communication lacks the tone, body language, and context of interpersonal or even verbal communication, and managers fear that messages may be

misconstrued, leading to confusion, or worse, conflict. With the speed of WhatsApp conversations, people may not compose their messages carefully enough, and this may lead to misunderstandings. This is especially true in a multilingual, multicultural workforce, as is found in South Africa. South African workplaces are comprised of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, not all of whom possess the same proficiency in English or understanding of idioms and emojis. Something said or an emoji used may have different meanings in different cultures, for example, the 'thumbs up' emoji has been given various interpretations in different contexts. A South African HR consultancy indicated that the use of certain emojis has even arisen in disciplinary cases, as these were misunderstood in the workplace context (Libera, 2025).

Management teams are concerned about cultural etiquette in WhatsApp (e.g., direct communication styles vs. indirect communication styles, and seniority norms). In some cultures or among older generations, there is an expectation of being more formal in calls or messages sent to superior officers, or not to phone them after certain hours. Younger subordinates might send messages to the CEO with memes and use chat slang. If there are no definite norms, differences can arise, leading to dissonance. In a study done by Mushaathoni regarding intercultural communication in a South African university, the subordinates indicated that a lack of guidelines about intercultural communication leads to an erratic application thereof and causes differences in the possibility of understanding the goals of colleagues from different cultures (Mushaathoni, 2024:5-6). Putting this into perspective, a multicultural sales company might experience miscommunications if idiomatic expressions or local slang are used in group chats where not everyone shares the same background.

The next obstacle could be the language barrier. Although English as language is often used in commerce, South Africa has 12 official languages, and WhatsApp might encourage mother-tongue engagements in some group chats, which at face value could cause the exclusion of others. Within English there are differences in tone, which consequently could lead to perceptions of rudeness and disrespect if this is not handled delicately. The influence on the effectiveness of digital communication tools is dependent on both organisational culture and national cultural context. A study conducted by Theron *et al.* (2025), which examined nurses from diverse cultural backgrounds working in Saudi Arabia, revealed that an individual's culture can significantly influence their communication preferences, message interpretations, and expectations for response time (Theron *et al.*, 2025:5-6). This culturally related aspect of communication has the potential to create additional barriers when implementing universal digital communication policies within organisations.

The problem for management is to keep the communication via WhatsApp at some level of professionalism and clarity. The informal type of communication on WhatsApp and the

subsequent problems for hierarchical communication are also to be contended with. Here, for instance, the subordinates might take liberties in ways bordering on ethical concerns and disrespect hierarchical differences. This creates a complex situation when working with WhatsApp. When non-verbal cues are absent, consequently things like sarcasm, urgency of the communication, compassion and empathy for the content need to be derived purely from written text (and emojis), which is not infallible. There are also generational differences which need to be considered. Older managers may adapt more slowly to the mass usage of informal communication and are scared that they will lose the formal basis which builds knowledge, clarity and respect. Younger workers consider it as normal. Getting all generations aligned is the challenge.

People from all cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds are being represented in the working environment in South Africa nowadays. They all have unique abilities and skills, and show special expertise and potential. They draw from unique backgrounds and show different perspectives, ideas, opinions and essences. All these combined in a multicultural society would need to be accepted by an organisation to successfully lead in dealing with understanding every employee. Employees must, in turn, also have a profound understanding of a new world of multiculturalism, with regard to cultures, age groups, gender and lifestyle preferences. This can only be achieved through enhanced communication between all personnel on all levels (Rana, 2013:1-2).

2.5.3 Security and privacy concerns

Another critical concern is how to protect data and conform to privacy regulations when using WhatsApp for business purposes. WhatsApp can be considered a consumer application rather than an enterprise-type communication system, as it lacks many of the administrative controls and audit features found in applications designed specifically for business communication purposes. This raises concerns in the management teams of sensitive industries about the potential for data leakage, confidentiality breaches, and the inability to retain records of conversations. For example, in South Africa, the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) prescribes stringent controls to be exercised in relation to personal information. Using WhatsApp for private employee-client discussions may also potentially infringe upon the provisions of POPIA if proper protection measures are not taken.

WhatsApp does not provide the same level of advanced administration control required in a corporate environment, like other platforms created specifically for business use, according to cybersecurity expert Anna Collard. According to Collard, the primary issue with WhatsApp relates to unauthorised information disclosure, specifically where employees accidentally send sensitive

data to an incorrect group or recipient using the straightforward "share" function, which leads users to forward data without considering the implications (Collard, 2025)

Pricing strategies, client databases and projected revenues constitute significant, competitive enterprise intelligence within sales organisations. Unauthorised access to this type of confidential business intelligence by third-party entities would likely cause severe damage to an organisation's competitive position. An additional problem exists because there is no formal organisational record of what was communicated between employees via WhatsApp, unless employees formally document their communications. This limits regulators' ability to monitor and enforce compliance requirements and increases the likelihood of litigation based on the dissemination of objectionable or illegal material through work-related WhatsApp groups. There have been documented cases in the past of employees being terminated after sending inappropriate messages or emojis in work-related WhatsApp groups, resulting in litigation against them alleging violations of workplace harassment and professional misconduct policies. Management is also concerned that if they establish loose boundaries around the use of WhatsApp in the workplace, it will promote unprofessional behaviour that can be detrimental to both employees and the organisation as a whole. Security, confidentiality and compliance are of significant concern when using WhatsApp for business purposes (Libera, 2025).

Grawe's (2021) study showed that all participants in their study used WhatsApp daily for internal communication, indicating its relevance in workplaces. The study identified hindrances, such as the lack of a social media policy and organisational support, that tended to impede effective communication. Conversely, studies in healthcare and educational environments have emphasised issues of communication exhaustion, poor work-life balance, and an increase in stress and pressure from the perceived demand to always be available (Gebbia *et al.*, 2021). Grawe's study demonstrated that a formal approach to implementing regulation for internal communications via social media is required in municipalities in South Africa (Grawe, 2021).

Although the value of WhatsApp cannot be diminished, these concerns indicate why certain managers are reluctant to permit WhatsApp usage in the workplace. The next section will outline business options to mitigate concerns by establishing policies and best practices that promote the use of WhatsApp in their business operations.

2.6 HOW CAN SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANIES ENHANCE WHATSAPP-BASED INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ALIGN WITH GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES AND ADDRESS LOCAL CHALLENGES, WHILE

OFFERING RESULTS-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENTS IN WHATSAPP-BASED INTERNAL COMPANY COMMUNICATION?

This study assesses ways to enhance WhatsApp's functionality within a professional setting. To implement effective solutions that maximise WhatsApp's function as an internal messaging service, companies will need to develop strategic plans to ensure WhatsApp is used effectively as a business tool. By developing internal strategies using evidence-based methods from international research studies and tailoring them to meet South Africa's specific business environment and organisational cultures, companies will be able to improve communication through WhatsApp. Research indicates that there are practical approaches to this: establishing clear policies and guidelines for how WhatsApp will be used, providing employee training programs that cover both security practices and business-appropriate messaging etiquette, utilising WhatsApp's functional capabilities consistently, and implementing globally accepted and emerging workplace standards.

2.6.1 International and sectoral research on WhatsApp usage

International academic research on WhatsApp usage in the workplace and among businesses globally has increased significantly over the past several years. This type of study can provide South African companies with valuable insights for evaluating how they may wish to adopt the technology. The body of research into the characteristics and usage patterns of WhatsApp users, including their overall satisfaction levels, has been conducted not only in South Africa but also in Europe, Asia, and North America, and has analysed how WhatsApp operates and produces different outcomes across various industry segments. For example, Gupta and Upadhyay's analysis of WhatsApp from a social sustainability perspective demonstrated how the prolonged use of WhatsApp affects the quality of personal interactions and professional relationships. While they found that the continued use of WhatsApp does meet the social requirements of connection, the misuse of WhatsApp in the dissemination of false information via the platform, or the psychological dependence that individuals develop toward using the communication channel that stems from the use of the platform, will hinder the ability to fulfil its significant social requirements (Gupta & Upadhyay, 2019:2).

For example, studies in the healthcare sector have shown that healthcare workers can use WhatsApp effectively for communication and coordination purposes, thereby reducing consultation time and call volume for patients. In general, doctors and nurses create "WhatsApp" group pages for departmental or case-related discussions, which appear to improve the efficiency of their work, resulting in improved decision-making and more effective patient management. However, researchers note that the uncontrolled use of WhatsApp in the healthcare sector would

warrant the development of some established norms for its use to ensure that there is a professional relationship between staff receiving confidential patient information and other staff members who are not working at the time (Gebbia *et al.*, 2021:2). While WhatsApp can therefore potentially make teams more efficient, it must be used in conjunction with established guidelines and policies.

Research into the use of WhatsApp in education has also been carried out. These researchers found that WhatsApp enables teachers to get to know their pupils better and fosters a sense of integration among pupils. It can also assist pupils' interaction outside the classroom and stimulate them to be active in their studies (Durgungoz & Durgungoz, 2022:8). Although this findings are confined to an educational milieu, it suggests a more general principle: that WhatsApp can foster social constitutionalism and social cohesion in any group by enabling more continuous informal contact. Nevertheless, even in the educational case, some limits were needed to prevent over-utilisation of the opportunity provided by WhatsApp to contact pupils outside classroom time.

Another related area of research emerges from the field of management and business studies. Wushe and Shenje found that, by looking at government employees in Zimbabwe, the use of social media in the workplace (and WhatsApp is one of the primary platforms) was positively associated with engagement in the workplace but negatively with employees' intention to leave. The use of WhatsApp by employees at work appears to be beneficial, as it is reasonable to conclude that if employees are permitted to use tools like WhatsApp for interaction at work, they are more likely to feel engaged with their colleagues and the organisation, and consequently may have a lower intention to leave. However, the study cautions that overutilisation may lead to decreased productivity in the organisation, as there comes a time when networking (chattering) or connectivity becomes unproductive in terms of what organisational productivity needs to survive. This would show the need for substantial balance in performance (Wushe & Shenje, 2019:3).

Astudillo-Rodas was working from a mixed-method study of public servants in Palmira, Colombia. His study pointed out that WhatsApp has 'altered internal communications', speeding up coordination while further compounding the plethora of already existing communication tools by adding yet another tool to the available channels, thus pressurising employees to manage their communication processes via coping mechanisms (Astudillo-Rodas, 2024:12). Research demonstrates that workers experience increased levels of stress regarding their use of chat applications for organisational purposes, as they are concerned about whether the conversations will be appropriately stored in accordance with organisational documentation guidelines. Researchers have provided recommendations to workers on messaging practices and the responsibilities of prompts to help increase operational productivity in the future.

Research across multiple industries and countries indicate that WhatsApp has high potential to improve team communication efficiency, increase employee engagement, and ultimately produce better results for organisations. However, organisations need to have appropriate structures to handle human-related issues, such as ensuring employees do not become overwhelmed by messages, creating boundaries between work and personal life, protecting confidential information, and maintaining professionalism.

2.6.2 Overload, stress and moderated usage

This review will now focus on studies examining the relationship between employees' use of instant messaging, such as WhatsApp, and their workloads and stress. Yang and Feng studied 235 subjects to see how the use of mobile instant messaging (MIM) affects perceived workload via interactivity and job interruptions. Using questionnaires to assess MIM use, interactivity, job interruptions, perceived workload, and communication quality, the mediation analysis revealed that MIM use affects workload indirectly through increased interactivity, which in turn lowers perceived workload, while increased job interruptions increase it. The authors claim that instant messaging, in and of itself, is not disruptive, but rather that disciplined norms, such as channel-specific rules and quality communication should be employed to leverage the benefits of interactivity while minimising interruptions (Yang & Feng, 2025). One of the primary strengths of electronic business communication is that it is faster and less expensive than traditional means of communication. The lack of communication can be harmful, but overcommunication would mean a surplus of input or too many subjects to recipients, leading to a loss of concentration (Terkan & Serra, 2020:4).

In another study, investigating the use of KakaoTalk among 434 South Korean office workers, Cho and colleagues developed a model linking MIM-related overloads (information, communication, and system feature overload) to role ambiguity, role conflict, burnout and turnover intention. Path analysis revealed that information overload and system feature overload significantly increased role ambiguity and role conflict. Communication overload, however, did not substantially predict these stressors. Role ambiguity and conflict subsequently led to emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, thereby increasing the intention to turnover. Information overload has the most potent effects on role stress, emphasising again the need for a communication inflationist-friendly method of dealing with information flows and system complexity, such as using WhatsApp (Cho *et al.*, 2019).

Companies can adopt policies by setting up specific times for information sharing and communicating vertically, rather than relying on ad hoc communication and continual messages. Furthermore, utilising some of WhatsApp's features, such as muted replies or status (busy or

offline), may help reduce interruptions. At the same time, they can be solved by creating a general ambience of work where staff feel that they have permission to disconnect at any time. By doing so, it is hoped that the positive aspects of WhatsApp (real-time collaboration, speed of interactivity) will flourish, while mitigating the negative aspects (constant interruptions, information overload).

2.6.3 Reviews and guidelines for sustainable WhatsApp use

To synthesise best practices, it is helpful to review recent studies and expert recommendations on using instant messaging professionally. Sulistiani and Al-Amin's literature-based review catalogues the advantages and disadvantages of instant messaging platforms for professional communication. This study states that applications such as WhatsApp, Slack and Teams enable real-time coordination, effectiveness and location-independent collaboration, providing flexibility for teams to work from any environment. They also highlight known issues, namely risks to data security and privacy, distraction from the constant notifications, ineffective information management and reduced professional boundaries (Sulistiani & Al-Amin, 2025:2-3). In order to reconcile the tension between the benefits and the detriments of each of these advantages and disadvantages, the authors advocate for a "working wisely" strategy that is comprised of digital hygiene, time management and ethical communication practices. The authors recommend using apps with end-to-end encryption, controlling notifications, and defining the boundaries of work and personal life as directly applicable to any organisation utilising WhatsApp (Sulistiani & Al-Amin, 2025).

Similarly, a study by Samsura *et al.* explores the stressor–strain–outcome (SSO) model in relation to excessive use of WhatsApp in an Indonesian mining company. Through the analysis of data collected from 219 employees, the authors examined the effects of excessive WhatsApp use on job stress. They demonstrate that the use of WhatsApp significantly predicted communication overload, but interestingly, did not significantly predict information overload within the group studied. The authors concluded that overload is the process through which the use of WhatsApp affects stress, and that measures to reduce the number of messages and notifications after hours will help, rather than seeking to remove WhatsApp from the mix altogether (Samsura *et al.*, 2024).

Willie's narrative review constitutes a study of the South African workplace and synthesises literature dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp. The review admits that WhatsApp accelerates efficiency and connectivity, but also that mobile devices can cause work-life imbalance, overload of information and questions regarding the security of information (Willie, 2025). The study highlights that information streams that flow perpetually, combined with the near-total lack of professional supervision, can lead to technostress, interruptions, and forms of

annoyance and harassment. To counter this situation, Willie suggests instituting clear rules governing the skilled use of WhatsApp, which include the withdrawal of after-hours communication, the right of an employee to disconnect, the need to institute structured communication to prevent overload, and making encrypted channels and training a priority. Using WhatsApp in this way, while complying with the Data Protection Acts/Regimes (e.g., POPIA) and the well-being of their employees, will help facilitate the use of WhatsApp for managers as well as for their subordinates (Willie, 2025).

Literature-based recommendations on managing WhatsApp communication better:

- Implement the international standards of practice for the use of WhatsApp (e.g., encryption and work-life balance).
- Establish WhatsApp office guidelines tailored to your region/local community (e.g., accommodate multilingual communication and varied technology access in South Africa).
- Educate and govern the use of WhatsApp by establishing guidelines.

There are numerous advantages to using WhatsApp as an internal communication tool for businesses seeking to coordinate and connect quickly. However, organisations should provide a proper structure and rules to manage the disadvantages better.

2.7 SUMMARY

This literature review illustrates the multifaceted nature of utilising WhatsApp as a tool for internal communication. Although WhatsApp offers a quick way to communicate in a timely manner, which can enhance productivity and morale among employees, the literature identifies several barriers to its use. Barriers include information overload, fuzzy lines between work and personal life, miscommunications, and data security issues. In addition to these barriers, the literature suggests that South Africa's rapid adoption rate of WhatsApp, combined with its diverse culture, will exacerbate these problems. The literature also emphasises that developing formal policies, training users and being culturally sensitive are all essential factors when utilising digital communication to support organisational goals rather than inhibit them.

WhatsApp is faster and less expensive than traditional communication mediums. Timely communication helps avoid misunderstandings and enables projects to continue moving forward. Poor communication within organisations may lead to decreased productivity and negatively impact overall company performance. With the use of WhatsApp for communication, managers

may be members of dozens of different work groups and receive anywhere from 15 to 30 messages per hour via WhatsApp, in addition to receiving personal WhatsApp messages, emails, internal CRM system notifications, face-to-face meetings, video conferences, audio messages, and phone calls.

As a result, management teams may feel overwhelmed due to continuous communication stimuli, which makes it increasingly challenging to determine which information is important and what can be ignored, and ultimately causes a blending of personal and professional life. Additionally, textual WhatsApp messages do not contain the same contextual clues as verbal communication and/or non-verbal body language, such as facial expressions and gestures, which may cause the manager to interpret the message incorrectly, resulting in possible confusion or conflict. Finally, because of the short duration of the chat, the instructions may be misinterpreted, which may result in incomplete tasks.

Using WhatsApp can result in a number of obstacles due to language varieties and cultural differences (e.g., the use of slang and emojis). The meaning of a casual comment or emoji can vary between cultures. Therefore, it is important to develop better management strategies for WhatsApp. This qualitative study will explore how managers utilise WhatsApp to offer assistance and recommendations to organisations that are interested in implementing and managing WhatsApp internally. Additionally, the findings of this study may inform the creation of guidelines to support effective WhatsApp utilisation for internal communication purposes, promoting communication and team collaboration among employees, and reducing employee workload.

Utilising WhatsApp more effectively as an internal communication platform will likely have a positive impact on manager productivity and employee well-being. Chapter 3 will now describe the methodology employed in completing this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework of this research. Using an interpretive research philosophy in combination with descriptive qualitative methods, this study examines how managers perceive WhatsApp as a tool for communication in their workplaces. In contrast to quantitative studies that may provide statistical measures of social media tool use or studies that develop generic propositions, this research aims to capture the meanings and significance of participants' lived experiences of using digital forms of communication in their workplaces. Chapter 3 outlines the epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying the researcher's approach, as well as the sampling methods, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations pertinent to the research, and the study's limitations. By providing transparent descriptions of the methodological processes used in this research, the reliability and validity of the study are ensured.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are directly connected to the objectives and will guide the methodology:

3.2.1 Main research question

What are management teams' perceptions of the facilitators, barriers, strengths and weaknesses of using WhatsApp for both formal and informal communication in a South African sales company?

3.2.2 Secondary questions

- How do different management departments at a South African sales company use WhatsApp as their primary communication tool?
- What affects management teams' happiness and motivation while utilising WhatsApp as their primary internal communication tool?
- What are management teams' most significant concerns about WhatsApp-based internal communication techniques in South African sales companies?
- How can South African sales companies enhance WhatsApp-based internal communication strategies to align with global best practices and address local challenges,

while offering results-driven improvements in WhatsApp-based internal company communication?

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM, METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

Essential issues in this research proposal are the ontology and epistemology that underpin the investigation of WhatsApp's usage experience as the principal communication tool in a corporate setting. Understanding the ontological foundation for a study of a sales company's usage of WhatsApp as a method of communication involves understanding the fundamental nature of what exists in terms of the organisation using WhatsApp as the preferred form of communication. This includes studying the existence and characteristics of WhatsApp as a communication channel and the impact of its use on communication and relationships between employees within the organisation. The study employs the interpretivist paradigm, which is best suited to investigate the lived experiences and the subjectivity that managers attach to their use of WhatsApp as their primary means of communication. The interpretative paradigm provides for the study of social processes from the perspectives of individuals involved, thus allowing for a qualitative study of managerial perceptions (Bell *et al.*, 2021:45).

The interpretivist paradigm is an alternative to positivism, which is based on the idea of a measurable, objective world and quantifiable facts. Interpretive paradigms allow researchers to explore and understand the complexities of human experience, organisational relationships and communication processes within organisations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:163). The researcher chose to use the interpretive paradigm instead of positivism because the goal of the study was to explore and develop an understanding of the individual realities and meanings created by the managerial team, rather than to find general laws and cause-and-effect relationships. While the critical paradigm explores power and inequalities in society (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009:78), it has limited application to this study. The interpretivist paradigm fits best to the study as it recognises the complexity of human communication and provides a better understanding of the effects of using WhatsApp as a communication tool on organisational interactions, decisions, and employee engagement (Bell *et al.*, 2021).

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

Qualitative researchers generally use literature that supports a "learning from the participant" approach, as opposed to imposing their own questions with their own perspectives in mind. Qualitative research is primarily an exploratory approach to research. In cases where the research literature has little information about a topic or population, researchers will often have to rely on participant feedback for understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:59). In grounded theory, case

studies, and phenomenological investigations, literature is rarely employed to establish the context. Qualitative studies should begin with a minimal literature review to express an inductive design, unless the design type necessitates a more extensive literature review. This includes selecting the most suitable position for literature in qualitative research, considering the project's target audience, and typically placing it at the beginning to frame the problem, in a different section, or at the conclusion to compare findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:60).

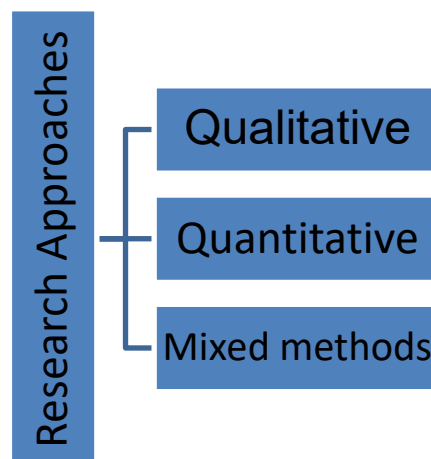


Figure 4: Illustration of research approaches.

Adapted from (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

This study employed a qualitative approach, as it is necessary to gather the viewpoints and experiences of participants to obtain the most valuable and multifaceted data. Researchers in qualitative research prioritise understanding participants' perspectives on a topic or issue rather than their own or the literature's interpretation. Data is collected at the site where participants experience the subject or problem under study, and do not often send out tools or coerce someone into a controlled setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:225). Qualitative researchers inductively organise data into abstract units to identify patterns, categories and themes. In this inductive method, researchers iterate between topics and the database to create a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:226). This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to explore management perspectives on WhatsApp use, cultural barriers, and communication strategies within a South African sales company. Unlike quantitative research methods that emphasise statistics and numerical data, qualitative research provides deeper insight into the experiences of managers using WhatsApp for internal communication at work (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:59). Semi-structured interviews provided respondents the opportunity to express their experience, which provided rich and detailed descriptions that cannot be obtained from surveys and other quantitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:94). The research

design is organised to maintain consistency among the issue description, objectives, data collection methods, and analytical approaches, as depicted in the figure below.



Figure 5: Research design flow diagram.

Source: Author's own

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative researchers use emergent methods, where the initial plan is likely to change during the research process. After starting data collection, the researcher may adjust or modify some or all of the process steps. Changes in questions, data collection forms, individuals researched, and venues visited may occur. These shifts suggest that researchers are undertaking a more in-depth exploration of the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative research is used to gather information from individuals about a problem or issue, and to remedy it (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:226). In qualitative research, a descriptive method involves close data analysis, limited frameworks, interpretation, and categorisation of information into themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:228).

This method is most applicable to this study, as it provides a foundation of information to start the research from, and one can clearly conclude from this information. Qualitative descriptive research can "borrow" from grounded theory and phenomenology due to its flexibility. However, this flexibility has raised concerns about study inconsistency and researcher complacency. Researchers must disclose their thought processes and reflectively assess themselves as they carry out a research investigation to ensure their work is valid and reliable (Doyle *et al.*, 2020:443-455).

Qualitative descriptive methods provide a viable means to achieve a direct and simple understanding of the perceptions of individuals directly involved in a particular experience as part of a research study's objective to determine the perceptions of individuals. Because of its ability to produce findings that can be easily translated into practical application for use in developing policies and informing practice, qualitative descriptive methods are instrumental.

This study employed semi-structured interviews as its primary method for collecting data from participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, fulfilling the study's objectives within a qualitative paradigm that focused on descriptive analysis. A goal of the study was to create a comprehensive understanding of how WhatsApp affects workplace communications, team collaboration, and organisational performance. The researcher employed an inductive analysis method as the basis of the research process. The purpose of an inductive analysis method is to permit the researcher to allow themes and patterns to emerge naturally from the data collected, instead of testing an established theory (Creswell & Poth, 2017:145). In general, inductive methodology is most applicable in qualitative research because it allows researchers to establish theories that evolve from empirical observation, rather than applying existing frameworks to the data collected (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:210). Through systematic analyses of the themes and patterns within the responses provided by the managers participating in the study, the researcher determined the extent to which WhatsApp was being utilised as a viable organisational communication platform. Inductive reasoning was employed to develop theories based on the collected data. Inductive methods are most applicable when conducting research in areas where there is limited knowledge or little research has been conducted in that area.

3.5.1 Design Map

Problem Statement

→ *WhatsApp's unregulated use in South African sales companies causes communication challenges.*

Research Questions

- *How do a management team's departmental experiences with WhatsApp vary?*
- *What drives satisfaction and motivation?*
- *What obstacles hinder communication?*
- *How can WhatsApp usage be optimised?*

Methodology

- *Qualitative descriptive design | Inductive approach | Thematic analysis*

Data Collection

- *Semi-structured interviews with 8 team members in a management team*

Data Analysis

- *Thematic coding (ATLAS.ti) → Emergent patterns (overload, cultural barriers)*

Findings

- *Contextual insights into WhatsApp's role, challenges, and opportunities*

Theory Development

- *Framework for balancing immediacy, well-being, and cultural sensitivity*

Recommendations

- *Policy frameworks | Training modules | Tool integrations*

3.5.2 Time Frame

This study takes a cross-sectional view, therefore, all the data for this study were collected at a single point in time, rather than through a process of longitudinal observation. The cross-sectional approach is appropriate because this study seeks to measure the management team's perception of WhatsApp as a primary means of communication at one particular time (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:212). Interviews were conducted in September 2025, utilising a sample of the sales company's management team.

Cross-sectional studies are the most common type of qualitative study because they provide a snapshot of the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of participants at a given point in time. Cross-sectional studies ensure that the results of the study reflect the current context of the business communication environment (Creswell & Poth, 2017:148).

3.5.3 Study demarcations

To establish a local context for the role of WhatsApp as a primary internal communication tool, the study is confined to South Africa, specifically to a sales company operating out of offices in Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch, Kathu and Roodepoort. South Africa has numerous linguistic and cultural influences on how communication is achieved within a workplace, so limiting this study to only these four locations will provide the researcher with a quality-rich qualitative data set.



Figure 6: Stellenbosch office (GoogleMaps, 2025a).



Figure 7: Potchefstroom office (GoogleMaps, 2025b).



Figure 8: Roodepoort offices (GoogleMaps, 2025c).

3.6 INCLUSION- AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

This study employed explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for participant selection. The inclusion criteria detail the minimum characteristics participants should possess for participation, while the

exclusion criteria detail the maximum characteristics which would render participants ineligible for participation (Creswell & Poth, 2017:150).

3.6.1 Inclusion criteria

1. The Participant is part of the management team at the sales company.
2. The participant has used WhatsApp internally for at least six months within the organisation.
3. The participant is located in one of the four locations: Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch, Kathu or Roodepoort.
4. The participant will agree to participate in semi-structured interviews and provide insights into their experiences.
5. The participant provides informed consent to be involved in the study.

3.6.2 Exclusion criteria

1. Employees who are not in a management role within the organisation.
2. Employees who do not use WhatsApp for internal communication regularly.
3. New employees with less than six months of WhatsApp experience in the organisation.
4. Participants who decline to participate or do not consent to interviews.
5. Participants on leave or unavailable during the study period.

These criteria are necessary to ensure that participants selected are relevant to the study's objective of studying WhatsApp as a primary communication tool in a South African sales company.

3.7 POPULATION AND STUDY FIELD

The population refers to the specific group of individuals being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:197). This study has targeted a wide array of sales management personnel, including executive leadership personnel and various types of departmental managers, such as those from human resources, operations, and sales functions. Broad inclusion enables this study to thoroughly assess how different departments utilise WhatsApp for their unique communication needs. The results of the study will provide an overall assessment of the role of WhatsApp in

organisational communication and identify the opportunities and challenges experienced by each department, providing the foundation for organisations to develop lasting and robust digital communication frameworks.

25 managerial staff members work at the organisation being studied. Four geographical offices - Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch, Kathu and Roodepoort - comprise the base of the study's participants. In addition to sales, the four participating departments are human resources, operations, information technology (IT) and executive leadership. Through purposive sampling, eight participants were selected to be part of the study to provide departmental representation from the four offices. A representation of ages, ranging from 23 to 39 years, is present, as generational differences are a common factor in differing views about adopting workplace technologies, such as using WhatsApp for professional purposes.

The goal of this study was to engage sufficient numbers of participants to provide a representative sample of the variability present among offices, age ranges, and locations, while assessing the impact of these variables on the participants' perception and experience of using WhatsApp for professional purposes. The research design intended to include a minimum of two participants from each of the four office locations to ensure both adequate sample representation and sample saturation of this diversity. According to Creswell's framework, in qualitative studies, "sample saturation" occurs when participants contribute no new information to the data collected. While data quantity is important to determine an adequate sample size, it is secondary to data quality (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:202).

3.7.1 Sampling method

The entire population was targeted first, as it meets the study's necessary criteria. A purposive sample was employed to select eight management team members from the sales company to participate in the interviews, with two participants per company venue (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:197). A qualitative and descriptive design determined the sample size for this study. Participation remained voluntary, even with the backing of the CEO and top management.

Cohen *et al.* (2013:464) define sampling as the process of selecting specific individuals, environments, occurrences, or actions to observe or investigate. A descriptive method was followed with at least 8 participants selected. An estimated sample size is one solution to the issue of determining an appropriate sample size. The concept of saturation originates from grounded theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:229).

3.7.2 Sample size

With a population of only 25, the entire population would be targeted, and from there, purposive sampling was applied to also consider the business's needs at the time of the research, examining the management team's experiences using WhatsApp as a primary communication tool in their sales company. The study would stop at saturation if saturation is achieved before interviewing eight candidates. According to Creswell, "sample saturation" is the point in qualitative research where no new information can be obtained from participants, indicating that sufficient data have been collected to fully understand the phenomenon being studied, and that further data collection would not yield any new insights. Data quality, not quantity, is a key factor in determining an adequate sample size (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:202). A total of eight participants in this research was sufficient to provide a variety of opinions, demonstrating and detailing the diversity of viewpoints.

This purposive sampling strategy used in this study is aligned with the objectives of this study:

- **Departmental differences** - Participants were selected who represented the different use patterns of WhatsApp across various departments (human resources, operations, sales, and senior/executive levels), as well as the role of WhatsApp in providing managerial functions.
- **Views of management** - Senior management and mid-level managers were both included in the participant pool to investigate and understand the communication methods, barriers and practical techniques associated with workplace WhatsApp adoption.
- **Well-being, motivation and performance** - Views from a range of organisational areas were collected to assess the impact of WhatsApp on employee well-being, motivation and work performance. This provided the opportunity to explore how the implementation of WhatsApp may vary across organisational contexts.

The framework of sampling has been deliberately designed to cover all dimensions of the workplace utilisation of WhatsApp investigated in this study. The intentional design has enhanced the validity of the findings and their generalisability to similar business contexts.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Semi-structured interviews consist of a set of questions, yet still allow flexibility in the sequence or order of these questions (Bell *et al.*, 2021:270). Primary data collection in this study was done through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview method was selected for its

ability to provide an in-depth understanding of management teams' use of WhatsApp as an internal communication tool. Semi-structured interviews provide a degree of flexibility, therefore, the researcher can continue to probe further into certain areas of interest that arise during the course of the interview to collect high-quality, qualitative data.

Data collection followed a clear sequence:

A comprehensive interview guide was prepared with open-ended questions specifically designed around the research goals. This was followed by recruitment - reaching out to potential participants by email and beginning the consent process right from that first contact. The scheduling of interviews required working with participants to establish a mutually convenient time, thereby increasing the likelihood that each participant would be able to participate in an interview. Wherever possible, the interviews were conducted face-to-face, however, for participants located at remote sites, the interviews were conducted via MS Teams. All interviews were conducted with the participants' consent. Each interview was recorded to ensure that an accurate transcript could be prepared from the recording. Thematic analysis was the methodology employed to analyse the collected interview data, identifying themes and patterns across all interview transcripts.

Table 1: Interview schedule

Date	Time	Participant	Interview Venue
2025/09/04	13:00-14:00	Participant 1 (P1)	Face-to-face, Location A
2025/09/04	14:00-15:00	Participant 2 (P2)	Face-to-face, Location A
2025/09/09	13:00-14:00	Participant 3 (P3)	Face-to-face, Location B
2025/09/10	13:00-14:00	Participant 4 (P4)	Face-to-face, Location A
2025/09/10	14:00-15:00	Participant 5 (P5)	Face-to-face, Location C
2025/09/10	15:00-16:00	Participant 6 (P6)	Face-to-face, Location A
2025/09/11	12:00-13:00	Participant 7 (P7)	Online MS Teams Location D
2025/09/12	13:00-14:00	Participant 8 (P8)	Online MS Teams Location D

(Source: Author's own).

3.8.1 Data tools

Semi-structured interviews provided an ideal way to understand how participants truly thought about and experienced the issues being investigated. A semi-structured interview format allows the researcher to be flexible while still focusing participants' conversations around specific study questions. This allows the researcher to explore new avenues of discussion in real-time, ultimately providing a more comprehensive understanding of what they are finding (Bell *et al.*, 2021:270).

Interview questions allowed participants to provide extensive, detailed responses. Additionally, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed participants to have the opportunity to be probed or asked additional questions based on their responses. Open-ended questions are most effective when used to obtain the type of rich, contextually based data that qualitative research requires (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:314).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected through the interviews, the interview questions were designed to align with the study's objectives. Questions related to participants' personal experiences and perceptions may have less potential for social desirability bias than those that ask for factual data. This design approach is likely to capture the voice of the participants, therefore, capturing the participants' authentic responses is essential in qualitative studies. Privacy and confidentiality of the interviews help create an environment where participants feel comfortable in giving sensitive information (Dempsey *et al.*, 2016:482).

3.8.2 Technology used

The research was conducted using a structured and secure approach to capture data during interviews, manage that data, and analyse it to support the maintenance of both organisational and data integrity. Once participant consent has been obtained, all semi-structured interviews were recorded through either a digital recorder or through a secure video conferencing platform (e.g., Zoom or Teams) for remote interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to allow accuracy. The use of automated transcription software (e.g., Otter AI) follows this transcription process to assist in verifying accuracy, and also to record non-verbal cues from participants, such as tone and pauses, that could influence interpretation. To guarantee data privacy and confidentiality, all audio recordings and transcripts are stored in an encrypted format and on a password-protected external hard drive and a secure cloud-based storage solution (e.g., OneDrive with controlled access). Access to the raw data will be limited to the researcher and study supervisor, ensuring that all ethical guidelines regarding the protection of participant data are met (e.g., POPIA regulations in South Africa). Participant transcripts did not contain any identifiable information and were replaced with a pseudonym to protect the participant's anonymity.

3.8.3 Thematic analysis

Analysis of the interview data was conducted via thematic analysis, using the six-phase structure developed by Braun and Clarke for organised thematic analysis. Following an immersion in the transcribed data to develop a deep understanding of the content, preliminary themes are identified based on prominent features or patterns evident throughout the interview data. The preliminary themes are grouped to generate subthemes, which are then reviewed for relevance to the original

data. These subthemes are then further refined and defined, leading to the establishment of clearly defined and labelled categories (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Coding for this study was completed in a data-driven fashion and did not utilise a theory-driven methodology. The codes generated emerged naturally from the participants' responses. ATLAS.ti was used for developing and connecting codes to the corresponding text segments. Additionally, preliminary findings were shared with participants for validation purposes, and a discussion of the findings occurred between the researcher and supervisor to provide an objective perspective.

During the research process, a reflective journal was used to document the researcher's thoughts, biases, and perceptions before and after conducting interviews. Suggestive questioning was also avoided during the interviews with participants. Follow-up questions were worded to encourage participants to share authentic participant experiences. A separate evaluator (the research supervisor) evaluated the interpretations and confirmed that they accurately represented the participants' perspectives. These processes provided a systematic, ethical and unbiased data collection process, which support the reliability and validity of the study.

3.8.4 Measuring Instruments: validity, reliability, trustworthiness

To ensure consistency in the application of the questionnaire and meet the research aims, the study supervisor reviewed the interview protocol. All questions were designed to be non-leading, and the wording did not influence the direction of participants' answers. The research methods used during this study were consistent; the first eight interviews demonstrated that saturation had been reached and therefore proved the reliability and validity of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:291). Additionally, the researcher's reflective journals provided a rich addition to the dataset, which recorded the interviewer's insight and observations.

Participants' anonymity was protected through the use of pseudonyms, as suggested by Babbie (2020). Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected device. To protect the anonymity of participants, identifying details were deleted from the transcriptions. The transcription protocols ensured that the transcription process was completed accurately using verbatim recording, noting pauses, and recording the tone of participants, as recommended by Gibbs (2018).

3.8.5 Recruitment and fieldwork

The study was conducted within a South African sales organisation and investigated how management teams viewed WhatsApp as an internal communication tool. Access to middle and senior managers was granted through a partnership with the Human Resources department, which acted as the gatekeeper for the study. The fact that the researcher did not possess any supervisory authority over the participants or have prior relationships with them helped eliminate

potential conflicts of interest. If participants expressed reluctance to continue participating in the study, provisions were in place to provide an independent interviewer, thereby protecting the integrity of the collected data. Following guidelines proposed by Denzin *et al.*, (2024:45), participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time and that their participation was strictly voluntary. Contingency plans for recruitment were formulated to assist in addressing any potential problems that may arise when attempting to recruit participants, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2022:229). Eight individuals were identified for inclusion in the study through purposive sampling, which is an adequate sample size for a qualitative study of this type. The initial contact with each individual was made via email, where the purpose and aims of the study were outlined. Following acceptance into the study, written consent was distributed and signed in accordance with established ethical standards.

3.8.6 Research roles and relationships

The role of the gatekeeper is to facilitate participants' access to the study and to uphold ethical and information security standards for the research study.

In this particular study, the gatekeeper was the general manager who had formal authority to enable access to all managers across the organisation that spanned over multiple departments. In addition to serving as the general manager, she also held the position of HR manager. She was responsible for ensuring access to the personal contact details of potential participants and for upholding the ethical guidelines and confidentiality of information during the study. To ensure consistency in the data collection process, the researcher personally collected the data. The research supervisor/committee provided oversight of the ethical standards for conducting the research.

Before collecting any data, the study obtained Institutional Ethics approval through the acquisition of informed consent from all participants involved in the study. The researcher informed participants of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All personal information gathered during the study would remain confidential within the research team. All correspondence and interview documentation would be stored securely and disposed of after the completion of the analysis. Overall, the researchers adhered to ethical principles outlined in Creswell and Creswell (2022:154), in terms of respecting participants, providing procedural transparency and safekeeping of all information collected.

The company's Chief Executive Officer and Human Resources Manager authorised the gatekeeper, which allowed for entry into the worksite and approval for the researcher to work with the management team to complete the study. Participants provided firsthand accounts of their organisational communications, barriers, and organisational culture. As advised by Denzin *et al.*

(2024:45), the researcher used relationship-building skills to minimise the power differential before each interview by engaging in informal conversation with the participant before beginning the formal interview process. The provision of anonymity throughout the research project allows for honest and candid responses from participants (Babbie, 2020:201).

Conducting face-to-face interviews enables a researcher to observe non-verbal communication (body language and facial expressions) that could provide context to the verbal responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:231). Building trust through direct personal contact was essential to allow participants to feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics, such as communication overload. Since four offices would need to be visited to conduct the study, MS Teams interviews were scheduled in the event of travel difficulties (Stellenbosch participants). Scheduling and coordinating interviews via email helped to select convenient times and locations. A voice recorder was used for accurate transcription with the participant's consent. The interviews were limited to 45–60 minutes to maintain focus and allow probing time, as recommended by Saunders *et al.* (2019:544).

3.8.6.1 Relationships in study and gatekeeper interventions

The research was conducted within a South African sales company to explore management teams' perceptions of WhatsApp as an internal communication tool. The researcher is an organisation employee but holds no hierarchical authority over participants. However, access to participants (mid-to-senior-level managers) were granted through collaboration with the company's HR department, and the HR manager also served as the gatekeeper to the study. As the researcher has no hierarchical authority and there is no pre-existing relationship that could skew any responses, there was no conflict of interest, given that the researcher works in a department separate from sales. In the event of a participant's refusal to engage in discussions during interviews, the independent interviewer conducting the interview would collect data accurately and unbiasedly. Participants were also clearly informed that their participation in this research project was voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the study at any time, per guidelines from Denzin *et al.* (2024:45).

3.9 DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured method where participants provided consent and participated in either a face-to-face interview or a remote interview via Microsoft Teams. Interviews were recorded either using a digital audio recorder or Microsoft Teams' built-in recording function, depending on the preference of the participant and/or location of the

participant. In addition to these recordings, field notes were taken during each discussion to identify participants' non-verbal behaviour and contextual information regarding each conversation. Following data collection, automatic transcription software was used to create transcripts of the interviews, which were then manually verified to ensure accuracy and to document pauses and tone of voice from participants during the conversations.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative methodology of analysing qualitative data and is based upon identifying, exploring, and reporting repeating patterns and themes across qualitative datasets (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:333). During the initial stages of thematic analysis, open coding methods were employed. Open coding involves systematically breaking down the raw data into discrete elements and assigning descriptive codes to capture the essence of each element (Braun & Clarke, 2021:53). This allows researchers to develop a greater understanding of the repeated patterns present within the data and the participants' perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021:57). This analytical approach was especially suitable because it supports the extraction of themes connected to workforce engagement, organisational communication practices and workplace culture.

3.9.1 Integration of thematic and narrative analysis

In this case, the researcher used ATLAS.ti software to systematically identify and code emerging themes from the qualitative data and organise them using a structure to interpret the data.

The study utilised both manager narratives and personal accounts to establish the context for abstract concepts by placing them in the actual workplace. This approach allows researchers to examine how the stories told about communication, workplace pressures, and the dynamics between departments connect to larger thematic patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:156).

Code groupings were performed to illustrate relationships and patterns between primary themes. The thematic framework was established in ATLAS.ti and organised according to emerging themes based on their relationship to one another.

In addition to the interview transcriptions, the researchers maintained a complete record of the field observations made during the study, which contributed to the layering of meanings and the documentation of non-verbal behaviours that could have influenced the interpretation of the data. The field notes documentation included consideration of methodology, descriptive accounts and reflective observations, which collectively supports a review of the data according to Emerson *et al.* (2011:15). By reviewing the content of participant interviews through thematic analysis, the researcher identified multiple preliminary themes, grouped them into sub-themes, and eventually identified overarching categories.

This analytical technique was beneficial for identifying repetitive patterns within qualitative data. Early in the analysis process, the researchers employed open coding by breaking down the raw data into individual components and assigning descriptive labels that captured the essence of each piece of data - a process supported by Botma (2022:283). This was an iterative process that required continuous comparison to develop and refine categories of data, resulting in the identification of themes. This approach is suitable for exploratory studies that aim to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Bell *et al.*, 2021:367).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.10.1 Protecting participants' privacy

To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms or codes were used instead of real names in all documentation and reporting. Interviews were conducted privately, with only the researcher having access to the raw data. All data is stored securely in password-protected files to prevent unauthorised access. These files will be retained for 3 years and thereafter destroyed. The interviewer is also objective towards the participants to ensure openness. In South Africa, personal data is governed by the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) No. 4 of 2013, which came into effect in 2021 (POPIA, 2013).

3.10.2 Protecting participant anonymity

Data was de-identified before analysis, ensuring that participant identity is never revealed. Participants were clearly advised of the privacy protections, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences if they wished to do so. The researcher has signed a formal confidentiality agreement, demonstrating a commitment to protecting participants' data. The research design adheres to the guidelines of North-West University's Ethics Committee to ensure that participants are adequately informed about how their rights will be protected throughout the research process, including consent procedures, privacy measures, and the protection of participant data. Literature on ethics emphasises that researchers should obtain written informed consent from their participants as a means of protecting participants' rights (Creswell & Creswell, 2022:112). This was done and is included in the appendices, along with a complete description of the authorisation processes.

Rights of participants summarised:

Informed Consent: All participants were given, read, and signed consent documents that explained the purpose of the research, the privacy and confidentiality measures being used to protect them, and the right to withdraw at any time.

Privacy and Anonymity: The fictitious names used to identify participants ensured their anonymity, and the audio recordings were stored on password-protected, encrypted devices.

Access to Results: Participants could request a summary of the results through email, providing transparency into the research while also acknowledging their participation in the study.

A reflective journal was used to record any potential biases or preconceived notions, as well as insight gained during both the collection and analysis stages. The study supervisor periodically reviewed the researcher's interpretations to confirm objectivity in the thematic identification and analysis of the data. Opportunities were made available for participants to view their interview transcripts to verify accuracy and confirm meaning, thereby minimising the risk of misinterpreting participant responses. These precautions contributed to maintaining high ethical standards while producing credible, objective and participant-centred research results.

3.11 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this research, primarily because participants are asked to allocate time during the day, at work, which may result in reduced productivity. Participants may lose interest if they are repeatedly asked the same thing, and therefore their engagement may suffer. The way interview questions are asked needs to be as clear and as concise as possible so that the session can be completed as quickly as possible.

As far as methodology goes, achieving absolute objectivity is very difficult, and a researcher's own perspective can influence the interpretation of qualitative data, especially during processes like thematic coding. To mitigate against this, the inclusion of peer debriefing sessions and the maintenance of a reflection journal to document personal assumptions and bias throughout the entire research process was implemented, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2022).

Because of the relatively small sample size of this study (eight), it is possible that the number of different perspectives included in the data does not fully capture the diverse perspectives in South Africa's multicultural workplace environment. Therefore, achieving data saturation became a key strategy in addressing this potential limitation (Braun & Clarke, 2021:103), and participant recruitment stopped once the themes in the data began to repeat themselves.

Using a purposive sampling strategy has its own risks, specifically that the researcher may miss hearing the voice of certain departmental employees or employees from particular organisational levels. A stratified sampling plan would allow the researcher to intentionally include managers from each of the primary departments (i.e., sales, HR, Operations, Talent Management), and being open about this limitation is important - the results of the study should be clearly labelled as exploratory insight based on particular contexts rather than universally applicable (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). South Africa has a rich linguistic landscape, with twelve official languages, thus, the study's findings may not generalise well to workplaces where language diversity is much lower. Several other factors may potentially limit the credibility of this study. The power dynamics between the researcher and participants may lead to biased responses. The addition of a co-researcher who has knowledge of the local culture and is familiar with local workplace communications may assist in mitigating some of these issues (Neuman, 2013:139). WhatsApp is continuously updated, and therefore, feature changes may occur, which may influence the results of the study.

Research is always iterative in nature, and as the study evolves, new insights are discovered. Establishing credibility for this study was achieved through several strategies, including cross-checking interview data with existing organisational documentation, such as internal communication policies, and maintaining a thorough audit trail in ATLAS.ti of all choices made during the analysis process.

3.12 DISTRIBUTION OF FINDINGS

The research results are to be disseminated through as many channels as possible to provide maximum relevance for scholars, organisations, and the general population. Distribution is to be done in compliance with ethics and best practices for scholarly communication. A customised report will be developed for the participating organisation, providing an overview of the results along with practical recommendations, including guidelines for implementing WhatsApp and employee development initiatives. All participants' identities will be kept confidential in this report to ensure anonymity. Saunders *et al.* (2019:621) point out that developing "practitioner-friendly" products is important to achieve organisational change through the effective implementation of research results.

To maximise reach, the dissemination plan aims to reach all types of audiences: academic, professional, and the general public. Results will be published in this dissertation, as well as in scholarly articles submitted to peer-reviewed journals specialising in workplace communication, digital innovation, and organisational dynamics. Considering the multilingual nature of South Africa, results will be made available in both English and Afrikaans. Leadership teams will be able

to engage with the results through interactive workshops where they can collaborate to create implementation plans. Participants interested in receiving follow-up information will have the opportunity to receive an individual or group briefing that explains the results and addresses their questions.

3.13 SUMMARY

This chapter has described the research design for exploring managers' perceptions of WhatsApp usage in a South African sales organisation. Grounded in interpretative philosophy and qualitative methodology, the study employs purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews to collect rich descriptions from eight managers representing the organisation's four offices. The chapter outlines the data collection process, highlighting the use of semi-structured interviews, the safe storage of audio files and transcripts, and the application of systematic coding in ATLAS.ti software to find themes in the experiences of the participants. Thematic analysis provides the structure for interpreting the data, whereas careful consideration of ethical issues and the researcher's reflexivity enhances the reliability of the study. The chapter highlights the research's ethical commitments regarding participant confidentiality, institutional approvals, and procedures for obtaining informed consent. The methodological framework of this study sets the scene for the analysis and discussion of the results in the next chapter, providing an opportunity to thoroughly analyse the role of WhatsApp in internal organisational communication and its effects on managerial coordination and strategic thinking.

In the following chapter, the empirical research findings will be presented.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The research methodology employed is qualitative, focusing on the perceptions of WhatsApp use as a means of internal communication among the management team of a sales company in South Africa. The research involved eight semi-structured interviews with representatives from different areas within the sales company (IT, Human Resources, Data Control, and Sales), which provided a rich source of data to support the research objectives. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis, using thematic analysis to identify common themes or patterns in the collected data. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, the researcher employed an inductive coding technique that allowed themes to emerge naturally from the data collected, rather than imposing pre-existing themes or categories on the data. Once the researcher reached thematic saturation, she ceased collecting further data. The researcher determined that eight participants in the study would be sufficient, as no new themes emerged during the final interview. For the protection of the participants' anonymity, the researcher created pseudonyms for each of them. Therefore, throughout this chapter, references to quotes from each participant will include both the quote and the participant's pseudonym. To enhance the reliability of the analysis, member checks were conducted, as well as a comparison of the study's findings with those of other studies investigating workplace instant messaging.

Due to the exploratory nature of this research study, Braun and Clarke's (2006:16-24) inductive thematic analysis was deemed suitable for identifying the managers' perceptions of WhatsApp use without pre-determining the themes before data collection.

This qualitative analysis aimed to identify common words, phrases or themes that would enhance the researchers' understanding and interpretive perspective of this phenomenon. Through this research, five themes and 15 subthemes were identified from the transcribed data. Next, a reminder of the research questions will precede a discussion on the demographics of the study participants, followed by a theme summary table and a discussion of the themes, sub-themes and categories in a logical sequence.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The findings aimed to address the following research questions:

4.2.1 Main research question

What are management teams' perceptions about the facilitators, barriers, strengths, and weaknesses of using WhatsApp as a communication tool for formal and informal communication in South African sales companies?

4.2.2 Secondary questions

- How do different management departments at a South African sales company use WhatsApp as their primary communication tool?
- What affects management teams' happiness and motivation while utilising WhatsApp as their primary internal communication tool?
- What are management teams' most significant concerns about WhatsApp-based internal communication techniques in South African sales companies?
- How can South African sales companies enhance WhatsApp-based internal communication strategies to align with global best practices and address local challenges, while offering results-driven improvements in WhatsApp-based internal company communication?

4.3 DISCUSSION

This section presents a discussion of demographic information, as well as an examination of themes, sub-themes and categories.

4.3.1 Demographic information

The purpose of this research is to explore management's perception of using WhatsApp as a communication tool in a South African organisation. This demographic data provided the researcher with additional information about the background and experience of each participant, which helped the researcher to contextualise the data collected from the participants. The demographic data included the participants' gender and age, their level of current employment, and the number of years they had been using WhatsApp. A summary of the demographic data is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Participant demographics (age, gender, department role, duration of WhatsApp use in current role)

Participant	Age Range	Gender	Management Role	Years Using WhatsApp
P1	36–40	Male	Assistant Manager, HR & Operations	> 5 years
P2	26–30	Male	IT Manager	> 5 years
P3	36+	Female	Supervisor, Sales	> 2 years
P4	30	Female	Manager, Quality Control	~ 9 years
P5	36+	Male	Team Leader, Data Control	1–2 years
P6	26–30	Male	Sales Manager	> 2 years
P7	31–35	Female	Supervisor, Sales	> 2 years
P8	26–30	Female	Assistant Sales Manager	> 2 years

Source: Author's own.

Eight management participants reported daily use of WhatsApp for internal communication, highlighting how deeply WhatsApp has become integrated into the organisation's operational processes. Additionally, a gender-balanced participant sample and participants from various departments were included in the research, which enhances the external validity of the results. The problems experienced by these participants are likely representative of those encountered in other roles as well.

Participants P3, P6, P7 and P8, who are sales managers, could describe WhatsApp's role in a high-pressure, goal-oriented environment. On the other hand, Participants P1, P2, P4 and P5, who are support function managers, could describe WhatsApp's use for coordinating tasks, administration and interdepartmental communication. The variety of roles included in the sample meant that the analysis would capture both the enablers of effective WhatsApp communication and the barriers that may exist across different departments.

The majority of participants had significant experience using WhatsApp at work, therefore, their views would be based on prolonged exposure to the application, rather than first-time use. The participants provided an insightful understanding of the evolving practices and long-term implications of using WhatsApp as an internal communication medium.

The demographic information regarding the participants indicates that there is a highly technology-literate group of senior managers working within the organisation. A large proportion of the participants fall into the young to middle-aged age groups, and they appear to be very proficient in utilising the features of WhatsApp - in fact, this is consistent with broader trends in South Africa, where WhatsApp is highly prevalent in professional environments (Collard, 2025).

The following sections will delve into thematic analysis, discussing these themes through subthemes and categories.

4.3.2 Discussion of themes and sub-themes

Five key themes emerged through an inductive analysis of the interviews. These themes also have a close relationship to the original research questions and represent the main areas of investigation. Each theme will be reviewed in detail, including a summary table of its sub-themes and categories, and then discussed. The participants are referred to as P1-P8 when providing illustrative quotes/examples, or where applicable, references are made to the literature to illustrate the similarities/differences to current research. The themes, subthemes, and categories that emerged from the study are detailed in the following section and summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Themes, subthemes and categories summary table

Theme 1: How do different management departments use WhatsApp?		
Subtheme 1.1: WhatsApp's universal adoption and ease of use	Subtheme 1.2: Formal vs. informal communication on WhatsApp	Subtheme 1.3: Department-specific usage cases
➤ Daily use across all departments (P1, P2, P5) ➤ Rich features of WhatsApp (P1) ➤ Group chats for broad communication (P7 & P4)	➤ Mixed usage (P3 & P8) ➤ Norm setting (P2 & P4)	➤ Heavy WhatsApp reliance in sales teams (P6 & P7) ➤ Lower usage in support/admin departments (P1 & P2) ➤ Varied communication norms (overcommunication vs. brevity) (P4)
Theme 2: Impact of WhatsApp on management motivation and cohesion		
Subtheme 2.1: Enhanced communication efficiency	Subtheme 2.2: Team motivation and cohesion indicate positive perceptions in management's use of WhatsApp.	Subtheme 2.3: Communication overload and stress in the workplace may negatively influence management's perception of WhatsApp usage.
➤ Rapid response and decision-making (P2, P5 & P6) ➤ Real-time coordination and problem-solving (P1, P3 & P4) ➤ Accessibility and transparency (P5 & P7)	➤ Continuous engagement and support (P1 & P4) ➤ Flattened hierarchy and approachability (P3, P6 & P8) ➤ Empowerment and autonomy (P2 & P7)	➤ Message overload and constant "pinging" (P1, P6 & P8) ➤ Always-on culture and work-life interference (P1, P2 & P7) ➤ Anxiety and emotional toll (P3, P5 & P8) ➤ Perceived micromanagement (P5, P6 & P7) ➤ Distraction and reduced focus (P2 & P7) ➤ Emotional misinterpretation (P1, P6 & P8)
Theme 3: Concerns and challenges about WhatsApp use in organisational communications		
Subtheme 3.1: Information overload and clutter	Subtheme 3.2: Blurred boundaries and after-hours intrusion	Subtheme 3.3: Data security and confidentiality risks
➤ Too many groups & messages (P2 & P4) ➤ Difficulty prioritising (P3 & P5) ➤ Notification fatigue (P1 & P6)	➤ 24/7 availability expectation (P1 & P7) ➤ Lack of disconnect protocols (P2 & P4) ➤ Personal vs work mix-ups (P3 & P8)	➤ Sensitive information leakage (P5 & P8) ➤ Lack of corporate control (P2 & P3) ➤ Compliance and legal admissibility (P1 & P6)

Theme 4: Strategies and recommendations for improving WhatsApp communication		
Subtheme 4.1: Formal policies and guidelines	Subtheme 4.2: Training and awareness	Subtheme 4.3: Technical and tool-based solutions
➤ Usage guidelines & etiquette (P2 & P5) ➤ Group management & organisation (P3 & P4) ➤ Boundaries & disconnect times (P1 & P7)	➤ Digital literacy & training (P5 & P6) ➤ Channel selection & best practices (P4 & P7) ➤ Leadership modelling & accountability (P3 & P6)	➤ Leverage WhatsApp features (P2, P7 & P8) ➤ Integration with other systems (P2 & P6) ➤ Adopt alternative tools and monitoring/backups (P3, P4 & P5)
Theme 5: Overall perceptions of WhatsApp usage as a communication tool in organisations		
Subtheme 5.1: Overall strengths & facilitators	Subtheme 5.2: Overall barriers & weaknesses	Subtheme 5.3: Balance & future direction
➤ Speed & efficiency (P2, P4 & P6) ➤ Improved engagement & team spirit (P7 & P8) ➤ Accessibility & ease of use (P1 & P5)	➤ Communication overload & stress (P1 & P4) ➤ Miscommunication & boundary blurring (P3 & P8) ➤ Security & privacy challenges (P5 & P8)	➤ Need for balanced policies & training (P1 & P5) ➤ Change management & adoption of best practices (P7 & P6) ➤ Cultural adaptation, trust & inclusivity (P1 & P3)

4.4 THEME 1: HOW DO DIFFERENT MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANY USE WHATSAPP AS THEIR PRIMARY COMMUNICATION TOOL?

At the South African sales company targeted for this study, WhatsApp has become a default internal communication channel across departments. Managers in different units leverage WhatsApp to organise work, disseminate information, coordinate tasks and maintain team visibility, owing to its ubiquity and ease of use. A recent survey found that 93% of employees use WhatsApp for work, reflecting its penetration in South African organisations (Collard, 2025). The research literature supports the subthemes. Grawe *et al.* (2023) documented that municipal departments developed their own WhatsApp practices as there was no organisational policy, and Mushaathoni (2024) also identified variations in WhatsApp usage in a university setting, which were based on the development of informal rules by departments where there were no guidelines in place. Participants confirmed that WhatsApp's immediacy and group messaging enable faster information flow than email, aligning with literature that notes how instant messaging apps have become a primary means of workplace communication. How WhatsApp is utilised can differ by context and department. Figure 9 illustrates the identified subthemes that will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

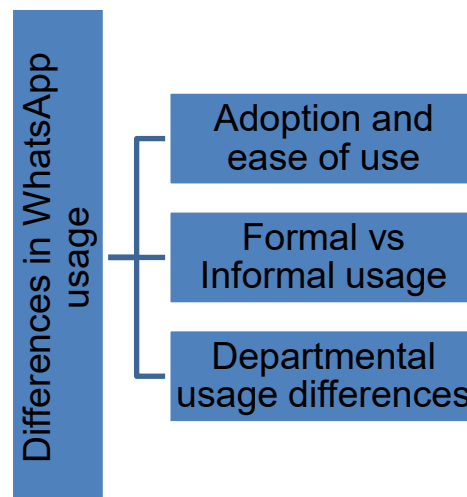


Figure 9: Theme 1 - Differences in departmental WhatsApp use and its subthemes.

Source: Author's own

Table 4: Summary of Theme 1: How do different management departments at a South African sales company use WhatsApp as their primary communication tool?

THEME 1: How do different management departments use WhatsApp?	
Category	Participants
4.4.1 SUBTHEME 1.1: WhatsApp's universal adoption and ease of use.	
4.4.1.1 Daily use across all departments	P1, P2 & P5
4.4.1.2 Rich features of WhatsApp	P1
4.4.1.3 Group chats for broad communication	P7 & P4
4.4.2 SUBTHEME 1.2: Formal vs. informal communication on WhatsApp.	
4.4.2.1 Mixed usage	P3 & P8
4.4.2.2 Norm setting	P2 & P4
4.4.3 SUBTHEME 1.3: Department-specific usage cases	
4.4.3.1 Heavy WhatsApp reliance in sales teams	P6 & P7
4.4.3.2 Lower usage in support/admin departments	P1 & P2
4.4.3.3 Varied communication norms (overcommunication vs. brevity)	P4

Source: Author's own

4.4.1 Subtheme 1.1: WhatsApp's universal adoption and ease of use

The majority of South African mobile users have adopted WhatsApp as their standard mobile instant-messaging application for communication. The main driving factors behind this are WhatsApp's user-friendly interface and rich media capabilities (Collard, 2025; Savio *et al.*, 2021). Managers at each department indicated that every employee utilised WhatsApp daily for business purposes, as many employees were already familiar with WhatsApp, having the application pre-installed on their phones, and did not require further instruction to learn how to utilise it. The sub-theme was categorised into three areas: daily usage across all departments, the features of WhatsApp that enable rich content, and group chats used to facilitate communication among large groups.

4.4.1.1 Daily use across all departments

Every participant in the study emphasised that WhatsApp forms part of their daily work routine. This widespread usage of WhatsApp within the organisation is similar to what has been reported in other areas of South Africa (Collard, 2025). Managers indicated that the ease of use and

availability of WhatsApp were the two significant reasons why it has become the leading communication method in the organisation.

P1: "WhatsApp is our main form of communication for all updates...we actually use it for all communication."

P2: "First app you open and the one you never close".

P5: "WhatsApp is the first app I open in the morning and the last I check at night. It's how we know what's happening."

This aligns with Dixon's (2024) research from the literature review. Dixon notes that WhatsApp's immediacy and accessibility have made it the preferred communication tool for many professionals. This immediacy is a key facilitator of productivity, consistent with findings that easy, mobile messaging can boost project efficiency, as was also mentioned in the literature review (Afridi *et al.*, 2023:1). Alsanossi and Mohammed (2025:3-4) noted that the ease of use, and the many features of WhatsApp have a significant impact on user satisfaction, as well as users' frequency of use of the app. Many of WhatsApp's capabilities, such as group chats, voice messages, and the ability to easily send images, enable managers to communicate with employees in real-time and create an environment where there is minimal friction when coordinating employee tasks. The comment made by Collard (2025) that workers prefer to use WhatsApp instead of email because it is available at all times is also echoed in this example. Using WhatsApp replaces slower communication methods and enables managers to receive information from employees regarding their current status or task completion, regardless of the department they are in, allowing for prompt communication without requiring managers to access different systems to gather information.

4.4.1.2 Rich features of WhatsApp

Several managers also identified that WhatsApp offers a wide range of functionality (for example, voice notes, images, documents and reaction emojis), allowing for more layered and/or richer forms of communication than basic emails. Managers can attach schedules and deadlines as PDFs, provide instant voice note updates on matters and conduct short video calls with their team. The polls feature within a management group allows for easy determination of whether all departments have completed a task by the deadline, enabling immediate contact rather than relying on email and taking extra time. This highlights why WhatsApp has become a "default" for internal communication.

P1: "It's not just chat; you can send a diagram or a voice note. It's everything in one app."

Audio, photo and document sharing capabilities enable departments to rapidly exchange information in real-time, thereby reducing their dependency on multiple systems (Savio *et al.*, 2021:4). Departments can simplify their workflow by utilising these features. Technical teams can send a screenshot of an error in a system, and sales teams can provide a photo of a display or stock shortage for a rapid response.

4.4.1.3 Group chats for broad communication

Managers praised the ability to communicate with entire teams or departments simultaneously by means of WhatsApp groups.

P7: "We have a WhatsApp group for all branch supervisors, so if a customer issue comes up, I can tag everyone and get help straight away."

P4: "When someone breaks a record, we celebrate it in the group and everyone joins in. It boosts morale."

Group chats help foster a sense of unity among team members. Back in the days before WhatsApp, you either had to call each individual or send an email with a large list of addresses to reach a large group of people. Now, you can just have one group on WhatsApp and reach everyone at once. The group chat functionality is an example of how Dos Santos (2021:2) observed that WhatsApp has flattened the hierarchy in which people communicate with one another, making communication more inclusive. Updates are now delivered to all users instantaneously, and this can be particularly advantageous for geographically dispersed teams. Group chats also foster a collaborative environment within your workplace, as teammates support each other by providing advice or congratulatory messages.

4.4.2 Subtheme 1.2: Formal versus informal communication on WhatsApp

Research has indicated that instant messaging systems create a grey area of interaction for employees. Through WhatsApp, both work-related information and social information are communicated to an employee in the same application, allowing employees to be contacted formally or informally by their manager (Mushaathoni, 2024; Woodcock, 2021). In addition to this, employees also reported on how they were mixing formal and informal communication, and on how different departments develop "house rules" about what is acceptable or not acceptable for them to communicate about in this way. As such, two main themes developed from the interviews: mixed use and development of norms.

4.4.2.1 Mixed usage

Managers said that they use their WhatsApp groups to communicate about work and for personal/social uses.

P3: "We post targets and deadlines, but we also post pictures of our kids or pets. It's the same group."

P8: "In the morning, I might remind everyone of the day's sales goals, then someone sends a joke or a happy birthday message."

Both participants have used these two types of communications together. This dual purpose has been supported by research that discusses how WhatsApp can be used formally and informally. Woodcock (2021:7) argued that using WhatsApp allows employees to quickly update each other on tasks but also supports employee cohesion. The interviews indicated that most managers accept the duality of their WhatsApp groups and like being able to access both job-related and personal/social uses of the same app.

4.4.2.2 Norm setting

Participants also highlighted their attempts to remain professional when using WhatsApp for work-related matters. Participants expressed that formal communication will need to transition from WhatsApp to a company record system, which is consistent with those who recommend that formal or confidential communications be sent by a means that a company can store and manage. Some participants also felt that formal decisions or critical data would need to be removed from WhatsApp and placed into a system where the records can be maintained.

P2: "We had to set some rules, because otherwise people share memes in the technical group and important information gets lost."

P2: "Some things should not be on WhatsApp...if it's something with a direct impact or needs a paper trail, it should be an email"

P4: "On WhatsApp, there's not really a process...there's no trace if someone deletes a chat. So if it's something big, we follow up with an email."

Mushaathoni (2024:5-6) noted that, in the absence of guidelines, communication norms vary significantly among employees, and the potential for miscommunication exists. Participants who established expectations regarding content and time of day aimed to develop professional norms and avoid overloading their employees. WhatsApp blurs formal and informal lines, but managers are aware of its limits for formal documentation.

4.4.3 Subtheme 1.3: Department-specific usage cases

The final subtheme for Theme 1 is about the extent to which various business functions utilise WhatsApp. Grawe *et al.* (2021) stated that differences in function justify greater use by departments and less use by others. The results from the interviews found three categories: the sales team's heavy use of WhatsApp, a lower usage by support and administrative departments, and variable communication norms.

4.4.3.1 Heavy WhatsApp reliance in sales teams

Sales managers stated that WhatsApp was an essential tool in order to maintain motivation and momentum in their sales teams.

P6: "We're always on the WhatsApp groups posting targets, competitions, stock levels, everything. It keeps us driven."

P7: "We run everything from our sales groups – posting targets, celebrating wins, running fun competitions – it really drives team morale."

These accounts are similar to Grawe *et al.*'s (2023:5-6) findings on why sales departments use instant messaging so frequently and at such high intensity. Grawe *et al.* found that sales departments often utilise instant messaging due to the immediate feedback and motivation it provides. The instant nature of a WhatsApp message allows sales teams to respond immediately to changes in their target numbers, and allow team members across different locations/branches to communicate with one another.

4.4.3.2 Lower usage in support and administrative departments

Managers in the Human Resource (HR), Facilities, Quality Control and Information Technology (IT) departments used WhatsApp less frequently than managers in other departments. HR stated that he uses WhatsApp for quick confirmations. IT mentioned that he would rather just phone someone when IT messages become long and hard to understand for non-IT employees.

P1: "For quick confirmations or small questions."

P2: "When it gets to a point I have to send a fourth message, I just call – but up to that point, WhatsApp is faster than email."

This aligns with Mushaathoni (2024:1-2), who found that administrative departments tend to favour formal communication methods. They will utilise WhatsApp only when immediate feedback

is necessary. The lower frequency of use enables the control of chat history and the preservation of clear documentation for audit and record-keeping purposes.

4.4.3.3 Varied communication norms - overcommunication vs. briefness

The various cultures within departments created different standards of behaviour concerning message volume and etiquette. IT indicated that his team members (technical) prefer concise communication, as they like one-line text and use emoji reactions to indicate receipt of a message, while not congesting the chat. Conversely, sales managers stated that the sales department often engages in lengthy conversations and sends multiple messages per hour, which can overwhelm other departments with less activity when participating in group conversations involving multiple departments.

P2: "We send one-liner updates and use a thumbs-up emoji to show we saw it - no chit-chat."

P4: "... belong to over 150 WhatsApp groups and receives 80 to 100 messages a day per group."

P6: "We set quiet times after 6 p.m., otherwise people complain about being disturbed."

Mushaathoni (2024) warns that differences in communication style and norms in different departments can lead to misunderstandings, especially in multicultural contexts. This research found that a lack of guidance in digital communication leads to inconsistent practices. In the absence of a policy, teams create their own micro-policies, such as quiet hours or separate groups, to ensure WhatsApp remains effective.

4.5 THEME 2: WHAT AFFECTS MANAGEMENT TEAMS' HAPPINESS AND MOTIVATION WHILE UTILISING WHATSAPP AS THEIR PRIMARY INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TOOL?

Theme 2 examines the factors that impact the happiness and motivation of management teams when utilising WhatsApp as their primary internal communication tool. It encompasses the perceived benefits of WhatsApp that enhance managers' satisfaction and team engagement, such as faster decision-making, better connectivity, and a sense of immediacy/control. It also examines the negative impacts that can diminish motivation, such as feeling overwhelmed or being intruded upon (Cho *et al.*, 2019).

Theme 2 analyses the dual nature of the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp systems through comparing the benefits of improved efficiency and motivation to the disadvantages of communication overload and stress. This theme is divided into three subthemes: enhanced communication efficiency, team motivation and cohesion, and communication overload and stress, as illustrated in Figure 10 below.

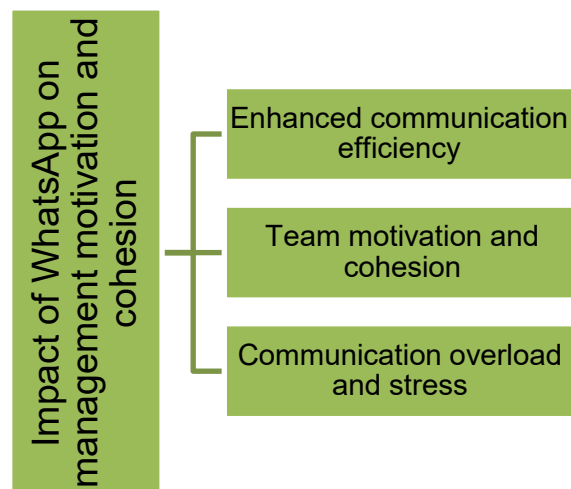


Figure 10: Theme 2 - WhatsApp's influence on communication efficiency, motivation, and team cohesion and subthemes
Source: Author's own

Table 5: Summary of Theme 2: What affects management teams' happiness and motivation while utilising WhatsApp as their primary internal communication tool?

THEME 2:	
Impact of WhatsApp on management motivation and cohesion	
Category	Participants
4.5.1 Subtheme 2.1: Enhanced Communication Efficiency	
4.5.1.1 Rapid response and decision-making	P2, P5 & P6
4.5.1.2 Real-time coordination and problem-solving	P1, P3 & P4
4.5.1.3 Accessibility and transparency	P5 & P7
4.5.2 Subtheme 2.2: Team motivation and cohesion indicate positive perceptions in management's use of WhatsApp.	
4.5.2.1 Continuous engagement and support	P1 & P4
4.5.2.2 Flattened hierarchy and approachability	P3, P6 & P8
4.5.2.3 Empowerment and autonomy	P2 & P7
4.5.3 Subtheme 2.3: Communication overload and stress in the workplace may negatively influence management's perception of WhatsApp usage.	
4.5.3.1 Message overload and constant "pinging"	P1, P6 & P8
4.5.3.2 Always-on culture and work-life interference	P1, P2 & P7
4.5.3.3 Anxiety and emotional toll	P3, P5 & P8
4.5.3.4 Perceived micromanagement	P5, P6 & P7
4.5.3.5 Distraction and reduced focus	P2 & P7
4.5.3.6 Emotional misinterpretation	P1, P6 & P8

Source: Author's own

4.5.1 Subtheme 2.1: Enhanced communication efficiency

Managers' experiences with WhatsApp reveal a mix of empowerment and strain, a finding mirrored in the literature, which describes mobile messaging as both a facilitator of work and a potential source of "technostress". On the positive side, participants overwhelmingly agreed that WhatsApp has improved communication efficiency and responsiveness. They reported that decisions that might previously have waited for an email reply or an in-person meeting can now be made in minutes via a WhatsApp query. This subtheme examines how WhatsApp enhances the speed and clarity of workplace communications, in addition to the platform's rapid nature of communication. As noted in Chapter 2, instant messaging enables employees to quickly communicate and make timely decisions in comparison with traditional methods such as using email or formal meetings (Cho & Lee, 2022; Savio *et al.*, 2021). The managers participating in this research also identified three key elements to the efficiency of communication via WhatsApp:

rapid responses to questions and the ability to make quick decisions, rapid coordination and problem-solving with other workers in real-time, and the access and transparency of all participants.

4.5.1.1 Rapid response and decision-making

Participants consistently remarked that WhatsApp speeds up decision-making. Participant 2 gave a telling example: after moving his IT support team's communications to WhatsApp, he noticed issues were resolved faster.

P2: "You spend less time figuring out the ticket and more time solving the problem... WhatsApp definitely improves response time."

P5: "If a KPI changes, we update the group, and management decides right there. It cuts out so much waiting."

P6: "We can finalise a decision in minutes. Before WhatsApp, we waited hours for email replies; now I ask a question and have an answer almost immediately."

Knowing that one can pose a question and often get an answer momentarily gives managers a sense of progress and momentum in their work, which can be very satisfying. It also reduces the idle time spent waiting for information. Research has found that increased interactivity through messaging can lower the perceived workload by speeding up information exchange, which may explain why managers feel more in control and effective when using WhatsApp. These direct accounts align with research indicating that WhatsApp reduces response times and facilitates faster decision-making (Cho & Lee, 2022).

4.5.1.2 Real-time coordination and problem-solving

WhatsApp enables managers to coordinate tasks and resolve problems on the fly. Participant 3, who works in the sales department, recounted:

P3: "If a branch runs out of stock, we send a message and someone nearby drops off supplies that same day."

P4: "When there's a quality issue, the team posts pictures or videos, and we can fix the problem without a meeting."

P1: "Maintenance issues are sorted in real time; someone posts a photo of a leak and facilities respond within minutes."

Such examples reflect Savio *et al.*'s (2021:4-5) finding that WhatsApp's multimedia capabilities facilitate real-time problem-solving, helping managers to avert possible delays.

4.5.1.3 Accessibility and transparency

Managers appreciated how WhatsApp increases visibility across departments. Anyone on a group chat can see everything, meaning everything is transparent.

P7: "Everybody sees the conversation, not just a few people on an email thread. There are no secrets."

P5: "It's transparent - any manager can look back and see how we made a decision."

Literature from Chapter 2 suggests that such transparency flattens hierarchies and builds trust (Dos Santos, 2021). The read-receipt feature allows managers to confirm message delivery and fosters accountability.

4.5.2 Subtheme 2.2: Team motivation and cohesion

Another uplifting aspect is how WhatsApp can boost team morale and cohesion. The subtheme examines how WhatsApp promotes engagement, approachability and autonomy. Literature on digital communication argues that the sense of immediacy and feedback provided by instant messaging can boost morale and strengthen relationships (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Three categories were identified: continuous engagement and support, flattened hierarchy and approachability, and empowerment and autonomy.

4.5.2.1 Continuous engagement and support

Managers described WhatsApp as a space where teams motivate and encourage one another. Almost all participants mentioned that receiving a good luck message or a congratulatory message improved their moods.

P4: "Every morning we post a motivational quote or a funny meme to start the day; it keeps the vibe positive."

P1: "When someone is having a tough day, colleagues send supportive messages. It feels like someone's there for you."

When employees observe managers using these types of methods in the workplace, it may help build stronger employee-manager relationships by making employees feel that managers genuinely care about their needs and are invested in them. These findings are supported by Wushe and Shenje's (2019:3) research which indicated that when employees are allowed to

communicate through work-issued WhatsApp messages, they report a greater degree of engagement and a lower intent to leave their jobs. Participants' accounts also reflect this, with many referring to WhatsApp as an application that can energise a team when used positively.

4.5.2.2 Flattened hierarchy and approachability

Several participants noted that WhatsApp makes senior managers and even the CEO more accessible.

P3: "I can ask the operations manager a question any time on WhatsApp; before, I had to book a meeting."

P8: "Even our CEO reacts to posts with emojis or short comments, so we're not scared to talk to her."

P6: "WhatsApp breaks down the hierarchy - you can voice your opinion without going through formal channels."

These examples illustrate Dos Santos's (2021:2) observation that instant messaging flattens hierarchies and encourages open dialogue. When leaders are active in chats, they appear more approachable, which in turn strengthens cohesion.

4.5.2.3 Empowerment and autonomy

Managers felt that WhatsApp gives them the confidence to act without constant supervision.

P2: "We can solve many issues ourselves because we have all the information on WhatsApp; we don't have to wait for approval."

P7: "It's not micromanagement; it's trust. We know what to do and just get on with it."

Literature from Chapter 2 highlights how digital tools can empower employees by facilitating quick access to information and decentralised decision-making (Cho & Lee, 2022). This empowerment contributes positively to managers' motivation.

4.5.3 Subtheme 2.3: Communication overload, micromanagement and stress

The participants reported a few negative aspects of their use of WhatsApp, which also affected their general well-being. Studies have identified other adverse effects of frequent messages, such as increasing levels of stress and creating blurred lines between an individual's work and personal life, which may lead to miscommunications (Mushaathoni, 2024). Six categories were included under this sub-theme.

4.5.3.1 Message overload and constant pinging

Many managers complained about the sheer volume of messages. Almost all participants mentioned the high number of messages they receive daily. From observation, the researcher noted the numerous notifications that participants received from WhatsApp work groups during the interview time slot.

P4: "I'm in over a hundred WhatsApp groups and get 80 to 100 messages a day. It's exhausting."

P6: "Sometimes my phone pings every minute - I can't keep up."

P8: "Important messages get buried under jokes and side chats."

These experiences mirror studies highlighting information overload in digital communication (Mushaathoni, 2024; Samsura *et al.*, 2024). Constant notifications ("pinging") can lead to fatigue and decreased productivity, as managers cannot attentively read all messages if there is an overload.

4.5.3.2 Always-on culture and work–life interference

Participants emphasised that WhatsApp extends work into personal time.

P1: "I feel guilty if I don't reply, even at night. My phone's always with me."

P7: "I'm answering messages on weekends and holidays; it feels like you can never switch off."

P2: "Even if you mute the group, you want to know what's happening. It's intrusive."

These sentiments from participants reflect findings that mobile communication fosters an always-on culture, thereby diminishing work–life balance (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010).

4.5.3.3 Anxiety and emotional toll

Excessive messaging triggers stress and anxiety for some managers. In the field notes, the researcher also noted that during the interviews, some participants became nervous because their phones kept receiving work messages, and their anxiety increased as a result.

P3: "It's stressful when you see 200 unread messages-you worry you missed something important."

P5: "I get anxious if I don't respond quickly; I feel like I'm letting the team down."

P8: "Sometimes the constant buzz gives me headaches; it's mentally draining."

These feelings from participants' comments align with research linking digital overload to increased stress and emotional exhaustion (Mushaathoni, 2024; Rana, 2013). Anxiety diminishes motivation and may contribute to burnout.

4.5.3.4 Perceived micromanagement

Some participants felt that constant messaging fosters a sense of micromanagement. Participants feel like they are being watched or checked up on through WhatsApp.

P6: "When you're expected to respond immediately, it feels like someone's watching you all the time."

P5: "Managers ask for updates every hour; it's like they don't trust us to do our jobs."

P7: "We post our work and then get a string of questions; sometimes it feels intrusive."

Literature warns that extensive monitoring via digital tools can be perceived as micromanagement, undermining autonomy and morale (Bizzi, 2018; Yang & Feng, 2025). Such perceptions may counteract the empowerment described earlier in the subthemes of theme 2.

4.5.3.5 Distraction and reduced focus

Frequent notifications disrupt concentration for employees in the workplace. During the interviews, 2 participants also interrupted the interview to check a WhatsApp, even though it wasn't an emergency message.

P2: "You're working on a report and your phone pings - it breaks your flow."

P7: "When there are too many messages, you lose focus on what matters."

Literature cautions that constant digital interruptions diminish productivity (Collard, 2025). In this study, managers acknowledged that WhatsApp can hinder deep work and cause inefficiencies because of a scattered focus.

4.5.3.6 Emotional misinterpretation

Without non-verbal cues, messages can be easily misread or misunderstood in a WhatsApp group. This can easily cause stress for workers and lead to unnecessary stress and possible conflict situations.

P8: "You can't hear tone. A short message can sound angry when it's not."

P6: "I once wrote a blunt message and a colleague thought I was upset; we had to clear it up later."

P1: "Cultural differences play a role - Afrikaans jokes don't always translate well in English."

Research from Chapter 2 highlights that misinterpretations and intercultural misunderstandings can arise in digital communication (Cho *et al.*, 2019; Mushaathoni, 2024). Managers are therefore careful with wording and would read a message five times before sending it, making them less efficient. Even though people do this, miscommunications still occur daily.

4.6 THEME 3: WHAT ARE MANAGEMENT TEAMS' MOST SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS ABOUT WHATSAPP-BASED INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES IN SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANIES?

The third research question addresses the issues that managers experience with using WhatsApp for all their business communications. The literature discussion showed how instant messaging applications can cause users to be overwhelmed by excessive information, create confusion between the sender and receiver, and increase privacy threats when not handled properly (Mushaathoni, 2024; Samsura *et al.*, 2024).

Participants expressed a range of anxieties during the interviews, including constant notifications and the blurring of work and personal life, as well as misunderstandings and a loss of control over their private data. This theme is divided into three sub-themes as illustrated in Figure 11.

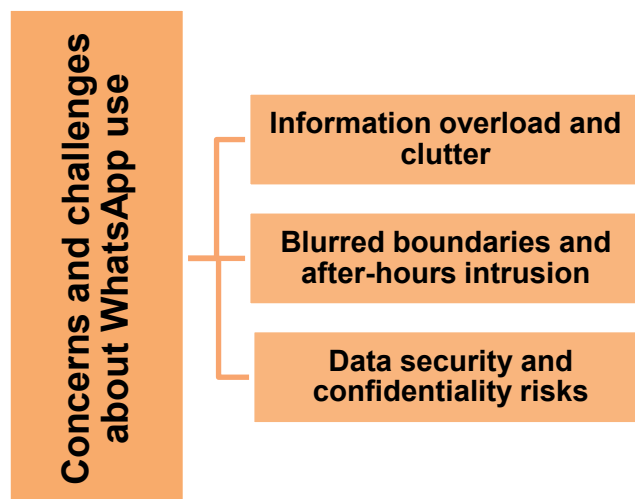


Figure 11: Theme 3 (Concerns and challenges about WhatsApp use in organisational communications) and subthemes

Source: Author's own

Table 6: Summary of Theme 3: What are management teams' most significant concerns about WhatsApp-based internal communication techniques in South African sales companies?

THEME 3: Concerns and challenges about WhatsApp use in organisational communications	
Category	Participants
4.6.1 Subtheme 3.1: Information overload and clutter	
4.6.1.1 Too many groups & messages	P2 & P4
4.6.1.2 Difficulty prioritising	P3 & P5
4.6.1.3 Notification fatigue	P1 & P6
4.6.2 Subtheme 3.2: Blurred boundaries and after-hours intrusion	
4.6.2.1 24/7 availability expectation	P1 & P7
4.6.2.2 Lack of disconnect protocols	P2 & P4
4.6.2.3 Personal vs work mix-ups	P3 & P8
4.6.3 Subtheme 3.3: Data security and confidentiality risks	
4.6.3.1 Sensitive information leakage	P5 & P8
4.6.3.2 Lack of corporate control	P2 & P3
4.6.3.3 Compliance and legal admissibility	P1 & P6

Source: Author's own.

4.6.1 Subtheme 3.1: Information overload and clutter

Participants' identified challenges indicate that, while WhatsApp has advantages in terms of convenience, the tool also poses considerable challenges for working professionals. Participants highlighted that one major disadvantage of using WhatsApp as an informal tool for work, is that it was developed for personal use and therefore does not provide adequate structure or governance for formal workplace communication. Participants highlighted how the sheer volume of WhatsApp messages can become overwhelming. Chapter 2 notes that frequent digital interruptions can lead to reduced productivity and increased stress (Samsura *et al.*, 2024; Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Within this subtheme, three categories were evident: too many groups and messages, difficulty prioritising and notification fatigue.

4.6.1.1 Too many groups and messages

Many managers complained about the sheer number of WhatsApp groups they are expected to monitor and participate in.

P4: "More than 150 workgroups."

P2: "You can easily find yourself in 50 or 60 work groups, you scroll and scroll and still miss things."

P4, a quality control manager, confessed that she belonged to more than 150 groups and received 80 to 100 messages a day, per group. She described it as overwhelming. P2 (IT manager) remarked that cross-departmental projects resulted in dozens of group chats. These experiences mirror the literature that warns how an endless stream of group conversations and excessive information flow can become unmanageable, causing stress and hampering focus (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010).

4.6.1.2 Difficulty prioritising

Related to message volume is the difficulty of identifying which messages require immediate action and which messages can wait.

P3: "Sometimes there are 200 messages, and you don't know which one is the important one. You just skim and hope you didn't miss an urgent instruction."

P5: "There are just too many chats to keep up with."

P3 (sales supervisor) explained that on a typical day, she receives hundreds of notifications from multiple groups, but only a handful are urgent. P5 (data control team leader) remarked that he often triages messages by scanning for @mentions or key phrases because one cannot attentively read all messages. Research shows that when people are bombarded with information without clear filtering mechanisms, they struggle to prioritise tasks and risk overlooking critical updates (Terkan & Serra, 2020).

4.6.1.3 Notification fatigue

A third issue is notification fatigue. P1 (HR and facilities) confessed that the constant pinging of his phone made it hard to concentrate.

P1: "It buzzes all day - WhatsApp, WhatsApp, WhatsApp. After a while you just mute everything and hope for the best."

P6: "When your phone lights up every few seconds, you end up ignoring the group."

P6 (sales manager) described how his team's enthusiasm sometimes translates into dozens of reactions and emojis, noting that he ignores half of it. Excessive notifications not only distract managers but also contribute to stress and burnout, echoing research that identifies communication overload and constant alerts as key sources of workplace tension.

Yang and Feng (2025) argue that disciplined norms are needed to leverage the benefits of interactivity while minimising interruptions.

4.6.2 Subtheme 3.2: Blurred boundaries and after-hours intrusion

This subtheme explores how WhatsApp blurs the distinction between work and personal life. Studies highlight that the always-on culture fostered by mobile messaging blurs these lines and increases the risk of burnout. Willie (2025) notes that the informality and constant stream of messages create dilapidated professional boundaries and contribute to work-life imbalance. Legal scholars have similarly argued for a "right to disconnect," urging employers to codify expectations around after-hours messaging (Cachalia, 2024). Participants likewise felt that WhatsApp expectations spill over into evenings and weekends. The categories in this subtheme are 24/7 availability expectations, lack of disconnect protocols, and personal versus work mix-ups.

4.6.2.1 24/7 availability expectation

Participants overwhelmingly reported that WhatsApp creates an expectation of continuous availability. This always-on notion will ultimately cause work-life imbalances and hinder employee well-being and motivation.

P1: "If I get a message, I always run and look - you don't know if it's work or family. You feel like you can't switch off."

P7: "Even if it's Saturday morning, people think you're ignoring them if you don't reply right away."

These sentiments align with the literature, which notes that the always-on culture induced by messaging platforms erodes work-life boundaries and increases the risk of burnout (Cachalia, 2024).

4.6.2.2 Lack of disconnect protocols

Several managers expressed discontent because of the absence of formal rules governing after-hours communication. Nearly all participants advocated for a clear rule on no-work messaging beyond a certain time. Suggestions ranged from 6 pm (as in some EU contexts) to 8 pm (the current informal company practice).

P4: "There are no guidelines - some people respect quiet hours, others send messages at 10 p.m. and expect action. It's inconsistent."

P2: "Without a company-wide policy, it's hard to enforce; some departments still ping you all night."

Literature advocates for explicit rules governing the skilled use of WhatsApp, including employees' right to disconnect after hours (Willie, 2025). The participants' comments further motivate the need for such policies

4.6.2.3 Personal vs. work mix-ups

Managers also found that personal and professional communications often become entangled. Participants noted that staff sometimes post family photos and jokes in the main sales group.

P8: "It's all mixed - you get a sales update and then someone's baby picture."

P3: "We use the same chat for everything, so your boss might see personal stuff you didn't mean to share."

This mixing can lead to confusion and misinterpretation, particularly in multicultural environments where humour or informal language may be misunderstood. Mushaathoni (2024) reports that a lack of guidelines around intercultural communication leads to erratic practices and misunderstandings. Without explicit norms, differences in tone, language and formality can lead to confusion (Libera, 2025).

4.6.3 Subtheme 3.3: Data security and confidentiality risks

The final concern relates to privacy, confidentiality and legal compliance. Chapter Two emphasises that WhatsApp is a consumer-grade application lacking administrative controls, which raises the risk of data leakage and complicates POPIA compliance (Collard, 2025). Participants shared experiences and concerns related to three categories: sensitive information leakage, inadequate corporate control, and compliance and legal admissibility.

4.6.3.1 Sensitive information leakage

Participants recounted instances where confidential data was shared through WhatsApp.

P8: "People send ID numbers, payslips and even bank details on WhatsApp - it's not safe."

P5: "I've seen invoices go to the wrong chat; imagine if it's client data."

Participants expressed concern that misdirected messages are sometimes sent to the wrong groups. Collard (2025) explains that WhatsApp's straightforward sharing functionality often leads

users to forward content without adequate consideration, increasing the risk of unauthorised disclosure.

4.6.3.2 Lack of corporate control

Another concern is the absence of institutional oversight in WhatsApp being used for corporate communications. All employees can message each other on work-related matters with no control or monitoring actions from management. With WhatsApp's delete feature, people can also delete chats, and important data might get lost.

P3: "There's no admin control. We can't see what happens in private chats or recover messages if something goes wrong."

P2: "If someone deletes a message, there's no trail."

Collard (2025) notes that WhatsApp lacks administrative features and audit trails, leaving organisations vulnerable.

4.6.3.3 Compliance and legal admissibility

Several managers worried about compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and the legal status of WhatsApp communications.

P1: "We could get into trouble if client information is shared on WhatsApp; POPI doesn't play games."

P6: "If there's an issue, can we use WhatsApp chat as evidence? There's no formal policy."

Participants added that they were unsure whether WhatsApp messages are admissible in disciplinary proceedings. Collard (2025) stresses that organisations face potential legal exposure when problematic or unlawful material circulates through work-related WhatsApp groups. Without proper safeguards, employers may contravene privacy legislation and lack evidence for dispute resolution.

Theme 3 explores the fears and concerns associated with the widespread use of WhatsApp among managers in a company for corporate communications. They find it beneficial as a means for rapid communication, however, they have difficulty dealing with excessive messages, the lack of boundaries and the risks associated with security. Unless there are organisational policies and technical safeguards regarding WhatsApp's use, it will be a source of additional pressure on managers and a possible area of liability. Therefore, addressing these issues will require an organisation to develop policies which include limits on the number of groups or notifications an

employee receives, protecting employees' after-hours time and creating protection mechanisms for sensitive data. Strategies developed within Theme 4 were designed to address these issues.

4.7 THEME 4: HOW CAN SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANIES ENHANCE WHATSAPP-BASED INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ALIGN WITH GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES AND ADDRESS LOCAL CHALLENGES, WHILE OFFERING RESULTS-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENTS IN WHATSAPP-BASED INTERNAL COMPANY COMMUNICATION?

The theme addresses secondary research question 4, which focused on the obstacles to using WhatsApp as a means of internal communication. The previous secondary research question focuses on what South African sales companies can do to improve their internal communication via policy, education and technology. In Chapter 2, best practices were reviewed on how to create a defined user policy, educate users about proper etiquette and digital safety, and utilise digital tools to facilitate the effective flow of information between colleagues. Instant messaging is not inherently an obstacle to effective internal communication, but it does require discipline to establish norms or rules specific to each channel of communication, thereby limiting interruptions (Yang & Feng, 2025). Sulistiani & Al-Amin (2025) advocates for developing "Working Wisely" strategies that provide a combination of digital hygiene, time management and ethical communication strategies. Practical recommendations from participants of this study also support these literature findings. Recommendations will be grouped under subthemes as illustrated in Figure 12.

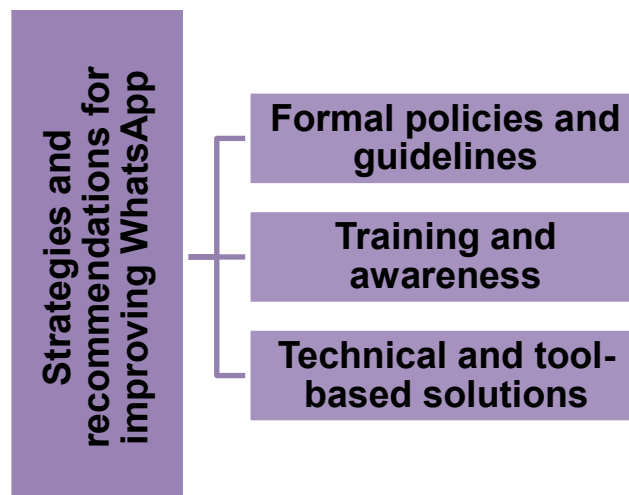


Figure 12: Theme 4 - Strategies and recommendations for improving WhatsApp communication and subthemes

Source: Author's own

Table 7: Summary of Theme 4: How can South African sales companies enhance WhatsApp-based internal communication strategies to align with global best practices and address local challenges, while offering results-driven improvements in WhatsApp-based internal company communication?

THEME 4: Strategies and recommendations for improving WhatsApp communication	
Category	Participants
4.7.1 Subtheme 4.1: Formal policies and guidelines	
4.7.1.1 Usage guidelines & etiquette	P2 & P5
4.7.1.2 Group management & organisation	P3 & P4
4.7.1.3 Boundaries & disconnect times	P1 & P7
4.7.2 Subtheme 4.2: Training and awareness	
4.7.2.1 Digital literacy & training	P5 & P6
4.7.2.2 Channel selection & best practices	P4 & P7
4.7.2.3 Leadership modelling & accountability	P3 & P6
4.7.3 Subtheme 4.3: Technical and tool-based solutions	
4.7.3.1 Leverage WhatsApp features	P2, P7 & P8
4.7.3.2 Integration with other systems	P2 & P6
4.7.3.3 Adopt alternative tools and monitoring/backups	P3, P4 & P5

Source: Author's own

4.7.1 Subtheme 4.1: Policies and guidelines

Participants emphasised that clear policies and guidelines are essential to prevent misuse and overload. Cho *et al.* (2019) found that information and system feature overload increase role ambiguity and conflict, underscoring the need for structured communication. Willie (2025) advocates a "right to disconnect" and calls for rules governing after-hours messaging. This sub-theme contains three categories: usage guidelines and etiquette, group management and organisation, and boundaries and disconnect times.

4.7.1.1 Usage guidelines & etiquette

Managers called for explicit guidelines on what types of messages belong on WhatsApp in this context. Participant 2 suggested drafting a set of rules to distinguish between urgent operational updates and discussions that would be better handled via email or meetings. Guidelines targeting managers themselves include encouraging managers not to expect immediate replies at night, to avoid sending stream messages, and to model good behaviour, such as respecting quiet hours.

Participants implicitly highlighted this need by noting that boundary breaches often come from the top. Clear expectations could normalise healthier communication patterns.

P2: "We need to teach people what belongs on WhatsApp and what doesn't."

P5: "People should say good morning before asking for things and avoid posting sensitive information."

Literature also emphasises the need for guidelines and etiquette when using WhatsApp in an organisation. Sulistiani and Al-Amin (2025:7) recommends 'digital hygiene practices' such as controlling notifications and defining the boundaries of work and personal life.

4.7.1.2 Group management & organisation

Participants advocated rationalising the number of groups and appointing administrators. Managers suggested rules about when to create new groups, who to include, and the group's purpose to reduce conflict and a stream of messages that do not matter in a specific department.

P4: "One group per department is enough; we don't need a new group for every small project."

P3: "Some groups have people who left the company months ago; that creates confusion."

Participants complained about the sheer number of groups they are on, and that receiving constant information on these groups is overwhelming, even though they do not need certain information for their departmental requirements. Participants suggested assigning moderators to archive old chats and remove inactive members. Research indicates that policies like scheduled information sharing and vertical communication structures can help manage group size and reduce clutter (Gupta & Upadhyay, 2019:10).

4.7.1.3 Boundaries and disconnect times

A recurring recommendation was to formalise quiet hours and respect personal time. Participant 7 proposed a company-wide rule that no work messages should be sent after 6 pm unless it is an emergency:

P7: "We need an agreed-upon cut-off so everyone can relax."

P1: "Leadership should stop sending messages late at night if they want us to switch off."

Participant 1 emphasised that managers must model this behaviour if they wish to see the same behaviour in their employees. Literature that supports this urges employers to institute structured communication practices and respect the right to disconnect (Willie, 2025:22).

4.7.2 Subtheme 4.2: Training and digital literacy

Along with formal guidelines, participants stressed the importance of training and capacity building. Chapter 2 highlights that effective communication requires more than rules - staff need to be aware of security risks, digital etiquette and cultural sensitivities. Many participants agreed that employees could benefit from brief training on the professional use of WhatsApp. This would cover tone, appropriate language, respecting cultural differences, and handling misunderstandings. This subtheme includes digital literacy and training, channel selection and best practices, and leadership modelling and accountability.

4.7.2.1 Digital literacy & training

Managers observed that many employees are not aware of best practices for messaging. People will reply with unprofessional language or share the wrong emoji. Participant 5 recommended regular workshops on features such as muting certain groups, star messages, and broadcast lists.

P5: "We should train people on how to use WhatsApp properly, not just throw them in."

P6: "Everyone must understand the legal risks of sharing personal data."

Participant 6 suggested mandatory training on POPIA compliance and data protection so that employees do not share personal information in any work groups. According to the literature, there are recommendations for training users on digital hygiene and ethical communication to balance the benefits and drawbacks of instant messaging (Sulistiani & Al-Amin, 2025:7).

4.7.2.2 Channel selection & best practices

Some managers proposed guidelines on when to use WhatsApp versus other tools. Certain messages are more appropriate in person, on a phone call, or via email if a paper trail is necessary. Managers must also consider other communication methods that will work more effectively than WhatsApp. For example, one participant mentioned that asking seven questions in a group is inefficient if you could create a Google form link and obtain results much faster.

P4: "Formal approvals and sensitive documents should still go through email or Teams."

P7: "It's better to send a Google Form than to bombard the group with questions."

Participant 7 stated that she uses internal portals and surveys instead of sending messages or *spamming* group chats. The literature suggests that when instant messaging system features are overloaded, role conflict and burnout tend to increase (Cho *et al.*, 2019). This proves that choosing the right channel for specific needs in organisational communication can alleviate overload.

4.7.2.3 Leadership modelling & accountability

Training also involves leadership modelling. Participant 3 insisted that leaders set the tone of the company.

P3: "If managers send careless messages or share jokes, others will follow."

P6: "Make managers responsible for moderating groups and setting expectations."

Participants advocated that leaders must model professionalism. Participant 6 agreed that accountability is crucial for managers' efforts in WhatsApp communication. Research emphasises that disciplined norms and quality communication stem from leadership's supportive efforts (Yang & Feng, 2025:6).

4.7.3 Subtheme 4.3: Technological solutions and alternative tools

Beyond policies and training, participants suggested technological solutions and complementary tools to manage WhatsApp effectively. This subtheme encompasses making better use of WhatsApp features, integrating WhatsApp with other systems, and utilising alternative tools, as well as implementing monitoring and backups.

4.7.3.1 Leveraging WhatsApp features

Managers felt that many users underutilise built-in features that could reduce clutter. Participants had inventive ideas for utilising existing or forthcoming features to facilitate the separation of work messages and personal messages. Participant 2 recommended using broadcast lists instead of posting the same message in multiple groups.

P2: "Send it once with a broadcast - it goes to everyone privately and doesn't start a whole conversation."

P8: "We need to teach everyone to star and pin key messages so they don't get lost."

P7: "Leave work groups temporarily when on leave"

Participants noted that star messages and pinned chats help keep important information accessible, and to mute all the groups when going on leave. Literature describes how features such as voice notes, images, presence indicators and mentions aid richer communication and direct attention to the right people (Seufert *et al.*, 2022).

4.7.3.2 Integration with other systems

Integration with other platforms was another suggestion from participants, for instance, using WhatsApp Business API to have official departmental WhatsApp lines (so chats can be monitored and multiple people can respond). Participant 2 envisioned a hybrid of ticketing and WhatsApp – a "best of both" where a WhatsApp message could generate a tracked task in a system. Such integration could bring some order and less clutter.

P6: "We could integrate WhatsApp with our CRM so that when a sale is logged, it automatically updates the group. That would cut down manual messages."

Participant 2 mentioned experimenting with dashboards that collate WhatsApp messages into a searchable archive. Researchers have noted that integrating instant messaging with enterprise systems can streamline workflows and enhance documentation (Samsura *et al.*, 2024:5-6).

4.7.3.3 Adopt alternative tools and monitoring/backups

Some managers advocated using different tools for specific tasks. Many participants noted that knowing when to switch to email or Teams is important.

P4: "For formal approvals and sensitive documents, we should use email or Teams - not WhatsApp."

P5: "We need a way to backup chats and recover them if someone deletes messages. That's important for compliance."

P3: "We can't rely on people to save evidence themselves."

Participant 7 stated that she prefers using internal portals for surveys over group chats. Participants also called for systems to monitor and archive chats. Participant 3 suggested designating administrators to export chat histories. By consciously complementing WhatsApp with other tools, the company can mitigate WhatsApp's weaknesses. Managers effectively suggest a more structured communication toolkit, where WhatsApp is one tool among many, not the sole communication tool. Collard (2025) emphasises that WhatsApp lacks administrative controls and audit trails, and by adopting tools with better oversight, it can mitigate this weakness.

Theme 4 shows that managers are not powerless in the face of WhatsApp's challenges. They offered concrete strategies that echo the recommendations in Chapter 2. Implementing after-hours rules, defining group protocols, educating staff on etiquette and security, and leveraging platform features can all help transform WhatsApp from a source of overload into a well-governed

communication tool. Such interventions require organisational commitment and leadership modelling but promise significant improvements in efficiency and well-being

4.8 THEME 5: WHAT ARE MANAGEMENT TEAMS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE FACILITATORS, BARRIERS, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF USING WHATSAPP AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANIES?

The final theme is based on the primary research question, which synthesises managers' overall perceptions of WhatsApp. Participants recognised significant strengths in WhatsApp usage, like speed, accessibility and improved engagement. They also noted weaknesses, such as overload, miscommunication and privacy concerns. Chapter 2 notes that instant messaging enables speedy communication, supports multitasking and reduces information silos (Johnston *et al.*, 2015; Omar *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, moderate use of WhatsApp is associated with higher employee engagement and lower turnover (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Some research suggests that excessive messaging can lead to frustration and burnout (Bizzi, 2018). While others suggest that the platform's informal tone may lead to miscommunication in multicultural settings (Libera, 2025; Mushaathoni, 2024). Security experts warn that WhatsApp's lack of administrative controls exposes organisations to privacy and legal risks (Collard, 2025). The subthemes are summarised in Figure 13.

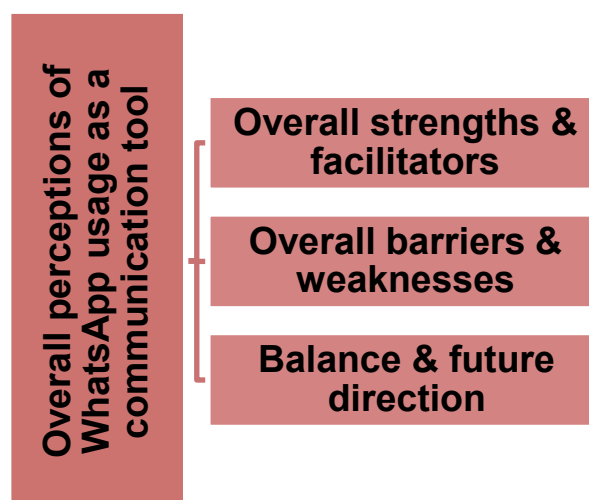


Figure 13: Theme 5 - Overall perceptions of WhatsApp usage as a communication tool in organisations and subthemes

Source: Author's own

Table 8: Summary of Theme 5: What are management teams' perceptions about the facilitators, barriers, strengths, and weaknesses of using WhatsApp as a communication tool for formal and informal communication in South African sales companies?

THEME 5:	
Overall perceptions of WhatsApp usage as a communication tool in organisations	
Category	Participants
4.8.1 Subtheme 5.1: Overall strengths & facilitators	
4.8.1.1 Speed & efficiency	P2, P4 & P6
4.8.1.2 Improved engagement & team spirit	P7 & P8
4.8.1.3 Accessibility & ease of use	P1 & P5
4.8.2 Subtheme 5.2: Overall barriers & weaknesses	
4.8.2.1 Communication overload & stress	P1 & P4
4.8.2.2 Miscommunication & boundary blurring	P3 & P8
4.8.2.3 Security & privacy challenges	P5 & P8
4.8.3 Subtheme 5.3: Balance & future direction	
4.8.3.1 Need for balanced policies & training	P1 & P5
4.8.3.2 Change management & adoption of best practices	P7 & P6
4.8.3.3 Cultural adaptation, trust & inclusivity	P1 & P3

Source: Author's own

4.8.1 Subtheme 5.1: Overall strengths & facilitators

Managers praised WhatsApp for its speed and efficiency, its ability to enhance engagement and team spirit, as well as its accessibility and ease of use. When reflecting holistically, managers in this study convey a nuanced view that WhatsApp is a handy communication tool with significant advantages that make it worthwhile to use, but it is not without substantial drawbacks that need to be mitigated.

4.8.1.1 Speed & efficiency

Managers highlighted WhatsApp's ability to accelerate communication. All participants mentioned that WhatsApp's fast response time or 'instant' feature is an enabler for them in their daily communications.

P2: "A question that would take two days via email is solved in five minutes on WhatsApp. Decisions happen fast."

P4: "Quick response – I've enabled my team to be online... I do get quick responses."

P6: "We can get everyone's input in real time without scheduling meetings; that makes us more agile."

Speed matters in business, and these managers believe WhatsApp accelerates everything from minor clarifications to major decisions. The literature supports this, as instant messaging is known to compress communication cycles and reduce delays. Research demonstrates that instant messaging enables rapid coordination and decision-making compared to traditional channels. Literature has found that WhatsApp communication is more efficient for negotiation and decision-making than meetings or emails (Omar *et al.*, 2020). Other studies observed that group chats reduce information silos by ensuring all members receive the same information simultaneously (Johnston *et al.*, 2015).

4.8.1.2 Improved engagement & team spirit

Another perceived strength is enhanced engagement and morale. WhatsApp keeps teams connected and engaged. The positive impact on team cohesion and morale emerged strongly in Themes 1 and 2, and managers recognise this as a net benefit. Participant 7 observed that sharing achievements and encouragement in group chats boosts motivation.

P7: "We celebrate big sales on the group and everyone cheers; it makes you feel part of something."

P8: "Even on busy days, a funny meme or a motivational quote lifts our spirits."

This continuous engagement is something email cannot provide. Managers feel more connected to their teams thanks to WhatsApp, which can enhance their leadership effectiveness. Literature reported a positive correlation between moderate WhatsApp use and higher employee engagement (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). The app creates a feedback mechanism that keeps staff "in the loop" and enhances feelings of inclusion. Research in educational settings has similarly found that WhatsApp fosters a sense of belonging and continuous interaction within a group, a principle that equally applies to workplace teams (Durgungoz & Durgungoz, 2022).

4.8.1.3 Accessibility and ease of use

Participants also appreciated WhatsApp's accessibility. The approachability and informality of WhatsApp is a more double-edged aspect, but managers do list it as a plus when it enhances openness. As Participant 8 jested, WhatsApp has been around "since the beginning of time" for her, and younger staff might find it a more natural way to communicate. This familiarity can break down some formality that might hinder upward communication.

P5: "Everyone has it on their phone already; you don't need to train anyone to use it."

P1: "My older team members use it as easily as the young ones - it's just like sending a text."

WhatsApp facilitates a culture of spontaneous communication, which can be very healthy for an organisation if appropriately managed. We see that managers appreciate being able to use emojis or a light tone to maintain morale, as it adds a human touch to their management style. This aligns with the Social Exchange Theory notion that frequent, supportive interactions strengthen the relational bonds and trust in a team. Chapter 2 highlights WhatsApp's low barrier to entry and universal adoption in South Africa, making it an appealing tool for diverse workforces (Collard, 2025).

4.8.2 Subtheme 5.2: Overall barriers and weaknesses

While many benefits were noted, managers also identified significant drawbacks, including communication overload and stress, miscommunication and boundary blurring, as well as security and privacy challenges.

4.8.2.1 Communication overload and stress

Participants emphasised that the volume of messages can be overwhelming. The theme of overload is recognised as a serious weakness, and it is becoming a problem. Participant 2 likened the clutter to a point where people just scroll without absorbing content. When the tool becomes a source of noise, its effectiveness drops. Managers are concerned that without rules, WhatsApp can reduce clarity and efficiency – ironically undermining the very efficiency it brings. The solution to this is largely in Theme 4's recommendations, but as a standing weakness, it is something participants accept as part of WhatsApp's nature. Overload is a barrier that they are keenly aware of whenever WhatsApp use goes unmanaged.

P4: "I get 80 to 100 messages a day, and it's exhausting."

P1: "You're constantly bombarded; it stresses you out."

Studies indicate that continuous notifications and large numbers of groups can lead to job stress and decreased productivity. Research highlights that information overload increases role conflict and emotional exhaustion (Cho *et al.*, 2019).

4.8.2.2 Miscommunication and boundary blurring

Miscommunication and blurred boundaries were another concern raised by participants. Miscommunication and informality being a weakness is interesting because the informality was

also seen as a facilitator in some ways. This highlights that WhatsApp's informal nature is a risk factor: it can be either positive or negative, depending on how people handle it. Managers, having seen or experienced conflicts due to tone, count that as a weakness of relying on WhatsApp for important communications.

P8: "You can't hear tone. A short message can sound angry when it's not."

P3: "An Afrikaans joke doesn't always translate well in English."

Participants likely feel more secure when delicate matters are handled in person or by phone, as this allows them to convey tone. While daily banter is fine, the reality is that you cannot easily gauge tone or ensure professionalism on WhatsApp. Research warns that text-based communication lacks non-verbal cues and may be interpreted differently across cultures, leading to confusion and conflict (Libera, 2025; Mushaathoni, 2024). The absence of clear etiquette can also encourage informality that clashes with hierarchical expectations.

4.8.2.3 Security and privacy challenges

Managers were also concerned about security and privacy, especially when using WhatsApp Web at the office. Participants mentioned that anyone can access your computer and work on it, potentially compromising your WhatsApp Web account.

P8: "Sharing clients' info on WhatsApp is risky; it's not POPI compliant."

P5: "If we can't control how info is shared, we could face lawsuits."

Abdelhay *et al.* (2024) found similar concerns in their study on the impact of WhatsApp on data confidentiality. Participant 2's anecdote about call recordings and Participant 1's remark about not sending IDs on WhatsApp indicate that they already work around this issue manually. Literature highlights that WhatsApp lacks administrative controls and audit trails, which raises serious compliance issues, and warns that sensitive data should not be sent via the platform (Collard, 2025).

4.8.3 Subtheme 5.3: Balance and future direction

This subtheme explores participants' visions for striking a balance between the benefits and drawbacks of WhatsApp. They emphasised the need for balanced policies and training, change management, and the adoption of best practices, as well as cultural adaptation, trust and inclusivity. The management team's overall perception is that WhatsApp is indispensable and highly effective for internal communication (facilitator), but comes with critical weaknesses that need to be managed (barriers). They appear to lean towards a constructive approach: none

suggested abandoning WhatsApp, instead, they want to refine its use. This nuanced perspective aligns with research studies that have found that WhatsApp has sped up coordination but also added stress, necessitating the need for coping mechanisms (Astudillo-Rodas, 2024).

4.8.3.1 Need for balanced policies and training

Many participants advocated for balanced policies and ongoing training for better future application of WhatsApp.

P2: "We need a company-wide WhatsApp policy with training so everyone knows what's expected."

P5: "Things change fast; we must review our rules regularly and train people accordingly."

Research from Yang and Feng (2025) recommend disciplined norms and channel-specific rules to maximise benefits and minimise disruptions, while Sulistiani and Al-Amin (2025) call for digital hygiene and ethical communication practices.

4.8.3.2 Change management and adoption of best practices

Several participants also highlighted the importance of change management and best practices.

P7: "Managers must model the right behaviour; otherwise, guidelines mean nothing."

P6: "We should look at how other firms use WhatsApp and adopt what works."

Literature synthesises international guidelines - such as establishing quiet hours, controlling notifications and tailoring policies to regional contexts - and encourages organisations to adapt them to local culture (Gupta & Upadhyay, 2019; Samsura et al., 2024).

4.8.3.3 Cultural adaptation, trust and inclusivity

Participants emphasised the importance of cultural adaptation and inclusivity, particularly in a South African diverse context.

P1: "We have people speaking multiple languages; we need to consider language and cultural nuances when we communicate."

P3: "Trust is important; if you feel safe to speak up in the group, it works better."

Research supports this as Mushaathoni (2024) stresses that intercultural communication guidelines are essential for reducing misunderstandings, while Rana (2013) argues that organisations must embrace diversity and build trust to ensure inclusive participation.

Theme 5 brings the analysis full circle by recognising that WhatsApp is neither wholly beneficial nor wholly detrimental. Managers value its speed, accessibility and ability to foster team spirit, yet they are acutely aware of the risks of overload, miscommunication and privacy breaches. Achieving a sustainable balance will require clear policies, continuous training and a sensitivity to cultural differences. When used thoughtfully, WhatsApp can remain a powerful tool for connection and collaboration.

4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The demographic-diverse management group had extensive experience in using WhatsApp to communicate with one another. Therefore, it indicates widespread use in today's workplace. WhatsApp is now the primary means of communication for many management teams, used to provide quick updates, coordinate tasks, and foster team collaboration. Instant messaging is becoming the backbone of internal communication worldwide. The findings indicate that WhatsApp is a great but double-edged sword for organisational communication. The speed, availability and convenience of use have significantly improved internal communication efficiency and connectivity within the organisation, thereby reinforcing the Technology Acceptance Model's assertion that perceived usefulness and ease of use drive the adoption of communication technology. Nevertheless, information overload, informality, and a lack of governance present real barriers that need to be addressed, reinforcing the fundamental problem statement that unregulated WhatsApp use could create significant issues. Additionally, the findings represent a management-level perspective in a South African organisational context, thereby helping to address a knowledge gap in research. The findings of this chapter provide evidence to support the notion that management teams can utilise mobile instant messaging as a mechanism to foster engagement, coordination and culture in their organisations, but must establish appropriate communication norms and tool usage to maintain these benefits.

The next chapter will relate these findings to the research objectives and theoretical frameworks, derive conclusions associated with the role of WhatsApp as a formal communication tool, and offer recommendations to the case company and other organisations seeking to improve their internal communication strategies.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will demonstrate how the management team's experience with WhatsApp usage in the workplace aligns with both the positive and negative aspects reported in previous studies. This study aimed to assess the views of management groups concerning the use of WhatsApp by the organisation as its official platform for both formal and informal communications within a sales organisation in South Africa. Through an examination of managers' experiences, the study illustrated how WhatsApp impacts motivation, job satisfaction, decision-making and group cohesion. The objective of this chapter is to connect the empirical findings to the relevant theoretical and research literatures from the literature review, thereby addressing the research questions and objectives. The chapter also addresses the study's limitations, outlines its potential contributions, discusses the recommendations and concludes with a summary of the entire study.

5.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This chapter in the study was guided by one primary and four secondary objectives, as initially stated in Chapter 1. These objectives are restated here to provide a framework for discussing the findings.

5.2.1 Primary research objective

The primary aim of this study was to explore management teams' perceptions of using WhatsApp as the primary internal communication tool in a South African sales company. By focusing on managers' experiences, the research sought to clarify how WhatsApp influences motivation, satisfaction, decision-making and team cohesion. The study pursued four supporting objectives:

5.2.2 Secondary objectives

- To evaluate the use of WhatsApp as the primary communication tool in sales company management departments: Determine departmental WhatsApp usage differences.
- To determine how satisfied and motivated management teams are using WhatsApp for internal communication: Measure satisfaction and motivation using semi-structured interviews by assessing managers' views on WhatsApp's usability, work-life balance, and communication goals.
- To identify limitations in South African sales businesses' WhatsApp internal communication strategy: Thematic analysis of interview data can identify and prioritise

communication overload, cultural/language hurdles, and technical restrictions by narrative recurrence.

- To develop and prioritise evidence-based WhatsApp usage optimisation proposals (e.g., policy frameworks, training modules, tool integrations) based on stakeholder feedback and 'Right to Disconnect' principles.

The next section provides a brief recap of each chapter of the dissertation before proceeding to align the findings with these objectives.

5.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 outlined the background and rationale for the study. The introduction explained the development of a clearly stated problem statement, followed by the outlining of the primary and secondary research questions and objectives. To support these objectives, an initial literature review was conducted to identify key concepts of the study. These key concepts included WhatsApp usage in organisations, business communication, communication overload and management team motivation. The chapter also included the research methodology, ethical considerations and the study's significance, limitations and time frame.

Chapter 2 detailed the study's background and literature review. A comprehensive overview of all relevant literature on workplace communication, Instant Messaging, WhatsApp and cultural considerations was provided. The literature review was presented in four topics, organised according to the research questions. These four topics include differences in departmental usage of WhatsApp as a communication tool, a management team's motivation and satisfaction while using WhatsApp in a South African context, management's most significant concerns in utilising WhatsApp as a primary communication tool in an organisation, and finally recommendations from literature to improve WhatsApp usage in organisations. This chapter describes and discusses the study's theoretical foundations.

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the research methodology employed in the study. A qualitative approach was used, with the interpretivist research paradigm serving as the foundation for the study. Purposive sampling was conducted with eight managers from various departments within the targeted company. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, and transcripts were created. Data analysis involved thematic analysis and the utilisation of ATLAS.ti software. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness measures were also described. The final section of Chapter 3 justified why the chosen methodological approach was suitable for investigating the complex experiences and perceptions of managers in using WhatsApp for work communication.

Chapter 4 presented the research findings that were analysed through qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed several underlying themes, subthemes and categories. The chapter begins with a demographic summary of participants, followed by the findings, which are organised around the research questions and objectives. The literature supports these findings and results.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the chapters, the findings of this study, the recommendations, and the study limitations.

5.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to explore management teams' perceptions of using WhatsApp as the primary tool for formal and informal communication in a South African sales company. This section will now summarise all empirical evidence related to each of the four research objectives, based on the literature.

5.4.1 To evaluate the use of WhatsApp as the primary communication tool in sales company management departments: Determine departmental WhatsApp usage differences

All the departments interviewed (operations, finance, HR, sales) used WhatsApp as their standard method for sending fast messages and for coordinating with each other. The literature reports that 93% of employees in South Africa's business environment are using WhatsApp while at work (Collard, 2025). The managers interviewed indicated that group chats were an ideal way to communicate sales targets, monitor deliveries and provide answers to employee questions in real-time. Departmental communication within management teams displayed differing levels of WhatsApp use. The sales team utilised WhatsApp for high-volume, fast-paced communication with field staff, as well as the rapid exchange of client information. Departments such as HR and Finance used WhatsApp less frequently than the sales team, preferring email or internal company news for formal communications and using WhatsApp for non-business-related activities, including socialising and internal status updates. Departmental uses of communication tools were based on different communication requirements by function. Although there has been no specific research comparing departmental use of a communication tool, the findings from this study support the notion that communication tools will be used differently depending on the work context. This is supported by the literature, where Wushe and Shenje (2019) found that excessive and unregulated social media use can lead to decreased productivity. However, when the level of use was regulated based on each department's specific communication needs, the adverse effects associated with increased social media use were reduced. Similarly, in the current study,

the frequent use of WhatsApp by sales managers, as observed in previous research, supports the need for regulatory oversight of intensive user groups to mitigate potential overload associated with increased use of a communication tool (Josserand & Boersma, 2024). Overall, the first objective was achieved by demonstrating that WhatsApp is pervasive across departments, but its use varies depending on the task's urgency and formality.

5.4.2 To determine how satisfied and motivated management teams are using WhatsApp for internal communication: Measure satisfaction and motivation using semi-structured interviews by assessing managers' views on WhatsApp's usability, work-life balance, and communication goals.

The majority of the managers were satisfied with how easy it was to use WhatsApp. Managers said they felt closer to their teams and could respond much quicker to emergencies than if they were using a traditional phone call. These positive experiences are also supported by the literature, which shows that moderate use of WhatsApp can increase engagement in work and lower an employee's intention to leave their employment (Wushe & Shenje, 2019).

Participants further stated that responding to their team members' comments via instant message as soon as possible increased their team's overall morale and team spirit. However, the managers' overall satisfaction with using WhatsApp was impacted by the fact that they often did not have a choice but to be available at all times, as many of the messages they received came through after hours. The managers stated this made them feel pressured to respond immediately, and this pressure decreased their motivation. Similarly, research found that excessive use of social media can lead to job dissatisfaction and encourage employees to find another job (Bizzi, 2018). Therefore, even though the managers appreciated the ease of using WhatsApp for communication, their motivation for continuing to use it would depend on whether they used it responsibly and did not allow it to interfere with their personal lives or cause them to be overwhelmed with too much information. This ambivalence was consistent with other research findings, which reported that users had limited positive emotions associated with using WhatsApp for formal communications (Sakib, 2016). The interviews from this study similarly reflected this finding, where managers used WhatsApp as a means of informal communication out of necessity but were concerned about the implications of using WhatsApp on their work-life balance. The findings suggest that while WhatsApp may facilitate greater communication, it may have adverse effects on manager engagement and contribute to manager stress, confirming other theories that link excessive messaging to technostress (Kasim *et al.*, 2022).

5.4.3 To identify limitations in South African sales businesses' WhatsApp internal communication strategy: Thematic analysis of interview data can identify and prioritise communication overload, cultural/language hurdles, and technical restrictions by narrative recurrence.

Three principal limitations were identified in the interviews: information overload, miscommunication due to cultural and language differences, and concerns about privacy and security. Managers were overwhelmed by the amount of information received through WhatsApp and the fact that boundaries were being crossed with after-hours messages. Many managers reported receiving "hundreds of messages" daily, which is consistent with research that found excessive use of mobile instant messaging leads to an increase in role stressors and burnout (Cho *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, findings show that the lack of clearly defined hours for work-related communications created blurred boundaries for participants, similar to comments made by other research that if there is no "right to disconnect", workers may feel pressured to be available 24/7 to respond (Cachalia, 2024; Willie, 2025).

Participants also said they could quickly misunderstand a colleague's tone or sense of humour with their use of WhatsApp texts. The twelve official languages of South Africa contributed to some idioms or abbreviations being misinterpreted by employees who speak different first languages. These experiences are reflected in the research, which warns about how other languages and informal texts may contribute to workplace misunderstandings in multilingual and culturally diverse environments (Rana, 2013). Managers noted that junior employees often interacted too informally with senior colleagues. This is an example of unspoken social etiquette for workplace interaction, supported by research that also identifies a lack of intercultural guidelines as a leading cause of inconsistent practices (Mushaathoni, 2024).

Managers were concerned about sharing company confidential data via WhatsApp, as they could be inadvertently sending data to people outside the company through a forwarded message or by someone taking a screenshot of the message. This concern is consistent with research's assertion that WhatsApp lacks enterprise-level privacy controls, which can expose organisations to potential data leakage (Collard, 2025). Additionally, examples from research of employees facing disciplinary actions for misusing an emoji or posting an inappropriately worded message highlight the risks to a company's reputation from unstructured communication (Libera, 2025).

The findings show that managers recognised that while WhatsApp increased efficiency, it also introduced significant risks and challenges. The third objective was met by identifying apparent limitations related to communication overload, cultural misinterpretation, and confidentiality.

5.4.4 To develop and prioritise evidence-based WhatsApp usage optimisation proposals (e.g., policy frameworks, training modules, tool integrations) based on stakeholder feedback and EU 'Right to Disconnect' principles

While the recommendations are discussed in detail in the following section, all interviewees provided potential resolutions prior to the recommendations being discussed. Solutions included establishing an official communications policy, setting "quiet hours" to allow for personal time, limiting the number of people on each WhatsApp group to those directly involved, and offering digital etiquette and cross-cultural communication training to employees. Each proposal aligns with the literature. Research highlighted that organisational social media usage should have a formal governing policy (Grawe, 2021). Other literature noted that formalising guidance on messaging etiquette fosters positive work engagement (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Managers' recommendations for improved WhatsApp usage align with current scholarly research and demonstrate how the fourth objective has been met. Participants provided several ideas to improve their organisation's use of WhatsApp. The most popular idea was formalising guidelines and policies for WhatsApp usage. Most managers agreed there needs to be a clear policy for using WhatsApp, including what hours it is acceptable to communicate via WhatsApp, and what is expected when communicating with others via WhatsApp during non-work hours.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this section, the study presents recommendations based on its findings and provides suggestions for future research.

5.5.1 General recommendations

Considering the findings, it is essential to establish a communications strategy and policies for organisations using WhatsApp as a corporate communication tool. The research suggests that while WhatsApp has replaced traditional means of internal communication in many ways, its unstructured and informal nature contributes to employee fatigue, leads to potential miscommunication and creates concerns regarding confidentiality and security of employee information. For an organisation to fully leverage the benefits of this communication platform while also prioritising employee well-being, management must establish policies and practices that promote responsible usage of WhatsApp and support employees' digital health and well-being. Other strategies might include training on responsible usage and setting departmental norms for the use of WhatsApp, while meeting POPIA requirements.

Based on the findings, the following general recommendations are made:

- Develop and distribute a formal communications policy that clearly defines the conditions under which an employee may use WhatsApp, outlining the employee's expected response time and identifying the types of employee communications that should occur over more secure channels. The communications policy should provide clarity to employees regarding acceptable behaviour in order to reduce the likelihood of anxiety related to continuous availability.
- Designate specific timeframes during which all employees are not expected to check or respond to WhatsApp messages unless the message is deemed urgent. Quiet hours allow employees to maintain their work-life balance and minimise the potential for burnout related to continuous connectivity.
- Regularly review and rationalise the number of groups to which employees belong to prevent employees from receiving unnecessary messages. Clearly defined naming conventions for groups and established protocols for creating groups will contribute to reducing noise and confusion.
- Provide training, workshops and resources on best practices for writing clear, concise messages. Training should include using proper tone and being culturally aware of how language and emojis may be perceived differently across cultures. Training will help reduce misunderstandings and foster greater respect among colleagues.
- Encourage employees to send confidential information via more secure channels than WhatsApp. This should also be stated in a company's communication policy. If there is a need for time-sensitive messaging, consider adopting a business version of WhatsApp that offers additional security features.
- Educate managers on signs of communication fatigue and encourage them to demonstrate healthy digital behaviours themselves, such as silencing non-critical groups and disconnecting after hours.

5.5.2 Recommendations for future research

Although this study focused on a single sales organisation and examined managers' perspectives, there are many opportunities to expand upon and strengthen the empirical base in future research. Future steps may include gathering additional diverse experiences and quantifying the issues presented by this research using alternative methodologies. Additional comparative research could further examine different platforms to see which platform best meets organisational communication requirements.

The following are recommendations for future research propositions:

- Future research could include examining other organisational levels and industries not included in this study. Examples may consist of frontline employees, support staff and executives from various sectors, and whether the identified patterns in this study also occur in similar roles and environments.
- Surveys and long-term tracking in quantitative studies can measure the frequency of communication overload, the effects it has on productivity, and the evolution of employees' attitudes toward communication technologies and policy changes over time.
- Research to compare instant messaging through WhatsApp compared to other platforms could help determine which platform(s) best meet the immediate needs while providing adequate data security and employee well-being. As this study focused solely on WhatsApp, comparative studies with other platforms may provide insight into best practices.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research study had certain limitations. This research examined only eight managers working for a single South African Sales Company. Consequently, the results may not apply to other organisations, industries or cultures. The fact that the research employed a qualitative design and that the results are based on participants' subjective experiences and interpretations of events can limit generalizability to other stakeholders, such as non-managerial employees, as their views were not considered. The interviews took place at a single point in time and do not provide evidence of how perceptions will change over time, when new technologies are developed, or as the organisation's policies change. It is possible that, due to the researcher being an employee of the organisation being studied, bias may have influenced both the collection and analysis of the data, despite every effort being made to remain reflective and objective. Lastly, this study did not quantitatively measure the effects of using WhatsApp on measurable performance indicators. A mixed-method research study with quantitative results might have strengthened the findings and conclusions. Additionally, this study did not evaluate how WhatsApp compares to alternative platforms for communication. Both areas of interest should be further explored to expand the knowledge base of digital communication in the workplace.

5.7 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study contributes to the development of theory by identifying current managerial attitudes toward WhatsApp usage in South African organisations. The study expands existing knowledge about how instant messaging intersects with cultural diversity and privacy issues within organisations. It offers evidence-based guidance to organisations seeking to benefit from using

WhatsApp, while also managing the negative aspects associated with its use in the workplace through organisational policies, training, and digital wellness programs. The integration of these theoretical and practical contributions can lead to a balanced and sustainable approach to utilising WhatsApp or other Instant Messaging platforms within the workplace. The published articles from this study will also contribute to the academic body of knowledge by supporting organisations' management in understanding the factors influencing their workforce's motivation regarding WhatsApp usage and how to manage these attitudes more effectively.

5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter demonstrated how managers appreciate the convenience and immediacy of WhatsApp for promoting interdepartmental collaboration, however, they often experience a sense of being overwhelmed due to the constant flow of notifications, blurring of work boundaries, and occasional miscommunication. This final chapter presented the objectives of the study, followed by a summary of all preceding chapters. After that, the findings from this study were discussed using the study's objectives as the framework for the discussion of the findings, and the conclusions were strengthened with relevant literature references. Based on the study's findings, conclusions and recommendations were drawn that can be applied to organisational communications management strategies and future research. Lastly, the study limitations and possible contributions were discussed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT LETTER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Dear Participant

I am conducting a study that explores perceptions of a management team using WhatsApp as their primary internal communication tool in a South African sales company. A recorded interview with instructions on how to answer will be used as an information collection tool. Please read and familiarise yourself with the content of the consent document and sign if you agree with its content. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes of your time.

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

Your data, which may include any personal identifying information (for example, demographics), will be handled in line with the rules formulated in the **Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013)**. The following is essential to note in line with the Act:

- You are also not obligated to complete personal information (i.e., demographics).
- You will have no negative consequences if you decide not to provide personal information (i.e., demographics).
- You can request access to your personal details anytime to change the information.
- The booklets and data will be securely stored for a period of five years at the University when collected.

I hereby confirm that,

- I voluntarily *agree to participate* in this study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I *can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question* without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I *can withdraw permission* to use data from my interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had *the purpose and nature of the study explained to me*, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that the interview will be recorded, and the time do it will not exceed 45 -60 minutes.
- I understand that participation involves an interview and that *the data will be used as part of the research work of the MBA program*.
- I understand *I will not benefit directly* from participating in this research.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be *confidential*.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research, *my identity will remain anonymous*.
- I understand that under the freedom of information legislation, *I am entitled to access the information* I have provided at any time while it is in storage.
- I understand that I am *free to contact any people involved in* the research to seek further clarification and information.

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

(Please tick)

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT



NWU Business School
Private Bag x6001
Potchefstroom, 2520

<http://commerce.nwu.ac.za/business-school>

26 FEB 2025

DEAR PARTICIPANT

INFORMED CONSENT TO COMPLETE INTERVIEW

You are invited to participate in a research study that forms part of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. You must be fully satisfied that you clearly understand this research and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to say no to participating. This will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You can also withdraw from the study at any point, even if you agree to participate now.

Your data, which may include any personal identifying information (for example, demographics), will be handled in line with the rules formulated in the **Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013)**. The following is essential to note in line with the Act:

- You are also not obligated to complete personal information (i.e., demographics).
- You will have no negative consequences if you decide not to provide personal information (i.e., demographics).
- You can request access to your personal details anytime to change the information.

The booklets and data will be securely stored for a period of five years at the University after collection.

This study has been approved by the NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC). It will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the North-West University and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study.

Title of the study: EXPLORING MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTION OF USING WHATSAPP AS A PRIMARY INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TOOL IN A SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANY.

Institution: NWU Business School

Ethics Reference Number:

Names and contact details of project staff

	Supervisor	Researcher
Title, name & surname	Prof Anna-Marie Pelser	Miss Rini van Vuuren
Full Names	Prof Anna-Marie Pelser	Hendrina Paulina van Vuuren
Function in Study	Principal Investigator	Researcher
Telephone	082 375 6636	082 499 8392

What is this research study all about?

Exploring perceptions of a management team using WhatsApp as a primary internal communication tool in a South African sales company.

What will be expected of you?

You will be expected to:

- Participate in an interview, which should take approximately 60 minutes.
- Respond to the questions openly and honestly.
- This interview will be conducted after working hours at your most comfortable times.
- Expected to sign the consent form indicating that you are willing to participate in this research willingly.

The interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy and preserve the essence of your responses. You will have the option to review or listen to the recorded information upon your request. Please note that your identity will remain confidential, and all identifying information will be replaced with codes during data analysis.

The recorded interviews will be transcribed and securely stored on a password-protected computer. All collected data, including transcripts and recordings, will be retained for three years and subsequently deleted. Any information shared during the interview will be anonymised to ensure your confidentiality.

DECLARATION

Declaration by participant

By selecting the option below, I agree to participate in the research study titled: EXPLORING MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTION OF USING WHATSAPP AS A PRIMARY INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TOOL IN A SOUTH AFRICAN SALES COMPANY.

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that as I have completed the study anonymously, it will not be possible to remove any information I have provided, as you will not be able to identify me in any way.
3. I understand that individuals from the University may look at anonymous research data collected during the study to ensure that the survey is conducted appropriately.
4. I agree that my anonymous information can be shared with individuals from the abovementioned project team.
5. I agree that I understand my rights and compliance in this study with POPIA.
6. I agree that results from this study will be published as part of this dissertation and will be published in articles.

I agree to take part in the above study

Yes	No
1	2

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Title: Exploring management's perception of using WhatsApp as a primary internal communication tool in a South African sales company.

Introduction:

1. Greet and give Purpose Briefing:

"Thank you for participating. This interview aims to understand your experiences using WhatsApp for internal communication. Your insights will help improve organisational practices."

2. Confidentiality Assurance and gain consent to proceed and record:

"All responses will remain anonymous. May I record this interview for accuracy?"

Refer to compliance with the POPIA Act and confidentiality.
Outline and understand Participants' Roles and Perspectives.

Demographics:

Age:

20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40
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Gender:

Male	Female	Prefer not to say	Other
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Position/Role in management team:

Team Leader	Supervisor	Assistant Manager	Manager	Senior Manager
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How long have you been using WhatsApp as the main communication tool in your management role?

6 months-1 year	12 months-18 months	18 months-2 years	Longer than 2 years
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Core Questions

Section 1: Departmental Experience

- 1. How does your department primarily use WhatsApp (e.g., updates, crisis management, informal chats)?*
- 2. How does WhatsApp usage differ between your department and others (e.g., Sales vs. HR)?*
- 3. Can you share an example where WhatsApp improved or hindered inter-departmental collaboration?*

4. *Are both formal and informal communication being shared on WhatsApp in your department?*
5. *How does WhatsApp influence decision-making and response times in your department?*

Section 2: Satisfaction and Motivation

6. *What do you find most useful about WhatsApp for internal communication?*
7. *How does WhatsApp impact your motivation to engage with team tasks?*
8. *Are there aspects of WhatsApp usage that frustrate you (e.g., after-hours messages or cluttered messages)?*
9. *Does WhatsApp contribute to work-life balance challenges, such as difficulty disconnecting after hours?*

Section 3: Obstacles and Weaknesses

10. *What challenges have you faced using WhatsApp for work (e.g., information overload, misinterpretation)?*
11. *How do language/cultural differences affect communication in WhatsApp groups?*
12. *Have technical issues (e.g., internet access) limited WhatsApp's effectiveness?*
13. *Have you experienced situations where sensitive or confidential information was shared inappropriately on WhatsApp? How was it handled?*
14. *Do you perceive your use of WhatsApp as POPIA safe?*

Section 4: Recommendations for Improvement

15. *What changes would you recommend to enhance WhatsApp's role in internal communication?*
16. *How could policies (e.g., "Right to Disconnect") or training improve WhatsApp usage?*
17. *Have you used alternative communication tools (e.g., email, MS Teams)? How do they compare to WhatsApp for internal communication?*
18. *What tools/features could complement WhatsApp to address current gaps?*

Probing Questions

- *Can you elaborate on that example?*
- *How did that situation affect your team's productivity?*
- *What would an ideal solution look like to you?*

Closing

1. *Do you want to share anything else about your WhatsApp experiences in your role?*
2. *Thank you for your time. Your input is invaluable to this study.*

Thank the participant for their time and valuable insights.
Mention any follow-up steps if necessary.
Reiterate the confidentiality of their responses.
Informed consent letter – Annexure A

APPENDIX D: COMPANY CONSENT LETTER



NWU Business School
Private Bag x6001
Potchefstroom, 2520

<http://commerce.nwu.ac.za/business-school>

18 February 2025

LETTER OF REQUEST

Dear Madam,

Permission to conduct research at Nova Life

My name is Rini van Vuuren. I am writing to formally request permission to conduct a research study at Nova Life as part of my mini dissertation for the fulfilment of my Master of Business Administration (MBA) at North-West University (NWU) Business School in South Africa.

My research study aims to explore management perceptions of using WhatsApp as primary internal communication tool in a South African sales company. This study aims to contribute to both academic knowledge and practical business insights that may benefit the company in how communication policies are framed.

As part of the research, I would like to engage with the company's management team through semi-structured interviews. I assure you that the study will be conducted in an ethical and professional manner, with strict adherence to confidentiality and data protection policies. Participation will be voluntary, and no sensitive or proprietary company information will be disclosed in my final dissertation without explicit consent.

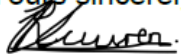
To ensure compliance with the company's policies and ethical considerations, I am happy to provide any additional information or make any necessary adjustments to my research methodology as required. Furthermore, should you require, I am willing to share a summary of the research findings with Nova Life upon completion of the study.

I kindly request your written consent to proceed with this research. Please let me know if any formal procedures or additional approvals are required from the company's side. I appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to your favourable response.

Should you require further details, please feel free to contact me at 082 499 8392 or via email at rinivanvuuren89@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,



Rini van Vuuren

(Researcher)



Noted by: Prof Anna-Marie Pelser

(Research Supervisor)

Approved by:



Nelrie Laing

(HR manager Nova Life)



Sasha van Wyk

(Nova Life CEO)

APPENDIX E: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222

Fax: 018 299-4910

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate Committee for Research Ethics

Tel: 018 299-484

Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

1 April 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)** on 1 April 2025, the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title:	Exploring management's perceptions of WhatsApp as a primary internal communication tool in a South African sales company.														
Study leader/Supervisor (Principal investigator/Researcher):	Prof A.M.F. Pelsier						University no.:	21707669							
Student:	P. van Vuuren						University no.:	21195129							
Ethics number:	N	W	U	-	0	0	6	3	7	-	2	5	-	A	4
Institution Study number Year Status Status: S = Submission; R = Re-submission; P = Provisional authorisation; A = Authorisation															
Application type:	Single study - Postgraduate research						Risk level:	Low/minimal risk							
Commencement date:	4/1/25														
Expiry date:	4/1/26														
<i>Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.</i>															

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

None.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EMS-REC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EMS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EMS-REC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EMS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- EMS-REC can be contacted for further information or any report templates through the secretariat. Botlenyana Maluleka (Botlenyana.Maluleka@nwu.ac.za/ +27 18 2852436) or the chair Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout (Diana.Viljoen@nwu.ac.za / +27 16 9103403).

The EMS-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EMS-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Diana
Viljoen-
Bezuidenhout

Digitally signed by Prof
Diana Viljoen-
Bezuidenhout
Date: 2025.04.11
12:11:14 +02'00'

Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout

Chairperson: NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX F: TURN IT IN SUMMARY

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 16-Nov-2025 15:11 SAST
ID: 2816476479
Word Count: 44810
Submitted: 1

21195129:Rini_van_Vuuren_21195129_Mini-Disser... By RIENIE VAN VUUREN

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Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

DECLARATION WITH REGARDS TO SIMILARITY REPORT

- ▲ Turnitin (TII) is the plagiarism- prevention service of choice for the North-West University. A thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article is submitted to the TII website, to be checked for similarities in the document by comparing submitted papers to several databases/repositories on the World Wide Web. It is important to note that TII does NOT identify plagiarism – only similarities. The aim is to draw students' attention to these similarities so that they improve their academic writing style and reporting of sources before submission for examination.

The undersigned declares that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article with the title mentioned below, was submitted, assessed and that the issues (if any) have been addressed, and that a satisfactory report has been obtained.

Exploring management's perception of WhatsApp as a communication tool in a South African sales company.

Title of dissertation/mini-dissertation\thesis

Hendrina Paulina (HP) van Vuuren

Anna-Marie (AMF) Pelsier

Student (Initials and surname)

Supervisor/Promoter (Initials and surname)

21195129 Masters in Business Administration

APPENDIX G: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE



Christel Eastes
Building J9A
NWU Potchefstroom Campus
11 Hoffman Street
Potchefstroom, 2531
082 566 4229

27 November 2025

To whom it may concern:

DECLARATION: LANGUAGE EDITING

This letter serves as proof that the following document was submitted to the undersigned for language editing in November 2025:

Author: Rini van Vuuren (21195129)

Document type: Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Business Administration at the North-West University

Title: *Exploring management's perception of WhatsApp as a communication tool in a South African sales company.*

Final review comments and recommendations were communicated to the author on 27 November 2025.

Applying changes in order to arrive at a final, approved document remains the responsibility of the document author.

Yours sincerely

CHRISTEL EASTES
Potchefstroom