Is Whatsapp Messaging Subsuming Conventional SMS?

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Abstract: The surge in social media platforms have impacted greatly on information sharing. Similarly, communication is becoming cheaper by the day due to increased innovation in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This article focuses on WhatsApp as an alternative for SMS. This article is anchored on scholarly review of literatures. Based on domestication theory, the theory provides valuable insights into how ICTs fit into different constructs of our day to day lives and routines. The paper concludes that WhatsApp messaging has surpassed conventional Short Message Service (SMS). In this light, mobile service providers are advised to be innovative in order to retain the relevance of SMS in communication.

Keyword: WhatsApp, SMS, Social Network Sites, Social Media, ICT

Introduction

The communication sector has witnessed an increased improvement due to advancement in science and technology. It is common to see individuals engaged in technology driven media this days. These forms of media-driven media have made day to day life convenient, easier and even cheaper. The world is largely technologically driven; this has improved the level of innovation (Yeboah S. et al, 2014). Boyd &Ellison as cited in Mefolere, (2016) points that the growth of SNS as another platform on the internet has gained acceptance over the last ten years. The Social Network Site or Social Media is one part of the technology-driven media that have witnessed great patronage in the past ten years. The SNS or Social Media: WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Viber, Line, LinkedIn etc. have become parts of our daily lives. Underwood, J cited in Yeboah et al., (2014) opine that these Social Media affect how users communicate and businesses operate. These applications allow users to send real-time text messages to individual or group at no cost (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). They-the Social Media have the ability to be catching influence which the conventional media lack. The Arab Media Report cited in Alsanie(2015) discovered that the social media have huge influence on persons live, especially on freedom of expression. McQuail cited in Okunna & Omenugha,(2012, p.161) state that:

The SNS often known just as social media comprise a number of internet websites that have been set up to enable and encourage users to create networks of acquaintances and also share messages and audiovisual material, often available to a wider public. The current examples of internationally very popular... they have become valuable commercial properties, especially for related advertising, cross-media publicity and generating content from users.

Introduced in 2009, WhatsApp, a proprietary cross-platform instant messaging subscription for smartphone has reached 1 billion monthly active users in 2016. Besides chatting/text messaging, WhatsApp has other medium like picture/video sharing, phone calls, document sharing, voice message and location sharing. Founded by Brain Acton & Jan Koun, former employers of Yahoo!, the firm is located in Mount View, California, USA.

Understanding WhatsApp

According to Wikipedia, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WhatsApp) WhatsApp is a freeware, cross-platform and end-to-end encryptedinstant messaging application for smartphones. It uses the Internet to make voice calls, one to one video calls; send text messages, documents, PDF files, images, GIF, videos, user location, audio files, phone contacts and voice notes to other users using standard cellular mobile numbers. Patil, Deepthi & Tadasad cited in Mefolere, (2016) state that WhatsApp is an instant messaging free application that is beneficial. They went further to note that, it is a mobile system text messaging that enables its users transmit and receive messages simultaneously and asynchronously. Jisha K. &Jebakmar (2014) identifies the advantages of WhatsApp to include the following:

- No cost: WhatsApp application is downloaded and used for one year free of charge. It demands a subscription of 0.99 US dollar per year
- Easy chatting: Chatting on WhatsApp is easy with friends and family. If an individual has the application installed on their phone, and they have your phone number, you are automatically added to their contact list if your number is registered to a WhatsApp account.
- Conserve chat history: WhatsApp allows you to preserve you chat, until you want to delete them. One could also choose a time limit for automation deletion.
- Enables user monitor when someone is online and when they logged in last
- Breaks geographic barriers: You can chat with user of WhatsApp wherever they are in the globe.
- Speed: WhatsApp messages are fast in delivery as far as you have good internet connection.
- Offer group chat facility: WhatsApp allows individuals to create group and chat as members.
Easy to use: WhatsApp does not require log in and log out procedures. The platform works whenever they are internet connection.

The images below show some of the feature of WhatsApp. The first image shows some of the functionalities of the platform. It shows their name, that they are online. In addition to these, we can see a sent image- a car. We can also identify the chat – text, and audio message. When we send a message on WhatsApp and it indicates a double mark on the message, it means the message has been delivered. The image also shows the field for typing text messages.

Source: Google image

SMS & WhatsApp: An Analysis
SMS – Short Message Service is a text messaging service components of most telephone, World Wide Web and mobile telephony system (Wikipedia.org). SMS is a service for sending short messages of up to 160 character (224 characters if using a 5 bit mode) to mobile device including cellular phones, smartphones and PDA. Battestini et al., cited in Church & de Oliveira, (2013) stated that in 2011, 7.8 trillion SMS were sent all over the world. This figure still highlights the importance of SMS as a medium of mass communication. WhatsApp is registered to an identified phone number. Users of WhatsApp need to have a data or Wi-Fi connection on their smartphone to be able to send and receive messages. The recipient of a WhatsApp message must have same application installed on their phone. Besides chatting/text messaging, WhatApp has other medium like picture/video sharing, phone calls, document sharing, voice message and location sharing. One can send unlimited messages on WhatsApp as long as they have internet connection. WhatsApp allows international or global messaging. Transmitting messages, SMS or MMS from one country’s network provider to another country could be challenging. WhatApp has broken this barrier as messages can now be sent across the globe within seconds. For WhatsApp to reach 1 billion active users in 8 years is a phenomenal feat. The figure below from Benedict (2015) says more.


Theoretical Framework
Scholars have used various theoretical frameworks to explain studies in WhatsApp. Theories as uses and gratification theory, social learning theory, technological acceptance Theory, network Society Theory etc. The theoretical framework adopted for this article is domestication theory. This theory was founded by Roger Silverstone. Domestication theory centers on the social relationships surrounding Information Communication Technologies (ICT). This theory explains the process of understanding the sophistication of how ICTs are experienced in everyday life (Ahad & Lim, 2014).
Furthermore, Haddon (2001) states that domestication deals with how ICTs have become integrated into peoples’ daily lives or how ICT finds a place in people’s life. Berkers cited in Ahad& Lim (2014) posit that domestication could mean “taming the untamed”. Domestication provides valuable perception into how Information and Communication Technologies fit into different constructs of our day to day lives (Ahad& Lim, 2014). Throwing more light on the theory, Silverstone& Haddon (1996) posit: "Domestication deals with the cultural, social and technological networks of the everyday life of households. The meanings and significance of all our media and information products depend on the participation of the user". The advantages of domestication rest in its emphasis on diverse points. These include the recognition that technology is a progression, portrayed as object symbolized and a media with content; the focus on the user- as a creative person involving a non-linear, two way process into how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are integrated into their lives through appropriation- the process where a technology is required upon ownership and use by an individual, objectification- how a technology is physically/symbolically, used, displayed or classified, incorporation- how a technology is used, adjusted to person’s day to day life, and conversion- a process where technologies (converted/transformed) metamorphosed (Ahad& Lim, 2014). As pointed out by Lie and Sorenson in Ahad and Lim (2014) “we adopt and adapt technologies, we shape and are shaped by them”. This theory is essential to this article, as it explain the domestication of WhatsApp for text messaging.

**Literature Review**

Recently the study of WhatsApp has become an area of interest to scholars. There are various studies done on WhatsApp usage and its capabilities. A study titled “WhatsApp: A trend Setter in Mobile Communication among Chennai Youth in India” conducted by Jisha K. &Jebakumar and published in the Journal of a Humanities and Social Sciences in 2014. Their study discovered that Youth considers WhatsApp as a replacement for SMS. The research further found that WhatsApp is a tool for instant communication, with unlimited texting. “Usage of WhatsApp & Voice Calls (Phone Call): Preference of Polytechnic Student in Ghana”. This study was carried out by Yeboah, Nondzor & Alhaji in 2014. They proved that 92% of the students surveyed prefer WhatsApp to voice call. The study finding revealed that WhatsApp was the major mode of communication. Further findings from the study were: WhatsApp was more convenient, easier to use, it is effective and reliable, and it saves cost. Church & Oliveira (2013) cited in Ahmad & Lim (2014), in their study discovered that WhatsApp was commonly used because its convenience in communication and cost benefits. The same findings were found in a research that examined WhatsApp use and its motivational factors, among 450 college students, between ages 15-55 in Riyahd (Soliman& Salem, 2014). In the meantime, Yeboah and Ewur (2014) conducted a study to investigate the impacts of WhatsApp use on student performance in tertiary institution in Ghana. They discovered the positive impacts of WhatsApp to include ease of communication and information sharing, while the negative impact is dwindling performance in students’ academics. In Brazil, Paiva (2013) stated that Newspaper Extra adopted WhatsApp in their news room. The Organization claimed that the advantages of using WhatsApp are: stable platform, cheaper than text messaging, user friendly. Similarly, a research emanating from the Ministry of Information and Communication reported that WhatsApp usage aided group discussion around the news as well as SMS replacement (Radcifie, 2015). Robinson, et al, (2015) states that Washington Post used WhatsApp chat feature to have open discussion with British expatriate in the US about the UK elections. Alaster (2015) opines that Journalism.co.uk did some of their reporting during the Ebola epidemic in Nigeria. According to him, it was easy using photo and audio to tell story in an interesting and engaging way.

**WhatsApp & Posterity: What does it hold?**

One obvious feature of ICT is continuous improvement or change. When WhatsApp was introduced in 2009, certain features like document sharing, user location and GIF-Graphic Interchange Format were not there. Today one can do a whole lot of work on WhatsApp. Will there be a continuous improvement in WhatsApp or a decline? Since Facebook bought WhatsApp for the sum of $19billion US dollars, individuals have been apprehensive of what might be the prospect Mark Zuckerberg-led Company. In an article entitled “The Future of WhatsApp”, whiskappfor.org cited some of the probable changes that Application have soon. Some of the probable changes might be:

- **Business to Consumer Messaging:** this entails that WhatsApp would be used to enable business to consumer exchange. It could be modified for marketing/advertising purposes. According to Facebook’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO), David Wehner, told participants in a business conference in Boston that his company is exploring ways to adopt WhatsApp for B2C (whatsappfor.org). To this end, WhatsApp could evolve into a space for businesses to interact with customers – similar to what WeChat already offers in China. Brands already experimenting with this functionality include Dutch airline KLM, which uses WhatsApp to let frequent flyers inquire about upgrades and seat selection (www.whatsappfor.org/news/future-whatsapp). “We see people moving from traditional social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to new platforms, such as WeChat in China and WhatsApp,” KLM spokesman Joost Ruempol (https://www.l2inc.com/whats-the-future-of-whatsapp/2016/blog)
- **Integration with Facebook and Facebook Messenger:** In April 2015 Facebook released a new version of its Android app that featured a WhatsApp icon. The icon enables persons to send information and pictures from their Facebook page to WhatsApp user. One obvious reason for this icon is to enable Facebook users to connect with persons without Facebook or those without access to a computer. Another is to enable persons to send advertisements or other Facebook content to WhatsApp and other social media users.
• Sending money through WhatsApp: The best way for Facebook to make money from WhatsApp would be to find a means of sending money through it. Tencent, a Chinese company that offers a similar solution called WeChat, made $1.1 billion in revenue by allowing users to send money through its service, Business Insider reported.

Going by this discussion, it is pointing to the direction that WhatsApp could be the future of communication portal. Within the few years it was taken over by Facebook, we have seen some remarkable innovations. Users of this product should brace up for further advancement, invariably we are talking of may be domesticating yet to come features.

Conclusion & Recommendations
WhatsApp has become a fast growing messaging platform across the globe. Its all-encompassing features have endeared people to it. The easiness of usage and affordability are some of the obvious characteristics that make it stand out. WhatsApp has also aided Smartphone penetration Jisha K. &Jebakumar (2014). With the catchphrase “ Simple. Personal. Real time Messaging”, WhatsApp has shown that it stands for what it promises. More study should be done on WhatsApp, taking into consideration its advancing features, and eventually commercialize the findings. With a total of 16billion active users as at February, 2016, it is glaring that the audience of WhatsApp is growing at an alarming rate. It is necessary for scholars to tap into the benefits of this product in order to see how it could be used for the advancement of humanity. It is pertinent to point out that SMS service provider should be more innovative if they want to retain the relevance of SMS.

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