Howard Journal of Communications

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/uhjc20

Forwarding of Messages Via WhatsApp: The Mediating Role of Emotional Evocativeness

Akeem Soladoye Bakare, Daha Tijjani Abdurrahaman & Acheampong Owusu

To cite this article: Akeem Soladoye Bakare, Daha Tijjani Abdurrahaman & Acheampong Owusu (2022) Forwarding of Messages Via WhatsApp: The Mediating Role of Emotional Evocativeness, Howard Journal of Communications, 33:3, 265-280, DOI: 10.1080/10646175.2021.1974611

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2021.1974611

Published online: 13 Sep 2021.

HOWARD JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATIONS
2022, VOL. 33, NO. 3, 265–280
https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2021.1974611

Forwarding of Messages Via WhatsApp: The Mediating Role of Emotional Evocativeness

Akeem Soladoye Bakare[a], Daha Tijjani Abdurrahaman[b] and Acheampong Owusu[c]

[a]Post Graduate Center, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Cyberjaya, Malaysia; [b]Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, National Open University of Nigeria, Nigeria; [c]Operations and Management Information Systems (OMIS) Department, University of Ghana Business School, Legon, Accra, Ghana

ABSTRACT

WhatsApp facilitates easy communication as users can send messages, images, videos, and group conversations instantly. Forwarding the messages received is one of the desires of WhatsApp users. Hence, it is imperative to understand the key determinants of this phenomenon. This study examine the level of influences of infotainment, purposive value, social identity, and emotional evocativeness on the decision to forward received messages via WhatsApp. Using a random sampling method, primary data was obtained from 342 respondents from a Private University in Cyberjaya, Malaysia. The data was analyzed through Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPls. Findings show that infotainment does not affect the decision to forward WhatsApp messages; however, purposive value, social identity, and emotional evocativeness have significant effects. Similarly, while emotional evocativeness mediates between purposive value, social identity, and the decision to forward WhatsApp messages, it does not mediate between infotainment and the decision to forward WhatsApp messages. These findings will help users to understand the key elements that should be implemented to achieve virality for WhatsApp messages and other social media. Limitations, future study opportunities, practical and theoretical implications were also discussed.

KEYWORDS

infotainment; purposive value; social identity; emotional evocativeness; virality; WhatsApp message

Introduction

The sharing of stories, news, and information among people (social transmission) predates social media. However, the coming of social media has made this practice better in terms of speed, ease, and reach. Today, applications that facilitate easy communication abound. One of such applications is WhatsApp. Its emergence has threatened and reduced the popularity of the Short Message Service (SMS) because it enables users to create chat groups, share photographs, video recordings, music, contacts, and information on the geographic area utilizing Google Maps (Shanmugapriya & Priya,

CONTACT Acheampong Owusu aowusu@ug.edu.gh Operations and Management Information Systems (OMIS) Department, University of Ghana Business School, Legon-Accra, P. O. Box LG 78, Ghana.

2016). There has been an exponential increase in the number of users of the application. As of mid-February 2020, WhatsApp has supported more than two billion users around the world (WhatsApp blog, 2020).

Social media users and their contacts can stay in touch with each other as a result of the ability to forward messages (Cruz & Harindranath, 2020). However, the factors that influence the process of forwarding messages are numerous and they vary across social media platforms. WhatsApp users want their messages to go viral because the act of forwarding a viral message, is an implicit endorsement of the content and the credibility of the message is enhanced (Harvey et al., 2011). Billions of messages are sent daily via WhatsApp; hence people are overloaded with information. This has necessitated the receivers to select, read, and forward the ones that meet certain criteria. Therefore, receivers of messages via an application such as WhatsApp use certain criteria to decide on whether or not to forward the message. (it's my expression)

Although it is clear that social transmission is both frequent and important, less is known about why certain pieces of online content are more viral than others (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Several studies have been done on the factors that influence people's decision to forward messages received via WhatsApp. Most of the studies have focused mainly on the direct relationship between some factors and the decision to forward WhatsApp messages (e.g. Harvey et al., 2011; Mohan et al., 2020; Shahid, 2018; Sircar, 2018). Also, some focused on the virality of commercial messages only (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Karimiyazdi & Mokhber, 2015; Yu & Kamarulzama, 2016). Given these observations, the present study is aimed at examining the factors that motivate people to forward the messages received via WhatsApp as well as checking the mediating role of the emotional evocativeness on the relationship between the factors and decision to forward such messages.

The organization of the paper is as follows: after the introduction comes literature review; followed by materials and methods; then results; discussion of findings; implications; suggestions for future studies; it ends with conclusion and references.

Literature review

The concept of WhatsApp

Jan Koum and Brian Acton created WhatsApp in 2009, however, at present, Facebook is the owner (Purkayastha & Chanda, 2018). Sebastian (2016) said that the name - WhatsApp was fashioned out of the greeting phrase *"What's up?" ("What is going on" or "how are you"!)."* WhatsApp is a free, multiplatform messaging app that enables users to make video and voice calls, send text messages, and more — all with just a Wi-Fi connection. Although WhatsApp is similar to other messaging services such as iMessage or Messages by Google, besides, it still offers a few key merits, one of which is the cross-platform functionality (between Android and iOS, for example) (Goodwin, 2020). Similarly, Purkayastha and Chanda (2018) explained that WhatsApp is an instant messaging app that is available free at no monetary cost. It provides cross-section messaging and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) serviced. A brief rundown of some of its core features are: Voice and video calls; voice messaging; secure messaging; document sharing; photos and video sharing; desktop access; WhatsApp Business (Goodwin, 2020).

Corroborating this, Purkayastha and Chanda (2018) submitted that through this App, users can send instant text messages, audios, videos, images, any document file, and the user can also make full-duplex communication using internet connectivity.

Underpinning theories

The underpinning theories for this study are the Value Model, Berger's Six STEPPS Principles of Contagiousness, and Social Identity Theory.

The Value Model was proposed by Ducoffe (1995). It posits that entertainment, informativeness, and irritation are the determinants of consumers' evaluation and formation of attitudes toward advertisements. This model is relevant to this study because the determinants of message acceptance are proposed. Hence, in this study, we combined both informativeness and entertainment to create infotainment as one of the independent variables.

Berger's Six STEPPS Principles of Contagiousness is the second underpinning theory in this study. In it, Berger (2013) contends that to ensure that content, products, or ideas go viral, it must contain few or all the six principles which he termed STEPPS. STEPPS stands for "Social Currency, Triggers, Emotions, Public, Practical Value, and Stories. In this study, we found two of the principles relevant. Hence, we adapted Purposive Value and Emotional Evocativeness as independent and mediating variables respectively.

The third theory is the Social Identity Theory (SIT). Tajfel (2010) in the theory argues that the groups to which people belong serve as an important source of pride and self-esteem because groups give people a sense of social identity. According to McLeod (2008), using the process of social categorization, people do divide the world into "us" and "them" (i.e., "in-group" and "out-group"). The relevance of this theory lies in the fact that the researchers adapted social identity as one of the independent variables.

Conceptual foundation and hypotheses

The virality of a message is the degree to which it was seen, shared, and sent on Social Network Sites (SNSs) (Alhabash et al., 2015). For instance, clients can see content on YouTube and share it on Facebook, Twitter, or other Social Media platforms. SNSs give clients the likelihood to openly show their affective reactions to online messages by enabling them to like a message on Facebook, like or dislike a video on YouTube, or retweet a Tweet (Alhabash et al., 2015).

It is pertinent to examine some factors that are related to the decision to forward messages received via WhatsApp. Hence, this study examines the direct impacts of Infotainment, Purposive Value, Social Identity, and mediating effects of Emotional Evocativeness on the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages as shown in Figure 1.

The connection between infotainment and decision to forward WhatsApp messages

Infotainment is an amalgamation of information and entertainment, and it means when there is a consolidation of useful information and entertaining content. It is aimed at

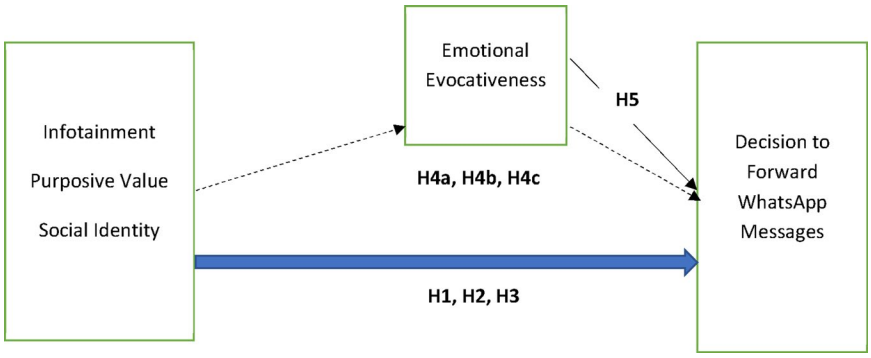

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

advancing the acquisition of specific information, skills, or trades in a format those appeals to users (Technopedia, 2016). Hence, a WhatsApp message is said to have infotainment value when the message does not only give vital information but also entertains.

Youthful shoppers' attitudes to commercial messages, especially via SMS are controlled by five factors, prominent among which are entertainment and informativeness (Almossawi, 2014). Equally, Saleem (2013) discovered that a positive correlation exists between entertainment, informativeness, and credibility and the attitudes to SMS advertising messages. Also, Christensen (2013) confirmed that entertainment and informativeness have a significant influence on people's disposition to advertising messages received via mobile phones. Furthermore, Pescher et al. (2014) asserted that when the people who are desirous of entertainment receive a message that is rich in entertainment, they are highly motivated to share such messages with other people. Likewise, Dong (2014) submitted that enjoyment purpose which is brought about by entertainment is the rationale behind the usage of instant-messaging tools. Informational utility and novelty according to Kim (2015) have a significant positive relationship with e-mail-specific virality. Equally, Yu and Kamarulzama (2016) discovered that the Perceived Entertainment Value alongside some other factors accounts for the positive consumers' disposition to forwarding WhatsApp messages.

Given the above, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: Infotainment quality positively influences Decision to forward WhatsApp messages.

The connection between purposive value and decision to forward WhatsApp messages

Purposive value is another message factor that encourages the forwarding of a message. As far as message sharing is concerned, people are willing to receive and share messages they regard as having value rather than the one that does not have. In line with the above, we can say that the value of a message is the perception of the receivers of such a message concerning its worthiness.

Berger (2013) enthused that extant studies have revealed that out of people's desires to help others, they like sharing valuable information with them. In his six STEPPS

principles of contagiousness, he referred to it as practical value. He argued that when people see content as being useful, they share it. Similarly, Berger and Milkman (2012) found that the content that is more practically useful, interesting, and surprising will be forwarded by the people.

Chiu et al. (2014) found that when people read a viral marketing message which is rich in purposive value, they are likely to share it with other people. Yu and Kamarulzama (2016) established that the perception concerning a WhatsApp message, with purposive and entertaining messages influences the attitude of Malaysians toward using WhatsApp. Likewise, Pescher et al. (2014) discovered that people who accept the purposive value of a message will like to forward such a message.

Mohan et al. (2020) reported that while forwarding health messages received via WhatsApp, people take the perceived quality and credibility into consideration more than the need of the message. Potnis et al. (2018) found the Perceived value of messages as one of the reasons why Ethiopian students will forward US diplomacy messages via WhatsApp.

Consequent upon the above, it is hereby hypothesized that:

H2: Purposive Value positively influences Decision to forward WhatsApp messages.

The connection between social identity and decision to forward WhatsApp messages

Social identity is the piece regarding an individual's self-concept that emanates from perceived membership within a relevant neighborly group (Tajfel, 2010). According to Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, the source of pride and self-esteem of a person is traceable to the group (s) such a person belongs.

Analyzing how consumers get involved in the system and little gathering based virtual networks, Dholakia et al. (2004) developed a social impact model which is made up of three phases: value perception, social influence variables, decision making, and participation (Karimiyazdi & Mokhber, 2015). Individual identification with the group (social identity) is related to this study. Expatiating this phase, Karimiyazdi and Mokhber (2015) said that it is made up of three elements which are - the cognitive self-awareness of membership in the group; affective commitment to the group; and evaluative significance of membership in the group. They concluded that past studies such as Dholakia et al. (2004) have confirmed the validity of these three elements. Karimiyazdi and Mokhber (2015) considered social identity as one of the important factors that impact people's intention to forward or not to forward a viral message.

To Botha (2014), people share viral content with their social networks as a form of online gift-giving, out of altruism, or simply to build their reputation. In a similar vein, Guadagno et al. (2013) presented that the type of content people share depends on the In-group vs. Out-group membership they belong to. Findings from the study done by Harvey et al. (2011) revealed that tie strength and amount of online communication across the tie are the most critical factors in affecting the likelihood of a YouTube video being forwarded across a tie.

Going by the above, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Social Identity of users influences the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages.

The connection between emotional evocativeness, infotainment, purposive value, social identity, and decision to forwarding WhatsApp messages

Emotion according to the various theories propounded by the great classical philosophers is a subject's phenomenological notable reactions to significant events and is capable of triggering distinctive bodily changes and behaviors (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). In regular daily existence, individuals need to convey and impart their accomplished feelings to other people, which would likewise disclose the drive to share viral content that triggers emotion (Dobele et al., 2007).

However, Eckler and Bolls (2011) have identified positive emotional tone and pleasant experience as the main determinants of the influence of emotions on sharing behavior. They stated further that the willingness to forward messages decreases due to the unpleasant tone in the content. Berger and Milkman (2012) also concurred that positive emotions impact significantly on people's intentions to share received messages more than negative emotions. Berger and Milkman (2012) submitted further that: emotions of high arousal (e.g. awe) are more important than low arousal emotion which brings about negative emotions (e.g. anger or anxiety); there is a high possibility of less virality for an online message that brings about a deactivating emotion such as sadness; marketing content that evokes more of specific emotions characterized by arousal (i.e. amusement in or anger), tends to be shared. In a similar vein, Berger (2013) found that when more arousal is added to a message, it is going to propel people to share it.

Greenberg (2010) identified Psychological Share Motivation, Easy Shareability, and A Data-Driven Strategy as three (3) things that any video needs to go viral. Under psychological share motivation, he identified emotions as one of the psychological drivers. He explained that sharing feelings is a basic human need and that when a video captures an emotion that resonates with its audience, users will share it. This is because, in addition to sharing the content of the video, they are equally sharing the feeling the video has created. Similarly, Rimé (2009) asserted that the experience of emotional arousal will, in general, bring social sharing of that feeling since emotion sharing has both intrapersonal and interpersonal advantages, for example, sense-making of the emotional experience and foundation (or reinforcing) of social bonds.

Berger (2013) identified three major classifications of content that may become viral easily. They are the content that oozes positivity or optimism; the content that entails informative and relatable messages and content that includes sentimental messages. The third classification is related to our discussion here. Berger (2013) explained sentimental messages as the contents that are more emotional to their nature hence people tend to believe in sharing those messages. He submitted that while some emotions increase sharing, others actually decrease it hence he advised that we need to pick the right emotions to evoke. He proceeded to say that irrespective of whether the message is negative or positive in as much as it relates to a person's past or history in some way it will be shared because sometimes even negative emotions may be useful.

Knobloch-Westerwick (2015) discovered that messages that arouse people emotionally tend to foster selective exposure. Similarly, Potnis and Gala (2017) found among others that emotional engagement with the message (e.g., Likeability of the message) is one of the factors that influence e-WOM among Indian youth. Equally, Hirvijarvi (2017) found an emotional component as one of the key elements that influence the

forwarding of viral content on social media. The other two key elements found are triggers and incentives and shareability. Kim (2015) equally established that emotional evocativeness among other factors plays a significant role in social media-based retransmissions. Botha (2014) opined that people's propensity to share viral content was a function of the intensity, sociality, and complexity of the emotion elicited by the viral content. Equally, Berger (2014) asserted that media messages that are rich in emotional evocativeness are also more likely to go viral. Berger (2013) declared that "Emotions drive people to action. They make us laugh, shout, and cry, and they make us talk, share, and buy. So rather than quoting statistics or providing information, we need to focus on feelings", (p. 66).

Given the above facts, it can be hypothesized as follows:

H4a: Emotional Evocativeness mediates between Infotainment and Decision to forward messages received via WhatsApp.

H4b: Emotional Evocativeness mediates between the Purposive Value of a message and the Decision to forward messages received via WhatsApp.

H4c: Emotional Evocativeness mediates between the Social Identity and Decision to forward messages received via WhatsApp.

H5: Emotional Evocativeness positively influences the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages.

The decision to forward WhatsApp messages

The decision to forward messages received via WhatsApp refers to the choice made by the message receiver either to forward the message received to other people or not. Undoubtedly, taking such a decision is influenced by certain factors. For instance, the persuasive appeal of the sender and an accompanying form of emotional response are two important factors that influence the forwarding of a viral message (Kibby, 2005); Purposiveness and entertainment influence the attitude toward using WhatsApp (Yu & Kamarulzama, 2016); Social identity is one of the important factors that impact on people's intention to forward or not to forward a viral message (Karimiyazdi & Mokhber, 2015); Social Currency, Triggers, Emotions, Public, Practical Value, and Stories are the six principles that determine the contagiousness of an idea or message (Berger, 2013).

Materials and methods

The researchers employed the use of a questionnaire to assess the relationship between the variables. Students from a Private University in Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia were the target population for this study. The researchers chose students because over time this group has been very active in using smartphones to communicate. Corroborating this, Gerbaudo (2018) said that the youth increasingly rely on mobile phones for accessing, searching, and sharing messages over social media. The University has a population of 9,500 students. Data collection took place in 2016. To analyze the reliability of the survey instruments, a pilot test was carried out and the results proved the instrument was reliable.

For the main study, a sample size of 370 was used. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) when the population is 10,000, then 370 samples should suffice. However, a total of 380 questionnaires were administered online via the various students' WhatsApp groups existing in the University. Out of the 380 questionnaires administered, 342 questionnaires which represent 90% were used for analysis. The questionnaire is made up of two parts. The first part contains eight (8) questions that measure the demographic profile of the respondents. The second part contains thirty-four (34) questions that measure the three independent variables, one mediating variable, and the dependent variable. The researchers adapted the questions from extant studies and modified them to suit the context of this study. For instance, items for infotainment were adapted from Ling et al. (2010); the items for purposive value were adapted from Bakare et al. (2017); the items for social identity were adapted from Karimiyazdi and Mokhberb (2015); the items for evocativeness were adapted from Berger (2013). Lastly, the items for the decision to forward messages received via WhatsApp were adapted from Tsang et al. (2004). Five points Likert scale ranging from "1" strongly disagree to "5" strongly agree was used to measure all the variables.

Results

After cleaning the data, the analysis was done via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23, and Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) Smart PLS version 3.2.9. PLS-SEM was used because of its ability to handle unnormalized data and small sample size (Hair et al., 2014, p. 19). Hence, the adoption of PLS-SEM is in tandem with recent studies across several fields of research. For instance, in Management Information System (Owusu et al., 2017), Advertising and Marketing (Abdurraham et al., 2018), and e-learning (Abdurrahaman et al., 2020).

From Table 1, in terms of gender, female respondents were more than males as we recorded 235 (68.7%) females and 107 (31.3%) males. In terms of age distribution, those within 21 – 25 age brackets recorded the highest number with 171 which is equivalent to 50%; those within the age bracket 15 – 20 recorded the lowest number of 21 which represents 6.1%. Regarding marital status, the singles were 175 (51.2); married were 134 (39.2) while others were 33 (9.6%). For the educational background, the top two were undergraduates and postgraduates as they accounted for 31.3% and 29.8% respectively. For family economic status, those from average economic status were the highest as they accounted for 39.8% while those from below average were the least as they accounted for 11.4%. As regards respondents receiving messages via WhatsApp and belonging to different WhatsApp groups, all the respondents responded in affirmative (100%). Lastly, concerning the rate at which respondents receive messages via WhatsApp, 80.7% indicated that they receive it every day while 19.3% indicated that they receive it twice a week.

Examining the measurement model

The evaluation of PLS-SEM results was done by examining the measurement models and assessing the structural model (Hair et al., 2017). The two steps were followed in carrying out the inferential statistical analysis of this study.

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents.

Description	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	107	31.3
	Female	235	68.7
Age	15 – 20	21	6.1
	21 – 25	171	50.0
	26 – 30	84	24.6
	31 – 35	66	19.3
Marital status	Single	175	51.2
	Married	134	39.2
	Others	33	9.6
Education	Undergraduate	107	31.3
	Postgraduate	102	29.8
	Diploma	67	19.6
	Foundation	66	19.3
Economic status	Below average	39	11.4
	Average	136	39.8
	Above average	101	29.5
	Affluent	66	19.3
Do you receive messages via WhatsApp?	Yes	342	100.0
	No	0	0.0
Do you belong to different WhatsApp groups?	Yes	342	100.0
	No	0	0.0
	Don't want to say	0	0.0
How often do you receive messages via WhatsApp?	Everyday	276	80.7
	Twice a week	66	19.3
	Fortnightly	0	0.0
	Once a month	0	0.0

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) shows that the outer loadings of all the observed variables attained the acceptable threshold of 0.708.

Constructs reliability and validity

The evaluation of the construct reliability was done using both the traditional Cronbach alpha and composite reliability. The least Cronbach's alpha value obtained is 0.842 and the least composite reliability value is 0.908. This shows that all the constructs have high levels of internal consistency as they are above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014)

Regarding the convergent validity, all the constructs have the AVE values that are above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This result implies that the convergent validity of all the constructs is firmly established.

The discriminant validity was established using Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. The AVE values of each construct (latent variable) were higher than the squared value of the correlation between the constructs.

Assessing the structural model

Before evaluating the structural model, it is crucial to ensure that there is no collinearity issue in the structural model (Hair et al., 2017). Hence, the collinearity test was conducted to ascertain if there exists multicollinearity amongst the constructs. Results show that all the inner variance inflation factor (VIF) values are less than 5, indicating that there are no collinearity issues with the model (Hair et al., 2017).

The R^2 of the dependent variable is 0.510; that of the mediating variable is 0.615. This means that the exogenous variables explain 51% of the variance of an endogenous variable; while the exogenous variables explain 61.5% of the variance of the mediating variable. In line with the recommendation of Hair et al. (2017), the model has moderate predictive quality.

The f^2 values show that Social Identity (0.176) has a medium effect in producing the R^2 for the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages. Purposive Value (0.118) has a small effect size while Infotainment (0.001) has no effect on the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages in this model.

Also, the predictive relevance of the model using the blindfolding procedure shows that the two Q^2 values for the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages (Q^2 = 0.349) and Emotional Evocativeness (Q^2= 0.572) are more than zero (0). As per (Hair et al., 2017) this indicates that the model has sufficient predictive relevance.

Hypotheses testing

To test the hypotheses, the bootstrapping method was employed. To test the significance level, the researchers generated t-statistics for all the paths using the bootstrapping function. From Table 2 and figure 2, it is evident that three of the four hypotheses tested have t – values ≥ 1.96 thus significant at the 0.05 level. However, one of the hypotheses has t – value of < 1.96. In specific terms, Purposive Value, Social Identity, and Emotional Evocativeness are positively related to the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages; on the contrary, Infotainment does not have a significant impact on the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages. Thus, hypotheses H2, H3, and H5 are all supported. Hypothesis H1, on the contrary, is not supported.

For mediation analysis, Table 3 shows that Emotional Evocativeness (EE) does not mediate between Infotainment and Decision to forward WhatsApp messages (β = 0.019, t-value = 0.455). This gives the indirect effects 95% Boot CI Bias Corrected: [LL = −0.065, UL = 0.102]. However, Emotional Evocativeness (EE) has a mediating effect on the relationship between Purposive Value (PV) and Decision to Forward WhatsApp messages (β = 0.274, t-value = 5.045). Equally, Emotional Evocativeness (EE) mediates between Social Identity (SI) and Decision to Forward WhatsApp messages (β = 0.303, t-value = 5.924). These two give the indirect effects 95% Boot CI Bias Corrected: [LL = 0.176, UL = 0.384] and [LL = 0.294. UL = 0.557] respectively.

From the indirect effects, 95% Boot CI Bias Corrected outcomes, it shows that in the relationship (INFT->EE-> Dec._ forward WhatsApp message), a zero (0) is straddled in between whereas the relationships (Purp. Val. -> EE -> Dec._ forward WhatsApp message) and (Soc. Id. -> EE -> Dec._ forward WhatsApp message) do not straddle a zero (0) in between. This is in line with the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008). Thus, we can conclude that H4a is rejected while H4b and H4c are accepted.

Discussions

Findings from the study revealed that Infotainment does not positively influence the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages (H1). This result is surprising as it is contrary

Table 2. Path coefficients (hypotheses testing without mediation effects).

Hypothesis	Relationship	*t*- value	*p*-value	Decision
H1	INFT -> Emotional Evocativeness	0.456	0.649	**Not supported**
H2	Purp. Val. -> Emotional Evocativeness	5.366**	0.000	**Supported**
H3	Soc. Id. -> Emotional Evocativeness	6.288**	0.000	**Supported**
H5	Emotional Evocativeness ->Dec. forward Whatsapp message	20.171**	0.000	**Supported**

Note: $^{**}p < 0.5$.

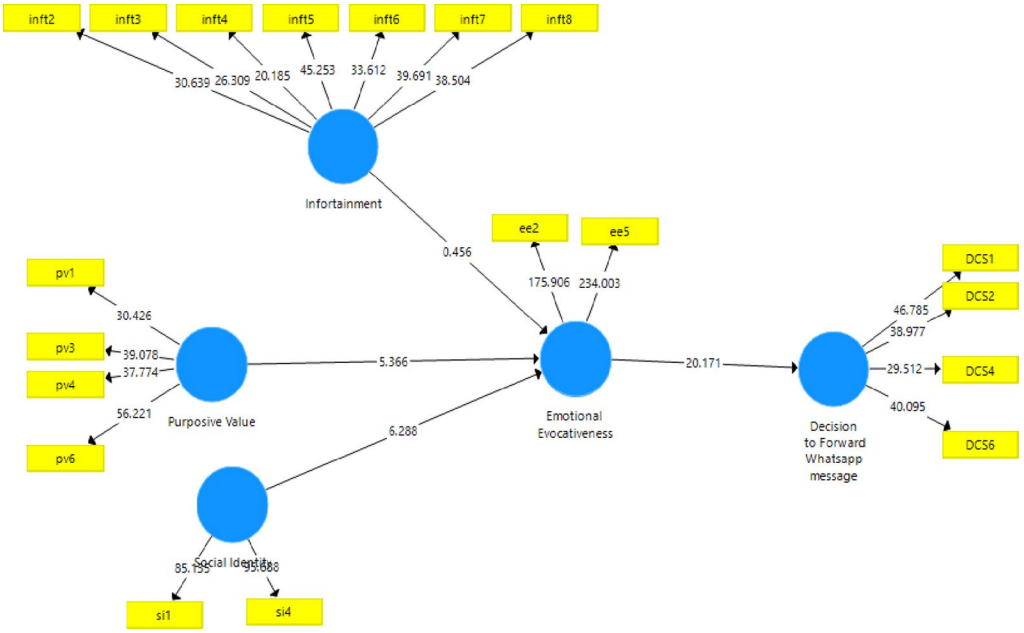

Figure 2. Research model showing the bootstrapping results.

to the findings from previous studies (e.g. Almossawi, 2014; Dong, 2014; Kim, 2015; Pescher et al., 2014; Saleem, 2013; Yu & Kamarulzama, 2016). These studies found informativeness and entertainment as having a significant influence on people's decisions to forward messages. The justification behind this disparity could be due to the fact that people have little time to spend reading messages except for the ones they consider very vital.

From hypothesis 2, the finding shows that Purposive Value positively influences the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages. This finding concurs with previous studies' findings (Chiu et al., 2014; Mohan et al., 2020; Potnis et al., 2018; Yu & Kamarulzama, 2016). This is because people are always willing to read and share any message they consider as being very useful to them and others.

Equally, the finding from hypothesis 3 shows that there is an existence of a significant relationship between Social Identity (SI) and the Decision to forward WhatsApp messages. This can be attributed to the fact that the source of pride and self-esteem of a person is traceable to the group(s) to which such a person belongs. The finding agrees with several previous studies such as Karimiyazdi and Mokhber (2015), Botha (2014), Guadagno et al. (2013), and Harvey et al. (2011).

Table 3. Path coefficients (hypotheses testing with mediation effects).

No	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	t- value	LL (2.5%)	UL (97.5%)	Decision
H4a	INFT->EE-> Dec._ forward WhatsApp message	0.019	0.019	0.000	0.455	−0.065	0.102	**Not Supported**
H4b	Purp. Val. -> EE -> Dec._ forward WhatsApp message	0.274	0.275	0.001	5.045**	0.176	0.384	**Supported**
H4c	Soc. Id. -> EE -> Dec._ forward WhatsApp message	0.305	0.303	−0.003	5.924**	0.294	0.557	**Supported**

Note: **p < 0.5; UL = Upper Level; LL = Lower Level; INFT = Infotainment; EE = Emotional Evocativeness; Purp. Val = Purposive Value; Soc. Id. = Social Identity; Dec._ forward WhatsApp message = Decision to forward WhatsApp message.

Additionally, the result shows that Emotional Evocativeness has a significant positive influence on the users' Decision to forward the messages received via WhatsApp. This finding is in tune with previous studies such as Berger (2013), Potnis and Gala (2017), and Hirvijarvi (2017).

Regarding mediation, findings show that emotional evocativeness does not mediate between infotainment and the decision to forward WhatsApp messages (H4a). This implies that messages that will be considered for forwarding must not be limited to having infotainment alone, rather it must be an embodiment of a myriad of other qualities.

On the contrary, findings from both Hypotheses 4b and 4c show that emotional evocativeness has a significant mediating effect on the relationships between purposive value, social identity, and the decision to forward WhatsApp messages. These findings are in accord with previous studies such as (Berger, 2014; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Botha, 2014; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Hirvijarvi, 2017; Kim, 2015; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Potnis & Gala, 2017). This is because according to social sharing of emotion theory, content that elicits an emotional response will generate social action of sharing content with online social networks.

Theoretical and practical implications

The first theoretical implication of this study is that its framework is hybrid. This is because the variables were taken from three theories (advertising value model, Berger's six STEPPS principles of contagiousness, and social identity theory), and several related studies. Secondly, this study introduced a mediating variable of emotional evocativeness on the direct relationship between three independent variables and the decision to forward the message received via WhatsApp thus enriching the communications literature. Practically, the study has shown that to achieve virality, factors such as purposive value and social identity should be given attention. Therefore, it is pertinent that message senders should: (a) ensure that their messages are rich in value that will

serve the purposes of the receivers; (b) send such messages to the people based on social identity because the way people see themselves and how they interact with others is highly influenced by social identity. That is to say that an individual relates well with the other members of the group he/she belongs to if he/she has a positive view of his/her identity as a member of that group.

Additionally, with regards to the implication of the mediation effect, we should realize that laying out the facts clearly and concisely is not enough, rather we need to make sure that the message evokes emotion. Corroborating this, Berger (2013) submits that "naturally contagious content usually evokes some sort of emotion", (p. 18).

Furthermore, we should choose the emotions that are capable of kindling the fire. This aligns with the submission of Berger (2013) that "When trying to use emotions to drive sharing, remember to pick the ones that kindle the fire: select high arousal emotions that drive people to action", (p. 63).

Both positive and negative emotions can be used to achieve that. To use positive emotions, we should ensure that the message is enriched with elements that are capable of generating excitement in the people. To use negative emotions, we should craft the message in such a way that the negative emotions it evokes will make people mad rather than sad because people get fired up when they are mad, but they have a dampened spirit when they are sad.

Limitations and future research

The first limitation is in terms of the respondents. The respondents were taken from only one Private University. Therefore, future researchers should involve respondents from more Universities preferably both private and public. Doing this will help to extrapolate the findings to larger demographics other than the one used in this study.

Secondly, only four factors were used in this study hence limiting the scope of the findings. Future researchers may want to broaden the scope by considering more factors that influence people's decisions to forward WhatsApp messages.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the nexus between the factors that WhatsApp users consider and the decision to forward WhatsApp messages. The insights gained from this study can go a long way in helping individuals, profit organizations, nonprofit organizations, government, non-governmental agencies, and the generality of people to adapt and develop strategies to gain virality for the various messages they disseminate via WhatsApp. This is because this study has provided relevant insights on the effect of some key variables (purposive value, social identity, and emotional evocativeness) that influence people's decision to forward the messages they receive via WhatsApp.

ORCID

Acheampong Owusu http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7789-5162

References

Abdurraham, D. T., Owusu, A., Soladoye, B. A., & Kalimuthu, K. R. (2018). Celebrity-brand endorsement: A study on its impacts on generation Y-ers in Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Scientific Research*, *11*(3), 415–427. https://doi.org/10.3923/ajsr.2018.415.427

Abdurrahaman, D. T., Owusu, A., & Bakare, A. S. (2020). Evaluating factors affecting user satisfaction in university enterprise content management (ECM) systems. *Electronic Journal of Information Systems Evaluation*, *23*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.34190/EJISE.20.23.1.001

Alhabash, S., McAlister, A. R., Quilliam, E. T., Richards, J. I., & Lou, C. (2015). Alcohol's getting a bit more social: When alcohol marketing messages on Facebook increase young adults' intentions to imbibe. *Mass Communication and Society*, *18*(3), 350–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2014.945651

Almossawi, M. (2014). Effectiveness of SMS advertising (a study of young customers in Bahrain). *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, *14*(4), 57–71.

Bakare, A. S., Owusu, A., & Abdurrahaman, D. T. (2017). The behavior response of the Nigerian youths toward mobile advertising: An examination of the influence of values, attitudes and culture. *Cogent Business & Management*, *4*(1), 1353218–1353231. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2017.1353231

Berger, J. (2013). *Contagious: Why things catch on*. Simon & Schuster, Social Dynamics Group, LLC.

Berger, J. (2014). Word of mouth and interpersonal communication: A review and directions for future research. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *24*(4), 586–607. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.05.002

Berger, J., & Milkman, K. L. (2012). What makes online content viral?*Journal of Marketing Research*, *49*(2), 192–205. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.10.0353

Botha, E. M. (2014). *Contagious communications: The role of emotion in viral marketing* [Doctoral dissertation]. KTH Royal Institute of Technology. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A745835&dswid=-5588

Chiu, H. C., Pant, A., Hsieh, Y. C., Lee, M., Hsioa, Y. T., & Roan, J. (2014). Snowball to avalanche: Understanding the different predictors of the intention to propagate online marketing messages. *European Journal of Marketing*, *48* (7/8), 1255–1273. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2012-0329

Christensen, P. B. S. (2013). *Adoption of mobile advertising in Denmark: Investigating psychological factors affecting consumers' intention to adopt mobile advertising from MNO's*. Aarhus University. 1–93.

Cruz, E., & Harindranath, R. (2020). WhatsApp as 'technology of life': Reframing research agendas. *First Monday*, *25* (1). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v25i12.10405

Dholakia, U. M., Bagozzi, R. P., & Pearo, L. K. (2004). A social influence model of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *21*(3), 241–263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2003.12.004

Dobele, A., Lindgreen, A., Beverland, M., Vanhamme, J., & van Wijk, R. (2007). Why pass on viral messages? Because they connect emotionally Angela. *Business Horizons*, *50*(4), 291–304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2007.01.004

Dong, W. (2014). Mobile instant messaging in the workplace: Research and design. *Applied Mechanics and Materials*, *556-562*, 6336–6339. In (VolTrans Tech Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4028/www.scientific.net/AMM.556-562.6336

Ducoffe, R. H. (1995). How consumers assess the value of advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *17*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.1995.10505022

Eckler, P., & Bolls, P. (2011). Spreading the virus: Emotional tone of viral advertising and its effect on forwarding intentions and attitudes. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *11* (2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2011.10722180

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *18*(3), 382–388. https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800313

Gerbaudo, P. (2018). *Tweets and streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. Pluto Press.
Goodwin, G. E. (2020). What is WhatsApp? A guide to navigating the free internet-based communication platform. https://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-whatsapp-guide.
Greenberg, D. (2010). 3 Things any video needs to go viral. https://mashable.com/2010/10/19/viral-video-science
Guadagno, R. E., Rempala, D. M., Murphy, S., & Okdie, B. M. (2013). What makes a video go viral? An analysis of emotional contagion and Internet memes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29*(6), 2312–2319. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.04.016
Hair, J. F., Jr, Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2017). *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.15358/9783800653614
Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2014). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)*. SAGE Publications Inc.
Harvey, C. G., Stewart, D. B., & Ewing, M. T. (2011). Forward or delete: What drives peer-to-peer message propagation across social networks?*Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *10*(6), 365–372. https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.383
Hirvijarvi, F. (2017). Viral marketing and content forwarding on social media: Outlining the key elements behind successful viral content creation. http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2017052910782
Karimiyazdi, R., & Mokhber, M. (2015). Improving viral marketing campaign via mobile instant messaging (MIM) applications. *Journal of Advanced Review on Scientific Research*, *10*(1), 20–33.
Kibby, M. D. (2005). Email forwardables: Folklore in the age of the internet. *New Media & Society*, *7*(6), 770–790. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444805058161
Kim, H. S. (2015). Attracting views and going viral: How message features and news-sharing channels affect health news diffusion. *The Journal of Communication*, *65*(3), 512–534. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12160
Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2015). *Choice and preference in media use: Advances in selective exposure theory and research*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315771359
Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *30*(3), 607–610. https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308
Ling, K., Piew, T., & Chai, L. (2010). The determinants of consumers attitude toward advertising. *Canadian Social Science*, *6* (4), 114–126.
McLeod, S. A. (2008). Social identity theory. Simply psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html.-Text:electronic.
Mohan, R., Nagadeepa, C., & Bharathi, N. (2020). Follow and/or forward: Impact of e-WoM on WhatsApp health messages. *Science, Technology and Development*, *9* (1), 60–64.
Owusu, A., Agbemabiese, G. C., Abdurrahaman, D. T., & Soladoye, B. A. (2017). Determinants of business intelligence systems adoption in developing countries: An empirical analysis from Ghanaian Banks. *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, *22*(S8), 1–25. http://www.icommercecentral.com.
Pescher, C., Reichhart, P., & Spann, M. (2014). Consumer decision-making processes in mobile viral marketing campaigns. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *28*(1), 43–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.08.001
Potnis, D., & Gala, B. (2017). Factors influencing electronic word-of-mouth among Indian youth: Implications for mobile governance. In *Proceedings of the special collection on egovernment innovations in India* (pp. 107–114). https://doi.org/10.1145/3055219.3055241
Potnis, D., Demissie, D., Trimmer, J., & Cleek, J. (2018). WhatsApp for social activism in Ethiopia? Research in progress from US Diplomacy Lab. https://aisel.aisnet.org/sais2018/25/
Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, *40*(3), 879–891. https://doi.org/10.3758/brm.40.3.879 18697684

Purkayastha, N., & Chanda, A. (2018). Whatsapp as a means of sharing information among LIS professionals of North-East India: A study. *International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences*, *6* (9), 69–82.

Rimé, B. (2009). Emotion elicits the social sharing of emotion: Theory and empirical review. *Emotion Review*, *1*(1), 60–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073908097189

Saleem, F. (2013). Acceptance of SMS advertising in young Pakistani consumers. *Journal of Business & Economics*, *5* (2), 206–227.

Sebastian, N. (2016). What is WhatsApp?https://www.quora.com/What-is-WhatsApp

Shahid, S. (2018). Content analysis of Whatsapp conversations: An analytical study to evaluate the effectiveness of Whatsapp application in Karachi. *International Journal of Media, Journalism and Mass Communications (IJMJMC)*, *4* (1), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-9479.0401002

Shanmugapriya, D. S., & Priya, A. (2016). A Study on impact of using whatsapp on reduction of stress. *International Journal of Current Research & Modern Education (IJCRME), 1* (2), 66-79.

Sircar, S. (2018). India tops the world in forwarding messages! Umm, why though?https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/reasons-why-indians-forward-many-whatsapp-messages

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2018). Emotion. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/emotion

Tajfel, H. (2010). *Social identity and intergroup relations*. Cambridge University Press.

Technopedia. (2016). Definition of Infotainment. https://www.techopedia.com/definition

Tsang, M. M., Ho, S. C., & Liang, T. P. (2004). Consumer attitudes toward mobile advertising: An empirical study. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *8*(3), 65–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/10864415.2004.11044301

WhatsApp Blog. (2020). Two billion users – connecting the world privately. https://blog.whatsapp.com/?page=2

Yu, C. W., & Kamarulzama, Y. (2016). Viral marketing via the new media: The case of communication behaviour in WhatsApp [Paper presentation]. In This Volume Contains the Papers Presented at IBAICM-2016: Third International Conference on Marketing 2016 Held on 19-20 December in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.