



## Strengthening Family Communication Bond through WhatsApp Media Group in Timor Leste

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Diterima tanggal 15 Januari 2022,  
Direvisi tanggal 12 Maret 2022,  
Disetujui tanggal 12 September 2022.

**Abstrak.** Kehadiran media sosial di era digital ini khususnya WhatsApp messenger dinilai mampu memudahkan proses komunikasi bagi setiap orang. Penggunaan WhatsApp tidak hanya ditujukan untuk komunikasi interpersonal. Namun, WhatsApp juga menawarkan fitur di mana pengguna dapat berkomunikasi dalam grup atau yang juga disebut fitur grup WhatsApp. Saat ini, grup WhatsApp telah menjadi media komunikasi yang biasa digunakan di kalangan keluarga, terutama di Dili, Timor Leste. Kehadiran Grup Keluarga WhatsApp juga telah membantu keluarga dalam cara berkomunikasi satu sama lain. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana WhatsApp Family Group memperkuat ikatan keluarga komunikasi atas keluarga di Dili, Timor Leste. Penelitian ini memanfaatkan teori media baru dan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif melalui studi wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa grup WhatsApp telah memperkuat ikatan komunikasi keluarga dan juga grup WhatsApp telah menjadi media komunikasi, informasi media dan media hiburan bagi keluarga yang memanfaatkan grup WhatsApp di Dili, Timor-Leste.

**Kata Kunci :** Komunikasi Keluarga, Media Baru, Ikatan Keluarga, Grup Keluarga WhatsApp

**Abstract.** The presence of social media in this digital era especially WhatsApp messenger is considered to be able to facilitate the communication process for everyone. The use of WhatsApp is not only intended for interpersonal communication. However, WhatsApp also offers a feature where users can communicate in a group or what is also called the WhatsApp group feature. Today, WhatsApp groups have become a media of communication that is commonly used among families, especially in Dili, Timor Leste. The presence of the WhatsApp Family Group has also helped the family in the way of communicating with each other. This research is conducted to identify how the WhatsApp Family Group strengthens the communication family bond over families in Dili, Timor Leste. This research was utilizing the new media theory and qualitative approach with the descriptive method through the interview, observation, and documentation study. The results of this study pointed that the WhatsApp group has strengthened the family communication bond and also WhatsApp group has become media of communication, media information and media of entertainment for family utilized WhatsApp group in Dili, Timor-Leste.

**Keywords:** Family Communication, New Media, Family Bond, WhatsApp Family Group

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## INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology have encouraged humans to create new forms of interaction and communication. Likewise, with the development of digital technology, the rapid technological advances today have made almost no area of human life free from its use, either directly or indirectly. As globalization flows with the demands of the rapid exchange of information, the role of communication technology is very important. One of the results of these advances in information technology is the creation of a new digital communication medium called WhatsApp. Nowadays, WhatsApp has a big role and is used by most people in the world. This is in accordance with the statement of Trisnani (2017) said that WhatsApp as one of the social media is currently using it for the benefit of socializing as well as conveying messages both by individuals and groups.

Based on Hootsuite's (2021) data, WhatsApp ranks the third most popular or most used social media platform, and WhatsApp ranks as the second most popular or most used digital communication media. Apart from Facebook, WhatsApp is also one of the most widely used communication media throughout the world, including in Timor Leste. The number of WhatsApp users can also be seen from the graphic below:

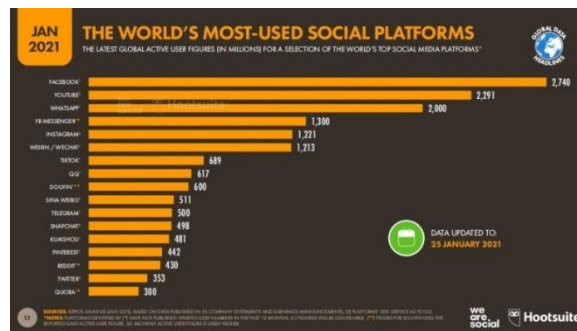


Figure 1  
The World's Most-Used Social Platforms, Jan 2021  
Source: <https://digitalreport.wearesocial.com>

The impact of this technology in Timor Leste has spread quickly as well, where everyone from urban areas to remote areas has used digital technology and the internet as a medium of communication, especially for youth as family members in Dili, Timor Leste. Digital technology and the internet have been recognized by everyone in Timor Leste as a medium of communication and they also have fully aware of those common existing digital media, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, skype, email, YouTube, and others.

The use of smartphones and the WhatsApp application can also be found among families in Dili Timor Leste. Almost all families in Dili Timor Leste use smartphones and most have a WhatsApp application. This allows family members to communicate with other family members without having to meet face to face. We can do numerous activities in the WhatsApp application not only for casual communication but we can make group discussion activities. Through smartphones and the WhatsApp application, this makes it easier for family members to interact socially with others.

In addition, based on the news from *Tatotli* (2021) as one of Timor Leste's national media said that WhatsApp is a valuable resource during covid-19 and helps students abroad lead a normal life. Using the messaging platform WhatsApp is an important coping mechanism for people living in areas characterized by conflict and the areas that impose the lockdown due to covid-19.



Figure 2  
WhatsApp valuable resource during covid-19  
Source: [www.tatoli.tl](http://www.tatoli.tl)

According to previous research by Ditha Prasanti and Sri Seti Indriani (2017) on *Peristiwa Komunikasi Dalam Media Sosial "Whatsapp Group Family SW-6"*. The research stated that the presence of the WhatsApp Group Family has also triggered the emergence of various communication events. Unique communication events occurred in family conversations through WhatsApp Group Family. The results of their study illustrate the uniqueness of communication events in conversations that occur through WhatsApp Group Family SW-6, consisting of the event of friendship; bullying events; show of self-existence; and satire/reprimand in a conversation through WhatsApp Group Family SW-6.

WhatsApp is a cross-platform message sending and receiving application that allows users to exchange messages without the cost of Short Messages Service (SMS) because WhatsApp uses the same internet data plan for email, web browsing, and other activities as well. The WhatsApp application uses a 2G to 4G connection or you can also use a Wi-Fi connection for data communication networks. By using WhatsApp, users can chat online, share documents, exchange photos/videos, and others.

In this study, the theory of new media is used as stated by Emmanuel Bonney where new media is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. This refers to on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation, community formation in the mass media, and around the media content. Another significant feature of new media is the creation, publishing, distribution, and consumption of media content.

In recent times, there is an advantage of a high technological mass media that has a wide range of information dissemination. Mobile phones, computers, CD-ROMs, DVDs, and the internet among other digital devices are all part of the era of new media. The internet especially has over the few years had a great impact on the mass media communication scene. Its invention has expanded the scope of mass media. The use of the internet has created a lot of space for interaction and easy connectivity to the world, thereby making the world a small place in terms of communication.

A device such as the mobile phone makes communication faster and easier. Today, a mobile device can also be used to access the internet for all kinds of information. Some time back especially in the era of traditional media, accessing information was not that easy as it is now. New media is a very important revolution of mass media. This has provided easy means of communication to students and practitioners in the field (communication). As we are involved and interact with people in our everyday life, it is very vital to be aware of the kind of media we access and use, and the influence it has on us.

Uses and gratifications theory is a very relevant theory in this era of new media. This theory seeks to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups, and society in general. Everybody uses the new media for one or more reasons. People may use the internet as a source of entertainment, for news updates, for social interaction among others. This theory is an approach to describe and find out why people actively seek out specific media outlets and content to satisfy specific needs. The theory discusses

how users proactively search for media that will not only meet a given need but enhance knowledge, social interactions, and diversion. New media is inevitable in terms of the application of the uses and gratification theory.

This can be seen in the three major objectives with respect to the development of the uses and gratifications theory. The first major objective of this theory is to explain; how individuals use mass media to satisfy their needs. Secondly, to discover underlying motives for individuals' media use; and also to identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use. At the core of the uses and gratifications theory lies the assumption that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs. Those statements are also in accordance with McQuail and Blumler, (1972) who emphasize that the uses of different types of media could be grouped into 4 categories; diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance.

### RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, a qualitative research method with a descriptive research technique is applied. According to Nasehudin and Gozali (2012: 27), the descriptive method is a framework for carrying out an action or a frame of mind for composing directed and related ideas with goals and objectives. The method used in this research is qualitative with the aim of descriptive research, namely to explain the phenomena that occur in society in depth by collecting data in-depth and completely based on the observation, data collection, documentation, and interviews.

Furthermore, Sugyono (2017: 96) states that sampling in qualitative research is carried out when the researcher enters the field and during the research. Based on Sugyono, in this study the authors set the following criteria: informant's criteria must be determined because interviewees must be competent in their fields to produce quality data. The number of informants to be interviewed was 12 people from three WhatsApp family groups in Dili Timor Leste. This sampling was selected according to needs or objectives (snowball sampling). The selected informants are members of the WhatsApp group who meet the criteria. The informants' criteria and profile can be Table 1.

Table 1: Informants Profile

No	Name	Ages	Gender	Occupation	WA Groups
1	Cesaltino Soares	26	Male	Fresh Graduated	Member of Soares Family
2	Caecilia Soares	28	Female	Staff in Telkomcel Timor Leste	Member of Saores Family
3	Januario Soares	34	Male	Consultant in INGO	Admin of Soares Family
4	Marcia Neves	25	Female	Staff UNDP Timor Leste	Member of Sonev Family
5	Lanya Neves	17	Female	Colleges Student	Member of Sonev Family
6	Genoveva Neves	23	Female	Colleges Student	Admin of Sonev Family
7	Simiao S. Gama	25	Male	Employee at Similie	Member of Familia Gloriossos
8	Calisto Babo	39	Male	Adviser at CARDNO	Member of Familia Gloriossos
9	Nonia Martins	23	Female	Businesswoman	Admin of Familia Gloriossos
10	Delio da Costa	25	Male	Employee at MAF	Member of CCS Family
11	Isidoro Salsinha	26	Male	Unemployed	Member of CCS Family
12	Ana Rosa	46	Female	Self-Employee	Admin of CCS Family

## RESULT

The research is conducted in four WhatsApp family groups in Dili, Timor Leste. The results were obtained through the process of interviews, observation, and documentation to identify how Timor Leste families use WhatsApp media groups to strengthen family communication bonds.

The WhatsApp group is a medium of communication between family members. Based on the statement of the informant Cesaltino S. Soares from the Soares family states that the lack of communication between family and friends has become their common issue. The WhatsApp group was formed in order to improve communication between their families to be more effective.

*“The lack of contact between our families is another aspect that has resulted in the formation of our WA group. The WhatsApp group was formed in order to improve communication between our families to be more effective”. (Cesaltino Soares of Soares Family, August 2021, Dili Timor Leste)*

On the other hand, Simiao da Gama (member of Familia Gloriosos) argued that the background of creating Familia Glorioso's WhatsApp group is because their family is too busy with their activities and they don't have enough time to direct communication among their family members. Therefore, they created this WhatsApp group to become their communication media between their families.

*“The background of creating Familia Gloriosos, WhatsApp group because we are too busy with our own activities and we don't have enough time to share with family members and friends. Therefore, a simple text message can always be good to show a gesture we are there for everyone. Being active in family and friend's things can be quite difficult sometimes, so through this group, we can actually know what's happening around”. (Simiao da Gama of Familia Gloriosos, August 2021, Lauten Timor Leste)*

Furthermore, WhatsApp becomes a communication medium for families in Timor Leste during this Covid-19 pandemic year. As the Coronavirus spreads throughout the world, family communication patterns and human lifestyles have changed. In order to keep the communication to be more effective during this pandemic situation, numerous families in Dili, Timor Leste use WhatsApp as a communication medium.

*“The CCS Family is a group of WhatsApp that created by the family of Costa, Cabral, and Salsinha. This group formed as a medium of communication between those three families. The reason for creating this group is because of less communication among these three families during the pandemic situation (COVID19)”. (Delio da Costa of CCS Family, August 2021, Dili Timor Leste)*

In Addition, Cesaltino Stated that WhatsApp is very important for families during this pandemic in which everyone is required to conduct activities online, families must use WhatsApp to communicate with family, friends, and other people. During the period of Covid 19 WhatsApp has become a family communication medium in Timor Leste. Whatsapp is commonly known as a medium of communication between families. But, WhatsApp family groups are also can be as information media for families using WA groups in Dili Timor Leste.

*“The purpose of Soares Family is to be able to share and obtain information as well as socialize with other people in cyberspace. Because it is a form of online media, social media is not constrained by space or time”. (Cesaltino Soares of Soares Family, August 2021, Dili Timor Leste)*

The same thing was conveyed by Calisto Babo (member of Familia Gloriosos) that they used WhatsApp social medial to know each other between them and at least they know what their family member during the weekend or sharing their experience during a week, sports activity. After they record much information about family members, they decide to make a plan which aims are to make their relationship become stronger.

Base on the result of the research that what the families do through WhatsApp groups is in family communication, and the reason is that they hold family discussions, share information and make virtual



friends via video calls, allowing them to keep reminding each other and stay up to date on each other's situations.

*“Sonev Family was created as a family WhatsApp group which used to communicate with family member especially in ask or sharing the information”. (Lanya Neves of Sonev Family, August 2021, Dili Timor Leste)*

*“We use WhatsApp to share, broadcast and provide the info to each other, because it’s easy, flexible and comfortable. The result is, we not missing any news and info which are related to all members”. (Marcia Neves of Sonev Family, August 2021, Dili Timor Leste)*

According to the Caecilia Soares (Soares Family) that the presence of the WA family group made it easier for family members to share credible information. The motive for creating a WA family group is because intent to share our condition, share the important information about our environment. That shared information above about being free from Lockdown in Dili, Timor Leste among those families’ Whatsapp group has been proven that they use the WhatsApp group as a media of information among their families’ members.

Apart from being a medium of communication and information, the WA group is also deployed as a medium of entertainment for the WA family group in Dili Timor Leste. According to the results of the study that the motive of family members for creating WA groups as entertainment media was because they wanted to strengthen communication bonds so that family members were more friendly.

*“We mostly do the online game together because we rarely can meet completely in person”. (Caecilia Soares of Soares Family, August 2021, Dili Timor Leste)*

*WhatsApp become our new family time platform to stay connected during our busy lives. The group chat is an exception to that. It’s something that can really bring us together anywhere and anytime. In the example, if I see something, I think is funny, I can immediately share it, instead of waiting until the end of the day to tell them. (Marcia Neves of Sonev Family, August 2021, Dili Timor Leste)*

WhatsApp Groups, apart from being a media of communication and information, WhatsApp groups are also a media of entertainment for families. They always share funny things in their WhatsApp groups, because they think sharing funny things in WhatsApp groups will strengthen their family relationship.

## DISCUSSION

WhatsApp has become one of the digital communication media used by many people around the world, especially residents in Dili Timor Leste. WhatsApp also provides opportunities for families to create family communication groups, so WA groups can help families in long-distance communication, update information, and also become a medium of entertainment for families who use WhatsApp groups.

The beauty of a WhatsApp Group family is that it makes it easy to deliver timely and authentic conversations. It allows family members to share information, condition, and gathering virtually. WhatsApp Groups tend to make communication quicker. It's easy to ignore a phone call to each member, but chats are a lot easier to deal with. Sometimes each family member is busy with their job and studies and they need to know how to do something right away. Responding to a chat is the ideal solution. The most important thing about WhatsApp Groups is that you create them sparingly.

The motive that prompted them to create their Family WhatsApp group is the lack of communication between family members. Therefore, through their Family WhatsApp group is to strengthen their family communication bond, and to make their communication more easily. On the other hand, Families in Dili Timor Leste created their WhatsApp group because all of their family members are busy and live apart. Therefore, their WhatsApp group has become a medium of

communication for their family, so that they can keep in touch even though they rarely see each other or are busy.

The motives and purpose of establishing the family WhatsApp group, because the lack of communication and information between family and friends is another aspect that has resulted in the formation of the family WA group. The WhatsApp group was formed in order to improve communication between families and friends to be more effective.

According to Mega, Nailariza, and Imam (2019) that WhatsApp is a social media application that can text/voice chat, send photos, send videos, send documents, and send locations. So that with WhatsApp social media, it can build a culture in the technology literate generation which is also more appropriate to be used as personal or group communication which can be a means of maintaining relationships with other people and sources of information.

Based on the results of the research that has been done, the authors identify that WhatsApp Group Family is one of the digital media for communication that has been used by almost all families. Almost everyone in this digital era uses the WhatsApp application therefore some families don't want to miss out on creating a WhatsApp family group, as a medium of communication.

In addition to knowing the motives and goals of the WA family group, the researchers also found reasons why families in Dili Timor Leste use the WA group. The reason the family in Dili Timor Leste uses the WA group is that they want to maintain or strengthen their family communication bond, and to keep their communication to be more effective. Based on the data, the changes after they used the WhatsApp group that occurred in their family were communication between their family members became smoother and their relationship is more strengthen

Before they used the WhatsApp group, some of the family members are feeling shy to greet other family members because they don't close to each other, but after joining the family WhatsApp group it unites and brings them together and so their relationships become very good. Sometimes they make a plan in the group to hang out in which makes their relationship become stronger. As a result, after them using WhatsApp, they are getting closer to each other and their communication more easily.

During the research, the researchers also found the reason why families in Dili Timor Leste chose to communicate via WhatsApp because most of the informants stated that WhatsApp was more private, more effective, safe application, user friendly, and the most popular app in Dili Timor Leste. In addition, WhatsApp is an instant messaging app, as WhatsApp plays an important role in communication, both personally and in groups. Group members can use WhatsApp to send text messages, photos, audio, video, documents, and make audio and video calls.

Nowadays, the development of technology and communication tools really affects to the communication that exists between family members. This can be seen from the emergence of communication tools that can be used by every individual at any time like WhatsApp; this tool will help them to maintain communication between their families. For example, by using WhatsApp chats and calls, they can contact their family at any time. Meanwhile, if they want to see whether their physical condition is getting thinner or getting fatter, or the current situation then they can use video call facilities. This development will help them to maintain communication between their families at the same time will strengthen their relationship.

Researchers found several reasons why families in Dili Timor Leste chose to communicate through WA groups, including being more effective, friendly application and the most popular social media applicants in Timor Leste. Besides that, the reason they preferred WhatsApp is that it was more private and they can share anything without worries about the bad opinion because what they share in their group it's just a family matter.

Based on the data the researcher found that the reason why the family in Dili Timor Leste used the WhatsApp group is that, it's easy to download on every smartphone, and it can be also linked to another social media like Facebook. And part from that, from the demographic aspect, *Timorese* citizens are preferring using WA rather than other social media.

In addition, another reason they use WhatsApp as their communication media is that this feature is more flexible than other social media, more private and safe application for communication, simple application because just only save the number who they want to communicate with, and easy to access.

According to the data found, the reason Family in Dili Timor Leste used WhatsApp as a family communication medium is because it is an instant messaging app, as WhatsApp plays an important role in communication, both personally and in groups. Group members can use WhatsApp to send text messages, photos, audio, video, documents, and make audio and video calls. WhatsApp group was formed to make it easier for family members to communicate so that communication can proceed smoothly and effectively.

The research was conducted through the observation to interviews with informants and it was found that the vision, mission, and goals of the creation of the WhatsApp family group, as a media of communication. The vision of the WhatsApp family group is to strengthen the family communication bonds, while its mission is to become a media of communication, information, and entertainment. The purpose of WhatsApp family groups is to help them communicate and strengthen their relationship.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion, the conclusions of this study are as follows: The purpose of the WhatsApp family group is to become a media of communication, information media, entertainment media, and a place for families to gather, especially with the COVID-19 situation. Because in this time of covid 19, many families find it difficult to communicate face-to-face or gather.

The reason families in Dili Timor Leste use the WA group is because they want to maintain or strengthen communication bonds. Build more intimate family relationships in long-distance relationships. Moreover, the WhatsApp group is considered to be more private and can share anything without worrying about bad opinions, because what is shared in WhatsApp groups is only a family matter. Besides, WhatsApp is not an instant messaging platform only, but WhatsApp plays an important role in communication, both personally and in groups. Group members can use WhatsApp to send text messages, photos, audio, video, documents, and make audio and video calls. On the other hand, WhatsApp is user-friendly and popular in Timor Leste.

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