



Whatsapp status updates as a minor tool for emotional and thought process assessment: a prospective study in 11 West Africa countries

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Abstract

Mental health is an integral part of Health and well-being. With the advent of smartphones, the internet and the growing importance of WhatsApp as an effective and cheap online means of daily communication, certain attributes of Users such as posts, activities, quotes, images and writings can be valuable to assess emotions and thoughts among others.

Mood/affect regulation thought process, impulse control, insight, judgement may be an apparent behaviour on users that can be observed using social network like the WhatsApp Status Update. This digital evidence could be useful in the assessment of such attributes.

This study empirically investigates whether the android WhatsApp messenger and its status updates could assess and predict the emotional and thought process of users in some West Africa countries. A structured online survey was employed to collect data from a sample of 1500 users across West Africa. The survey was shared and distributed online on various social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to people, contacts, friends, associates and social groups within the West African Region. Data collected was cleaned and descriptive statistics were used to analyze them.

The results show that posts on WhatsApp status are true reflections of what users are thinking. Users take time to put posts, observe them and make meanings to the post of their contacts. Therefore, WhatsApp Status Updates can be used to assess the emotional and thoughts process of users unless certain information posted are deliberately held confidential by users.

Keywords: assessment, Whatsapp, emotional, thought process, minor tool

Introduction

Internet and the use of social media such as WhatsApp messenger are relevant in our day to day life and activities. Due to this technological advancement, everyone is compelled by this system of communication. Mobile phone communication, the internet and social media have expanded and always expanding because it is cheap to use (Giordano *et al.*, 2017) ^[20]. This development is gaining grounds in all aspects of our lives and this was confirmed by a study done in the United States which discovered that 3306 healthcare providers employ this technology in clinical practice and for other purposes (Giordano *et al.*, 2017) ^[21]. The internet and social media make it possible to visualize and interact with the environment and connect to people and this may be used as an assessment to build knowledge that serves as a basis for making decisions about individuals. With increasing development and advancement, social media could be built upon as an instrument to support the growing interest in psychological testing and research.

This can be a reliable tool to test because mobile phones are highly portable and accessibly carried by users everyday anytime and anywhere whether work, school or church and this technology are playing vital roles in all field of life now (Allagui, 2014). The most visited sites today everywhere are social networks like Facebook, Twitter, goggle +, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, academia and Skype because they make information sharing easy among peers. The WhatsApp messenger started in 2009 created by two computer scientist Brian Acton and Jab Koum to make

communication and transfer of information instant (Sarker, 2015). This has enabled several users to stay in touch with friends, families and contacts, all that they need is internet access. New features like voice and video calls were added as time went on, it is free and simple to get started as a user. Users can easily connect with contacts in any place at any time beyond sea irrespective of distant. Everyone with a smartphone is currently using this application for personal update, notes, messages and even send documents up to 100MB. Simply put, it has occupied the life of every smart phone user. WhatsApp has 1.2 billion users worldwide, therefore with this large number using this means of communication, researchers need to pay more attention to the Application. There have been many previous studies focusing on the social effect of WhatsApp on users (Church and Oliveira, 2013) ^[18]. WhatsApp is an avenue for linguistic research as it shows the ability of humans to adapt and communicate with mobile devices. WhatsApp users can write or communicate any information regardless of where and what they are communicating (Sanchez-Moya and Cruz Moya, 2015) ^[1]. Nowadays, users can type manually and choose a picture of their own choice to communicate what they are thinking, doing or how they are feeling anytime.

This information can be shared worldwide across the globe and it takes no time to get it to spread. The traditional method of text messages is not quite used frequently because of the WhatsApp messenger this has caused reduced revenues realized from call

and landlines of telecommunication company. In West Africa, users have found it as a better and cost-effective means to supplement voice calls provided by Telecommunication companies. Psychological Assessment involves understanding the psychological functioning of all individuals with or without the use of psychological test to build sound knowledge for well-being and therapeutic purposes (Mansur-Alves, Silva, & Fernandes, 2016a) [9]. Evidence of self-presentation where individuals communicate their thoughts and images of themselves to others is predictable on WhatsApp status Updates. These attract emotional response from contacts who value the emotions of others and maybe convinced to share their emotions on the same WhatsApp platform. With the use of internet and WhatsApp, we may not need face to face examination of interaction to predict thought process but this could be disclosed digitally in a form of WhatsApp profile Statuses. WhatsApp users are very careful about what they post as their status because their contacts will make meanings from their post. People are sensitive to WhatsApp profile status; this implies there is a lot of significance attached to it. On the 24th February 2017, the developers of the application introduced a new version. Rather than allowing user to post their profile photo with a short text, the new version permitted users to share a 24-hour status in a similar way to that of snap chat. User worldwide complained of this new version such that the developers got back to textual status and the developers affected those changes on 24th March 2017.

This phenomenon shows that users are sensitive, alert and mindful of WhatsApp profile statuses. This paper aims to investigate whether WhatsApp profile statuses can be used to predict and assess the emotional and thought process of users

This paper address the question of whether real themes are expressed on WhatsApp profile status, what kind of thoughts are expressed by the users and how socio-demographic variables such as age plays a role in this aspect. Many instruments and tools have been developed for this purpose over the years with technical and scientific quality but in modern times where there is advent of internet, smartphones and WhatsApp, this could be used to test reliability of such assessment, hence the need to investigate smartphone device and the highly used Application like the WhatsApp messenger.

Materials and methods

A quantitative explorative structured questionnaire (Online survey) was designed for this study, then it was distributed and shared across West Africa. Data was collected by forwarding the online surveys link and the post to people, contacts, families, friends, associates, civil servants, social groups, student groups and all groups accessible in West Africa Region. The survey was translated into French to enable French speakers to understand the purpose of the study. These accessible populations also forwarded the post to the survey to their contacts and various groups they have on their WhatsApp messenger to keep the online survey widely distributed as far as possible.

The post was also shared on other social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. to increase visibility. To provide adequate ethical consideration and validity of data collected, participants below the age of 18 years were not considered because of their vulnerability as minors. Personal information that could identify

users were not included to ensure confidentiality. To be part of this research, respondents have to be in possession of a smart mobile phone device with access to the internet, the WhatsApp Application, social media networks, be prepared to use mobile data to take part in the study and make time to participate voluntarily. Data was collected for a period of three months; data was limited to the West African Zone. 1500 respondents who had access to the post and made time to fill through the online survey. Double responses from same persons were controlled as the survey was program to take one response per person because such response may not convey the original thought of participants. Data were cleaned and responses not related to Emotion and thought Assessment were removed. The data was entered into Excel and SPSS version 22 for Analysis and frequency calculations.

Results

This chapter analyzes the responses from the participant of the study. These are represented in tables, figures, bar charts and pie chart for clarity and their interpretation follow thereafter.

Table 1.0: Socio demographic data of respondents

Variable	Frequency(N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	972	64.8
Female	528	35.2
Age		
18-19	111	7.4
20-25	462	30.8
26-30	618	41.2
31-40	249	16.6
41 and above	60	4.0
Level of Education		
Primary	111	7.4
Secondary	345	23.0
Vocational	129	8.6
Tertiary	915	61.0
Marital Status		
Married	453	30.2
Single	231	15.4
Relationship	816	54.4
Country		
Benin Republic	90	6.0
Burkina Faso	72	4.8
The Gambia	30	2.0
Ghana	426	28.4
Guinea	45	3.0
Ivory coast	39	2.6
Mali	27	1.8
Nigeria	537	35.8
Senegal	69	4.6
Sierra Leone	6	0.4
Togo	159	10.6

Total 1500 100 Table 1.0 represents the socio-demographic characteristic of respondents. A total of 1500

WhatsApp users responded, 64.8% (972) were male while the rest 35.2%(528) were females.

The age distribution was made up of the following:18-19 (7.4%); 20-25 (30.8%);26-30(41.2%); 31-40 (16.6%) and 41 years and above representing 4%.

Majority of respondents had tertiary education (61%) followed by those with secondary education (23%). The least been primary education (7.4%).

Table 2.0: Reasons why respondents Update their WhatsApp Status

Statement	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
others to acknowledge something unknown them	142	9.7
others to be self-aware of them	240	16.0
Keep in touch with contacts	524	34.9
Show the level of grooming and dressing	69	4.6
Update people on current happenings/situations	360	24.0
No reason	81	5.4
Other reasons	84	5.6

Respondents have various reasons why they update their WhatsApp status, 34.9% of respondents will do that to keep in touch with their contacts, 24% do that to updates their contacts on current happenings or situations, 16% chose the option of others been self-aware of them, 5.6% had other reasons such as for educational purpose, motivations and news bulletins while 5.4% had no good reasons. The least been showing levels of grooming (4.6%).

Table 3.0: Ideas/Thoughts/Messages Respondents convey or Post on their WhatsApp Status

Ideations/Thoughts	No. of Respondents(N)	Percentages (%)
Adverts	225	15
Persecutory thoughts	38	2.5
Business thoughts	160	10.7
Paranoid thoughts	17	1.1
Feeling of love	58	3.8
Guilty feeling	11	0.8
Fears	10	0.6
Happiness	190	12.7
Worried and anxiousness	22	1.5
Intentions	10	0.7
Religious Beliefs	203	13.5
Motivations	184	12.2
Comedies	125	8.3
Birthday Wishes	140	9.3
Educational bulletins	47	3.1
Everything	12	0.9
Bereavement	18	1.3
Trending Issues on social media	30	2
	Total(N) 1500	100

Ideas, thoughts and information post daily on WhatsApp status differ. Advertisement account for 15% being the highest, followed by religious beliefs (13.5%), happiness scenes (12.7%), motivational word (12. 2%). There least are guilty feelings (0.8%) and fears (0.6%).

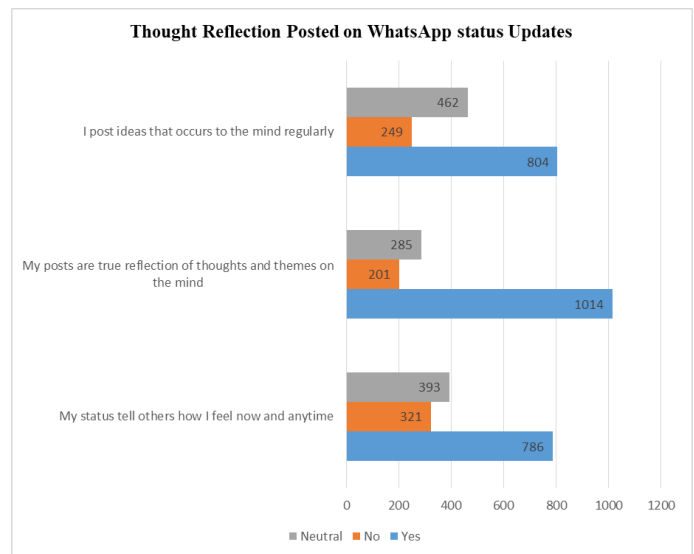


Fig 1.0

53.5% (804) of respondents post regularly on their WhatsApp status, 16.6%(249) do not post anything whereas 30.8%(462) are not certain about their post.

Out of this post, 67.6 % (1014) are true reflection of their thoughts, 13.4 % (201) are not while 19% cannot be classified. Then 52.4% (786) express true feelings of the respondents, 21.4% (321) don't signify true feeling and 26.2%(393) cannot be categorized in any of them

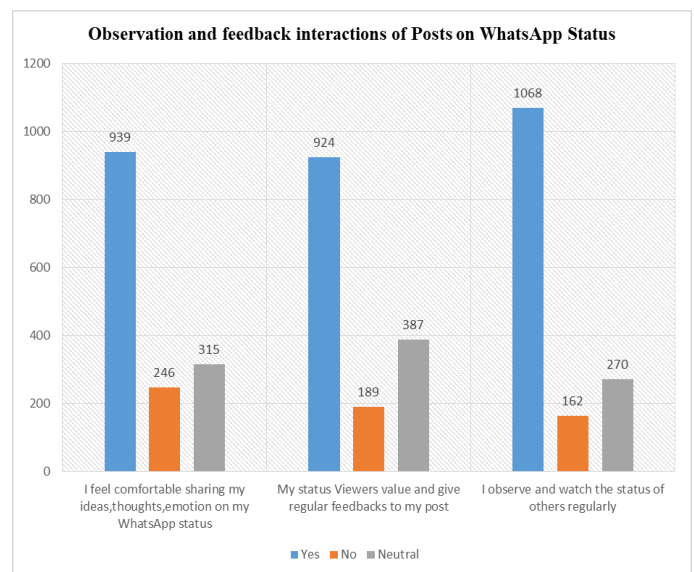


Fig 2.0

Feedbacks about how respondents and contacts of respondents receive and embrace WhatsApp status update was explored.

62.6% (939) of respondents are comfortable sharing their WhatsApp status with their contacts, however, 16.3% (246) remain confidential and private not sharing any post, 21% (315) are not particular about that.

From the table, it is indicated that 61.6% (924) of respondents contacts view what they post, 12.6% (189) are not viewed and the remaining 25.8% (387) have no clue to that observation. Similarly, 71.2% (1068) take time to watch the status of others, 10.8% (162) do not spy that.

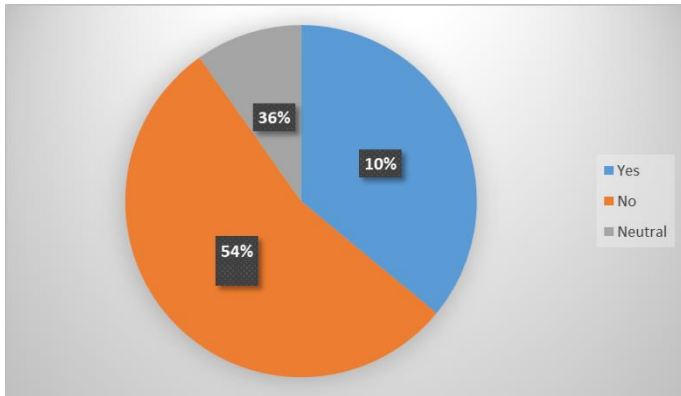


Fig 3.0

The tendency of respondents to post suicidal ideations on their WhatsApp status

As indicated in the pie chart 54%(810) said they will not post suicidal ideas, 10%(150) will do that while 36%(540) share no thought on that

Discussion

WhatsApp has been the major means of communication for almost everyone nowadays because communication is easier and faster. Been used almost by everyone for communication, it is observed through this study that those aged 41 years and above don't use it for the purpose of posting something on their WhatsApp status. However, the usage among young people especially those aged 20-25 years and 26-30 years are high. These age group regularly post on their WhatsApp status. Majority of the post on WhatsApp status is meant to keep in touch with contacts and update them with current happenings or situations. This support the finding of Kukulska and Shield (2008) who emphasize the importance of mobile devices as a tool for social contact. Therefore, it is an ideal tool for user to express their emotions and thoughts and reach out to their contacts.

This study reveals that respondents post mostly advertisement on how they can get their goods and services market followed by religious beliefs, motivational words and feeling of happiness.

On the contrary, users or respondents do not post on their status information that is related to their confidential, private issues, guilty feeling and fears.

These thoughts are not shared and posted by users and this is in line with a study conducted by Bronstein (2014) which found that 70% of Hebrew Facebook users hold back and will not disclose certain emotional information.

Post on WhatsApp status are primarily ideas that occur to the mind and true reflection of thinking and how users feel but users deliberately don't put post that will expose too much of their

emotional status to their contacts or show what is deep inside them.

Data analysis revealed that WhatsApp status updates are been observed, watched and there are good feedback circulations among users.

Users and contacts of users' view and provide regular feedback to post put on WhatsApp status.

This implies that people take time to observe their contacts and make meanings or monitor the current happenings of events, thoughts, emotions and wellbeing irrespective of distance or location.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study WhatsApp status Updates can be used as a tool to assess or monitor the emotion and thought the process of users.

But certain information remains withheld by users because they are not comfortable sharing such confidential information anymore. Such information is deliberately not posted by users. Moments of happiness, motivation, religious beliefs and good moods are disclosed by users on their WhatsApp status while bad feelings, mood changes and suicidal thoughts are expressed in few.

Therefore, unless certain information is withheld, WhatsApp status Update can communicate the Emotions and thoughts process of users.

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