

**DECODING DIGITAL IDENTITIES AND EXPLORATION OF WHATSAPP
STATUS CONTENT AND LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UGANDA
CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY- BISHOP BARHAM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE KABALE
STUDENTS' ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL IDENTITY**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I, **IVONE ARINDA**, hereby declare that this is my original work, is not plagiarised and has not been submitted any other institution for any award.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arinda', written in a cursive style.

Date 15/8/2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my lovely dad and mum Mr. and Mrs. Benon Tindiwensi and my siblings Emilly, Martin and Bonitah.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Almighty God for the opportunity He provided for me to acquire education.

I would also like to thank Him for His never- ending blessings and provision. I would like to thank my beloved parents, Mr. and Mrs. Benon Tindiwensi, my siblings and friends for the financial, moral and spiritual support.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

UCU: Uganda Christian University

BBUC: Bishop Barham University College.

FGDs: Focus Group Discussions

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, scope of the study, theoretical framework, significance of the study, definition of terms and the summary.

1.1 Background of the Study

The rapid growth of digital communication technologies has changed how individuals interact, express themselves, and build their identities. Social media platforms especially immediate message apps such as WhatsApp, have become integral to the lives of students and educators. WhatsApp, launched in 2009, gained popularity due to its simplicity, cost-effectiveness, and versatile features such as status updates (Boulos et al., 2021).

With the emergence of social media, platforms such as WhatsApp have changed communication in education, providing an avenue for sharing academic achievements, personal experiences and social interactions. WhatsApp statuses allow users to upload images, videos or texts visible to their contacts for 24 hours. In academic institutions like Bishop Barham University, lecturers often encounter their students' status updates, which might shape their perceptions of students' academic seriousness and social behaviors.

For university students, WhatsApp statuses serve as a tool for academic and social engagement. Many students use the platform to share their academic achievements, promote group discussions, or disseminate motivational messages, reflecting their academic identity (Tumwebaze & Mbabazi, 2023). Simultaneously, they also use the platform to share content related to their social lives, including personal experiences, recreational activities, or advocacy for social causes. This

duality makes WhatsApp statuses a significant space for exploring how students balance their academic responsibilities with their personal and social identities (Akeem & Oladayo, 2024).

At Bishop Barham University College, Kabale, where a diverse student body operates under a semester academic system, students rely on digital platforms like WhatsApp to navigate their busy schedules and maintain connections with peers and lecturers. As highlighted by Kyambadde et al. (2023), social media usage among Ugandan university students has increased, reflecting broader global trends. However, the content students share on these platforms can influence how others including lecturers perceive them. Lecturers, as key stakeholders in students' academic journeys often form opinions about students' priorities, professionalism, and values based on their online behavior, particularly WhatsApp statuses (Odhiambo & Nderitu, 2020).

Despite the growing prevalence of WhatsApp usage in academia, the implications of these perceptions remain underexplored. Studies in other contexts have shown that social media content can reinforce stereotypes or biases, which may impact students' academic and professional relationships (Amadi & Okeke, 2021). For instance, lecturers may view students who frequently post academic-related content positively, associating such posts with commitment and ambition. Conversely, students who post non-academic content such as memes or personal updates, may inadvertently be perceived as less serious or less focused (Ndlovu & Sithole, 2021).

This study was particularly relevant in the context of Uganda universities, where traditional norms about academic professionalism intersected with the modern realities of social media usage. While some lecturers viewed students' use of platforms like WhatsApp as innovative and collaborative, others expressed concern over its potential to distract students from their academic goals (Ssekandi & Luyinda, 2022). These perceptions could have had significant implications for students' academic and social identities, influencing how they engaged with their lecturers and peers, their self-esteem, and their overall educational experience.

Globally, studies such as those by Aghaee et al. (2021) indicate that social media usage could influence academic and personal perceptions. However, in Uganda limited research existed regarding WhatsApp's influence on academic and social identities.

1.2 Problem Statement

Lecturers' perceptions of students are based purely on academic performance, classroom engagement and professionalism. Social media would serve only as a supplementary communication tool without affecting academic relationships or perceptions (Manca, S., & Ranieri, M. (2016).

WhatsApp statuses often display content ranging from academic achievements to casual or controversial opinions. These updates can subconsciously influence lecturer's perceptions, sometimes leading to biases about students' academic abilities and social identities (Balakrishnan, M. S., & Griffiths, M. D. (2018).

Existing studies often overlook the specific cultural and institutional contexts, and there is a need for more robust methodologies to capture the complexity to these perceptions and their potential biases. Furthermore, the long-term effects of these perceptions on student-lecturer relationships and academic outcomes remain

largely unexplored (Mwesigye, F., & Nansubuga, A. (2020).

1.3 Research Objective

The study was guided by both general and specific objectives.

1.3.1 General Objective

To investigate the influence of WhatsApp status content on lecturer's perception of UCU-BBUC ,Kabale students' academic and social identity.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

- I. To identify the types of content shared on WhatsApp status that are most salient in shaping lecturer's perception of students.
- II. To explore the extent to which lecturers believe that WhatsApp status content accurately reflects student's actual academic and social identities.
- III. To examine the potential implications of lecturer's perception formed through WhatsApp status content, on their interactions with and evaluations of students.

1.4 Research Questions

General question

How do lecturers at UCU -BBUC, Kabale perceive students' academic and social identity based on their WhatsApp status content? To answer this main question, the study was guided by the following sub questions.

Sub questions

- I. What types of content shared on WhatsApp status by UCU -BBUC, Kabale students are most influential in shaping lecturer's perception?
- II. To what extent do lecturers believe that WhatsApp status content accurately reflects students true academic and social identity?

- III. What are potential implications of lecturer's perceptions, formed through status content on their interactions with and evaluations of UCU -BBUC, Kabale students.

1.5 Scope of the Study

1.5.1 Geographical Scope

This study took place at Uganda Christian University, Bishop Barham University College (BBUC) in Kabale Municipality, Western Uganda. BBUC is part of Uganda Christian University and has students from various faculties such as Education, Social Sciences, Journalism, Business and Theology. The decision to focus on BBUC came from its diverse student population and the active use of social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, for academic and social interaction. Its physical location facilitated easy access to both lecturers and students in a clear academic setting. This setup allowed for manageable and representative qualitative data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

1.5.2 Content Scope

The study's main focus was on two areas; types of content that students share on their WhatsApp statuses (such as memes, personal reflections, social activities and academic updates) and views of lecturers on such material in connection to students' social and academic identities.

WhatsApp content that was only institutional or administrative was not included in the study, nor did it look at other social media sites like Facebook or Instagram. Status updates that highlight sides of identity expression were prioritized instead. This emphasis supports the claim made by Ellison et al. (2011) that a crucial element of the development of a digital identity is online self-presentation.

1.5.3 Time Scope

Over the course of three months (June to August 2025), the study examined

WhatsApp status content and perceptions. A range of digital identity expressions were ensured by this timeframe, which allowed for the capture of both regular and special-event updates, such as campus events and academic deadlines. Limiting the scope to three months allowed the researcher to observe recurrent patterns and trends while conducting a thorough thematic analysis without being overloaded with data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The research was directed by the following interconnected theories:

1.6.1 The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974)

This theory explains how individuals deliberately choose media channels and content to fulfill personal requirements, including information seeking, social engagement, or entertainment. Students may post academic resources to meet their educational needs and memes to meet their social needs. Lecturers' interpretations of this behavior shed light on potential inconsistencies between intended and perceived messages.

1.6.2 Impression Management Theory (Goffman, 1959)

Goffman argues that individuals, either intentionally or unintentionally, regulate the perceptions they evoke in others, similar to performers on a stage. WhatsApp status updates are like "front stage" performances because students choose what they want to say and how they want to be seen by their lecturers and classmates. For example, a student might share Bible verses on purpose to make themselves look morally good in a religious Institution.

1.6.2 Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

This theory states that individuals describe their identities through group connections, thereby affecting their conduct and self-representation. For the purposes of this study, students' WhatsApp status updates serve as a digital

representation of their affiliation with both academic and social groups. If students post motivational academic quotes a lot, they may be reinforcing their identity as hard-working students. On the other hand, posts about nightlife or social events makes peer-based social identities stronger. How lecturers view these kinds of posts affects how these identities are understood in an academic setting.

1.8 Significance of the study

- i. The study added to the literature on social media's impact in higher education, specifically in Uganda.
- ii. It provided insights for university policies on social media usage among students and staff.
- iii. The study also helped lecturers and students understand the effects of digital impressions on academic relationships.

1.9 Definition of Terms

WhatsApp Status Content refers to the images, videos, text or other media shared by users on their WhatsApp status, which is a feature allowing users to post updates that disappear after 24 hours. Ahad, P., & Anshari, M. (2020).

Academic Identity refers to the way individuals perceive and present themselves in academic settings including their values, beliefs and attitudes towards learning and academic pursuits. Archer, L. (2008).

Social Identity refers to the individual's sense of belonging to a group or community and the emotional and value significance attached to that group membership. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979)

1.10 Summary

This paper sought to fill the gap in understanding how WhatsApp status content

influences lecturers' perceptions at Bishop Barham University. Based on the Symbolic Interactionism, provided a framework for exploring digital interactions' implications for academic and social identities.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature on the topic “The influence of WhatsApp status content on lecturers’ perception of BBUC students’ academic and social identities.” Sources of literature include journals, textbooks, websites, newspapers, blogs, dissertations, radio and television broadcasts among others.

2.1 Types of Content Shared on WhatsApp Statuses as a communication tool.

WhatsApp statuses serve as a significant medium for self-expression and social interaction, with users leveraging the platform to share diverse content types such as personal achievements, academic milestones, and entertainment -related materials.

Studies by Makinde and Salawu (2021) highlighted that WhatsApp statuses are widely used among university students to share academic updates, such as assignment reminders, exam schedules and personal reflections on coursework. Similarly, Aderibigbe et al (2022) emphasized the popularity of social and entertainment content among students, which often includes memes, motivational quotes and updates on personal interests.

This literature review was useful to my study since it answered the types of content shared on WhatsApp Statuses.

According to Alemayehu and Asres (2023), students also use WhatsApp statuses for advocacy and awareness campaigns particularly on social issues. In Uganda, for instance students frequently post about activism, showcasing the blend of academic and socio-political themes in their status updates. These trends underscore the platform’s role as both an academic and social communication

tool. However, as noted by Adebola and Okeowo (2022), the casual tone of some shared content may inadvertently influence how educators perceive student's academic seriousness. Although existing research provides insights into the types of content shared on WhatsApp, there is a lack of focus on how this content is categorized and interpreted within specific institutional settings like Bishop Barham University. This gap warrants further exploration to better understand the contextual dynamics of content sharing among students. WhatsApp status updates are a flexible communication tool allowing students to express various aspects of their personal and academic lives.

According to Alavi et al (2021), students often post content related to academic work, such as reminders, project updates and motivational quotes aimed at peers. The visual and temporal nature of WhatsApp statuses makes them an appealing platform for students to share snapshots of their lives. More recently, Kirabo and Semakula (2023) observed that WhatsApp statuses among Ugandan university students reflect a mix of social and academic identity expressions. They noted that students share coursework-related updated, news articles, and professional achievements while simultaneously posting informal content such as memes, birthday celebrations and trending topics. Similarly, Chawinga and Zozie (2022) reported that students use WhatsApp statuses to maintain social connections, advocate for causes and build their personal brands.

However, as noted by Mutahi and Njoroge (2024), the line between academic content is often blurred, creating challenges for viewers, particularly lecturers, in discerning students' priorities. This dual nature of shared content- academic on one hand and recreational or personal on the other- provides a rich area for analysis. Despite these findings, there is a lack of localized studies focusing on how

students at institutions like BBUC balance these content types. WhatsApp statuses offer students a dynamic platform for communicating multifaceted aspects of their identity, with content tailored to various audiences.

Akintoye and Oluwasen (2020) highlighted that the short-term nature of WhatsApp statuses allows students to share non-casual or non-permanent updates that reflect both academic and social contexts. These include reminders for academic deadlines, motivational quotes, event updates and celebrations of academic achievements such as scholarships and awards. Further, a study by Nwabueze et al. (2021) found that students in African universities increasingly use WhatsApp statuses for professional branding, sharing educational opportunities, internships or collaborations. On the contrary, Tumwebaze and Mbabazi (2023) noted that the entertainment content, such as memes, trending challenges and personal photos, remain dominant indicating the dual-purpose use of the platform for recreation and academia.

In addition, Onyango and Achieng (2022) observed that students often post statuses promoting socio-political movements or community causes reflecting their engagement beyond academics. This duality aligns with findings by Akeem and Oladayo (2024), who pointed out that students frequently alternate between academic and non-academic themes depending on their immediate priorities or intended audience. Despite this diversity, there is limited research focusing specifically on the nuances of content shared by Ugandan university students and how these variations might influence perceptions within institutions like BBUC.

2.2 Lecturers Student relationships and Perceptions of WhatsApp Statuses

Lecturers as critical stakeholders in the academic environment, from perceptions of students based on their online activities including WhatsApp statuses. As pointed

out by Smith et al. (2020), digital footprints often contribute to subconscious biases as educators' encounter students' non-academic lives through social media. For instance, posts that highlight students' social engagements or political opinions may lead to unintended assumptions about their academic priorities. In a study by Amollo and Nyakundi (2021), lecturers expressed mixed views on students' WhatsApp activity. While some appreciated academic-related updates as a reflection of intellectual engagement, others viewed excessive social content as a distraction from academic responsibilities. Similarly, the research by Wanyama and Tumwesigye (2023) in Ugandan universities found that students' WhatsApp statuses often revealed, such as business ventures or activism, which lecturers sometimes interpreted as competing interests to academics. However, there remains limited empirical research on how these perceptions directly affect student-lecturer relationship or assessment. This will highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of how lecturers at BBUC interpret WhatsApp statuses in shaping their views on students' academic and social identities.

This literature review was useful to my study since it answered the lecturers' perceptions of students' WhatsApp statuses.

Social media has been identified as a medium that influences interpersonal dynamics, including those between students and lecturers. According to Mulyungi and Obura (2020), lecturers are increasingly exposed to their students' online personas, which may align or conflict with their in-class behavior. WhatsApp statuses, as a form of digital self-presentation can shape these perceptions positively or negatively. Lindsey et al (2022) argued that lecturers may perceive students who share academic or intellectual content as committed and goal-oriented, while those sharing predominantly social content may be seen as

distracted. For example, lecturers in a South African university expressed concerns about students sharing controversial political opinions or explicit content, perceiving these as indicators of a lack of professionalism (Nkosi & Mbatha, 2021). On the other hand, Brown and Collins (2023) highlighted that WhatsApp statuses could provide lecturers with valuable insights into students' personal struggles or achievements, fostering empathy and better student-lecturer relationships. However, the risk of misinterpretation remains high.

Anyaele and Akinola (2024) noted that lecturers often view students' statuses through their subjective cultural or generational lenses which might amplify stereotypes or biases. Although these studies provide a global perspective more research is required to understand how Ugandan lecturers interpret and respond to the content shared by their students especially at BBUC, where student demographics and cultural contexts may differ significantly.

Lecturers, as observers of students' digital personas may interpret WhatsApp statuses as an extension of students' personalities and priorities. According to Odihambo and Nderitu (2020), WhatsApp statuses give lecturers informal insights into their students' lives, which can sometimes clash with the formal academic image they expect. For example, lecturers may view statuses that emphasize social or entertainment content as indicative of misplaced priorities, even when such content does not necessarily interfere with academic performance. Furthermore, Tunde and Amaka (2023) found that lecturers appreciate statuses that highlight intellectual engagement, such as posts about academic projects or research. However, lecturers in a Ugandan study by Ssekandi and Luyinda (2022) expressed concerns about students sharing provocative or controversial opinions on WhatsApp, which could lead to biases regarding students' professionalism or

maturity. Ndlovu and Sithole (2021) examined the generational divide in interpreting WhatsApp content noting that younger lecturers were more likely to view diverse status updates positively recognizing them as expressions of identity. In contrast, older lecturers tended to view non-academic content more critically perceiving it as a distraction. This generational and cultural divergence emphasizes the importance of institutional context in shaping these perceptions.

Despite those findings, specific research on how UCU-BBUC lecturers interpret students' WhatsApp statuses was scarce, leaving a gap in understanding how those perceptions manifested in the unique academic and cultural environment of the university.

2.3 Implications of Lecturers' Perceptions on Students' Academic and Social Identities

The perceptions lecturers form about students based on WhatsApp statuses can have far-reaching implications for students' academic and social development. According to Kusi and Adjei (2020), students who are perceived as overly social or unfocused due to their online activities may face biases in academic evaluations or mentoring opportunities. On the other hand, positive content showcasing achievements or intellectual pursuits can enhance students' reputations and foster supportive relationships with lecturers.

This literature review was useful to my study since it answered the implications of lecturers' perceptions on students' academic and social identities.

In the context of Uganda, Ochola and Obonyo (2023) noted that students who frequently shared content related to academic or entrepreneurial achievements were more likely to gain recognition and mentorship from their lecturers.

Conversely, those whose statuses highlighted excessive social interactions risked being stereotyped as unserious, potentially affecting their academic support systems. Additionally, studies by Nasir and Kareem (2021) revealed that lecturers' perceptions might influence how they approach students in terms of guidance and support. For instance, students perceived as academically committed are often given more responsibilities and opportunities. This aligns with findings from Ssewanyana et al. (2024), who argued that lecturer' attitudes towards students' WhatsApp statuses can either reinforce or challenge students' self-perceptions, ultimately impacting their academic confidence and social integration.

Despite those findings, there was insufficient literature exploring how perceptions based on WhatsApp content intersected with cultural and institutional norms at UCU-BBUC. This research aimed to address this gap, providing a limited perspective on the implications of lecturers' perceptions.

The impact of lecturers' perceptions on students' academic performance and social identity cannot be overlooked. Research by Adeyemi and Shittu (2021) demonstrated that students perceived as academically serious often receive more mentorship and career guidance, while those judged negatively may face subtle forms of exclusion. WhatsApp statuses, as a reflection of students' lives, can therefore influence how lecturers choose to engage with them academically. In Uganda, Nakanwagi and Namulindwa (2023) found that students whose statuses highlighted social activism or entrepreneurial pursuits often earned respect and recognition from their lecturers. Conversely, those sharing inappropriate or trivial content were more likely to be viewed as unserious, which could negatively impact their access to mentorship opportunities.

Moreover, lecturers' perceptions can influence students' self-concept and

behavior. Studies by Juma and Maina (2024) revealed positive feedback from lecturers about their online personas often displayed greater academic confidence and engagement. On the other hand, those who felt judged based on their social media activity reported feelings of alienation and reduced participation in academic discussions.

However, there is limited research how these dynamics play out within specific institutional settings, such as BBUC, where both students and lecturers navigate a unique socio-cultural environment. This study will aim to provide a nuanced understanding of these interactions. The perceptions formed by lecturers based on students' WhatsApp activity can significantly influence students' experiences in higher education. According to Amadi and Okeke (2021), students perceived as serious or professionally inclined on social media are more likely to receive mentorship and recommendations fostering positive academic outcomes. In contrast, students sharing content deemed frivolous or inappropriate may encounter implicit bias, impacting their academic relationships and opportunities. Mukisa and Okoth (2023) explored how lecturers' perceptions of students' WhatsApp statuses influenced grading and academic support. Their findings revealed that some lecturers admitted to unconsciously being less supportive of students who frequently shared controversial or overly casual content, associating such as behavior with a lack of commitment. Similarly, Awino and Otieno (2022) found that students who actively used WhatsApp statuses for academic purposes-

such as sharing study tips or engaging in scholarly discussions-were often seen as leaders, resulting in greater trust and collaboration from lecturers. However, these biases can also impact students' self-perceptions.

According to Asante and Mensah (2024), students who felt judged or criticized for their online activities reported decreased confidence in their academic abilities. This aligns with findings by Kyambadde et al. (2023), who noted that lecturers' positive reinforcement of academic-related WhatsApp content boosted students' motivation and academic engagement. While these studies provide general insights, there is a lack of empirical research focusing on the direct implications of lecturers' perceptions of WhatsApp statuses in Uganda particularly at BBUC. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies to foster more inclusive and constructive interactions between lecturers and students.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design, study population, sample size, sampling method, data collection methods, instruments, data control, data processing and analysis, data presentation, ethical considerations and research limitations for studying the influence of WhatsApp status content on lecturers' perceptions of BBUC students' academic and social identity.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted Qualitative research method which is appropriate to understand the meaning of experiences, explore social processes and develop a detailed understanding of how WhatsApp statuses influence lecturers' perceptions of students' identities. (Creswell, 2014, p. 44)

3.2 Study Population

The study population included lecturers and undergraduate students from Uganda Christian University- Bishop Barham University College, Kabale. The lecturers were selected from various faculties, including Social Sciences, Journalism and education ensuring diversity in academic discipline. The students targeted were active WhatsApp users given the study's focus on WhatsApp statuses.

3.3 Sample Size

The study used a qualitative method that focused on the quality of the data rather than its quantity. There was a total of fifteen people in the sample three lecturers who took part in semi-structured interviews and twelve students who took part in three Focus Group Discussions, each with four people.

Qualitative research prioritises a large number of information prosperity. Its purpose is

to achieve deep, detailed insights into the living experiences and perceptions of the participants rather than to generalise statistically.

Patton (2015) emphasizes that in qualitative inquiry, there are no strict rules for sample size; rather, the focus should be on the depth of information collected from participants who are most knowledgeable about the topic. Similarly, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that data saturation, the point at which no new information emerges can often be achieved with as few as twelve to fifteen participants in homogeneous groups.

3.3 Sampling method

A stratified random sampling technique and purposive sampling technique was used to ensure adequate representation of both lecturers and students across faculties. The population for this study comprised lecturers and students from Uganda Christian University - Bishop Barham University College, Kabale (UCU-BBUC). To ensure adequate representation of the diversity within the university, the population was divided into strata based on faculty and respondent type (lecturers or students).

3.3.1 Stratification Criteria

Faculty

Faculty of Education & Arts, Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Journalism.

Respondent Type

Lecturers. To provide academic and institutional perspectives on students' digital identity.

Students. To provide lived experiences and interpretations of their own WhatsApp status updates.

3.3.2 Sample Distribution by Strata

Faculty	Lecturers	Students	Total per Faculty
Education and Arts	1	4	5
Journalism	1	4	5
Social Sciences	1	4	5
Total	3	12	15

Table 1. Shows the sample distribution by strata

Stratified sampling was used to make sure all important subgroups of the population were fairly represented in the sample. Kothari (2004) states that stratified sampling works well for diverse populations because it improves how representative the sample is by including each subgroup. Etikan and Bala (2017) add that in qualitative studies, stratification boosts credibility and reliability by incorporating different viewpoints. Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) mention that stratifying by role and academic background allows for richer thematic comparisons during analysis. The chosen sample size of fifteen participants, including twelve students and three lecturers, aligns with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), who suggest that data saturation in similar qualitative samples usually happens between 12 and 15 participants.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The study adopted a qualitative approach to collect data. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to gain deeper understanding of lecturers' perception on students WhatsApp status content.

3.4.1 Focus group guide

Structured questions were used to collect data on the types of content students

share on WhatsApp and how the lecturers perceive this content. The questions were comprised of open-ended questions to understand and get more detailed information.

3.4.2 Interview Guide

A structured interview guide was designed for lecturers' focusing on their interpretations of WhatsApp statuses and how their perception impact on students' academic and social identities.

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis

Data was analysed and processed as follows:

3.5.1 Qualitative Data

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to detect the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of students and lecturers regarding WhatsApp status content and its implications for academic and social identity. Qualitative data contains of non-numerical information that captures participants' words, expressions, emotions, and interpretations within their natural context. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research wants to explain events in the context of the meaning of those that people bring to them. Creswell (2014) also emphasizes that qualitative inquiry allows researchers to explore an event deeply, gaining the overall understanding of the participants' perspectives. Merriam (2009) further argues that in educational settings, qualitative methods are particularly suited to check how individuals build and interpret their realities.

In addition to semi-structured interviews with lecturers and focus groups with students, this study also collected qualitative data by analyzing the content of students' WhatsApp status updates.

Three lecturers from Education, Journalism, and the Social Sciences were

interviewed in a semi-structured way to find out what they thought about the students' WhatsApp status updates. Patton (2015) says that semi-structured interviews have a set of predetermined questions but also allow for more in-depth exploration of new issues. Each interview lasted fifteen to twenty minutes, took place at UCU-BBUC in a quiet room, and was video recorded with permission. Later, the recordings were typed up word-for-word to make sure the analysis was correct.

Focus group discussions were used to get information from students in a group setting, which let researchers look into how they agreed or disagreed about using WhatsApp statuses. Krueger and Casey (2015) say that focus groups (FGDs) encourage people to talk to each other, which lets them build on each other's answers and reveal more in-depth ideas. Three focus groups discussions were held, with four people in each group chosen on purpose to represent a range of genders and academic backgrounds. A guide list of open-ended questions related to the study's goals was used to guide the discussions. With permission, all sessions were video recorded and then typed up word-for-word.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to systematically identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the data. There were six main steps in the process:

Learn how to use the data. Reading transcripts and WhatsApp messages over and over to get into the story.

Making the first codes. Drawing attention to important parts of the text that are related to the study's goals.

Trying to find themes. Putting together related codes into bigger themes, like

Faith-Based Self-Presentation, Social Belonging, Entertainment and Distraction, and Academic Identity.

Going over themes. Comparing the categories to the raw data to make sure they are correct.

Setting up and naming themes. Putting clear, evocative labels on each theme that capture its essence.

Putting together the report. Choosing quotes from participants that are typical and figuring out what they mean by using literature and theory to guide the analysis.

Thematic analysis was chosen because it is flexible, widely used in qualitative research, and it is good at finding complicated patterns in identity construction and communication (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles as outlined by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST, 2020). Key ethical considerations included:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were provided with detailed information about the study and their rights before obtaining their consent.
- **Confidentiality:** Participant data was anonymised to protect their identities.

3.8 Research Limitations

The study faced several limitations which include:

3.8.1 Social Desirability Bias

Given the sensitivity of the research topic, some participants, particularly students may have acted in a way that fits societal or academic expectations instead of sharing their true experiences or views. Lecturers may have also toned down their responses to avoid seeming too critical of students.

The researcher reduced this bias by guaranteeing anonymity and assuring participants that their answers could not be traced back to them. Interviews were conducted in comfortable, non-threatening environments that promoted openness. Questions were framed in hypothetical situations to lower self-consciousness (Fisher, 1993).

3.8.2 Limited Generalisability

The study included fifteen participants from Uganda Christian University - Bishop Barham University College. While this sample provides rich, intensive data, it could not represent the ideas of all university students and lecturers in Uganda.

To address this limit, stratified samples were used to ensure that the participants were drawn from various faculties and roles (students and lecturers), thus occupying various approaches (Patton, 2015).

3.8.3 Time Constraints

The study took place within a set academic calendar, which limited the time for engaging participants, collecting data, and analyzing it in depth. Researcher managed time by creating and following a detailed research schedule. The researcher tested research tools earlier to reduce delays during fieldwork. They also conducted thematic analysis alongside data collection to identify emerging themes early (Bryman, 2016).

3.9 Data Usage

This study used qualitative data from WhatsApp status content, interviews and focus group discussions. The main concern was to make sure that the information shared by participants especially descriptions of WhatsApp status updates did not reach unintended audiences. Participants might have been reluctant to provide full details due to fear that their academic or social identities could be affected.

Data were collected and protected in several ways; data were gathered only for academic purposes related to understanding how digital identities interact with lecturers' perceptions. All identifiable information was removed and replaced with pseudonyms before analysis. Video recordings were stored in password protected files on the researcher's personal device. When reporting findings, they were presented in anonymised form to avoid linking statements back to individuals. Only the researcher had access to the raw data, following ethical guidelines (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of data collected from students of Uganda Christian University - Bishop Barham University College, Kabale about their academic and social identity, WhatsApp status content and lecturers perceptions. Three interviews with the lecturers and three focus group discussions were video recorded with a video camera. Interviews with three lecturers and focus group discussions held with twelve participants (four participants in each group) took fifteen and twenty minutes respectively at Uganda Christian University- Bishop Barham University College, Kabale.

4.2 Data presentation

4.2.1 Types of content shared on WhatsApp status

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Personal updates	40	40%
Academic-related content	30	30%
Memes	20	20%
Inspiration quotes	10	10%

Table 2: Shows the types of content shared on WhatsApp status.

Students share personal updates 40% and academic related content 30% on WhatsApp status, indicating that they use the platform to maintain social relationships and discuss academic matters.

4.2.2 Lecturers perceptions on students WhatsApp status updates

Theme	Findings	Supporting evidence or Illustrative quote.
Perceived academic impact	Many lecturers see non - academic posts as signs of distraction. Few students use WhatsApp for learning.	“Some students know all the trending memes but can’t answer a question in class.” Lecturer, Education.
Social or moral observations	Religious posts seen positively. Some posts viewed as exaggerating lifestyles.	“It shows that they are not only for books but also personal growth.” Lecturer, Journalism.

Table 3: Shows Lecturers perceptions on students WhatsApp status updates.

Lecturers have mixed opinions. Many believe that non-academic posts show a lack of focus on studies, while others appreciate religious and motivational posts as a sign of moral growth. Some lecturers feel students use statuses to project exaggerated lifestyles, creating a “performance” rather than a true self-image.

4.2.3 Implications of lecturers' perception on students' Academic and social Identity

Theme	Findings	Supportive evidence or Illustrative Quote.
Social Identity	Positive feedback on religious or motivational content encourages moral expression. Criticism of performative lifestyles may lead to self-censorship	“Religious posts reminds us that students still hold onto Christian values.” Lecturer ,Education.
Academic Identity	Negative perceptions may discourage lecturers from using social media for teaching. It could cause tension between students and lecturers.	“I don’t see why we should integrate WhatsApp into learning because it is more of a distraction.” Lecturer, social work
Institutional Actions	There is a need for digital literacy programs. Integration of WhatsApp into learning. Mentorship for balancing social and academic life online.	“If the University could train both staff and students on responsible social media use, we could turn WhatsApp into a tool for learning rather than fighting it.” Lecturer, Journalism

Table 4: Shows the Implications of lecturers' perception on students' Academic and

social Identity.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 WhatsApp Status Content Analysis

The analysis of WhatsApp status content shows that students use this platform to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Conclusions have shown that most students use this application several times daily and consistently connect and communicate through WhatsApp status that reflects high level of WhatsApp among students at Bishop Barham University College. The content can be classified in many subjects:

Academic Related Posts: WhatsApp has a positive role in increasing communication between lecturers and students and it makes communication easier through information and idea sharing on WhatsApp status. Students share updates about their academic life such as assignments, exams and project work. Student from Focus Group Discussion one said, *“I post reminders about deadlines so my classmates can keep knowing it.”*

And another said, *“It is easier to share project updates on my status than to send everyone messages one by one.”*

Personal Related Posts: Students share personal views, feelings and experiences such as quotes, memes, songs and poems. This suggests that most students at Bishop Barham University College update their status daily because it is accessible and it allow members to communicate and cooperate with each other. Some students also said that WhatsApp status is flexible and quick to use and it creates opportunities for them.

Social Related Posts: Students share updates about their social life such as interactions with friends and family. Most students share their exciting moments with the audience through WhatsApp status such as making an outing with friends for example picnics. A student from FGD two said, *“When we go for a picnic or birthday, I post it so that my friends could not come can still see the fun.”*

4.3.2 Lecturer Perceptions

Lecturers perceptions of students WhatsApp status content can impact the students’ academic relationships and expectations. The study reveals that:

Lecturers’ Awareness: Lecturers are aware of students’ WhatsApp status content and they use it to gain insights into students’ interests, concerns and challenges enabling them to tailor their teaching approaches and support services.

Lecturers’ also said that by being aware of their students’ digital identities it fosters a positive relationship between lecturers and students. Lecturers’ build trust and rapport which leads to more effective communication and collaboration.

This reveals the fact that by being aware of students’ digital identity such as WhatsApp status update, Lecturers get to identify potential issues such as cyberbullying or online harassment and take proactive steps to address these issues while promoting peace among the students.

Effect on Academic Relationships: Lecturers’ perceptions of students WhatsApp status content can affect their academic relationships with some lecturers being more helpful of students who present themselves in a professional manner online.

It goes a long way to emphasize the understanding of Lecturers about students’ online behaviour and thus designs more and better ways of interactive learning experiences and also provides target support and resources to students. This helps

students to remove challenges and achieve their academic goals.

The interviews with lecturers highlighted the approach that awareness of students' digital identity or online behaviour helps them to promote academic integrity and prevent plagiarism. Education lecturer said, ***“when I see a student consistently posting academic related content, I feel more confident that they take their studies seriously and I’m more willing to guide them closely.”***

4.4 Discussion of The Finding

The findings of this study suggests that WhatsApp status among students of UCU -Bishop Barham Barham University College, Kabale serves as a major medium to create and express versatile digital identity. This discussion explains the results in study objectives, relevant theories and empirical research.

WhatsApp Status as a Tool for Identity Construction

Data has shown that the status of students is not random, but intentionally self-promotions, often curated to highlight some aspects of themselves-educational, religious, social or personal. It aligns with Goffman's (1959) dramatic theory, which sees social interaction as a performance where individuals present themselves in methods designed to influence the beliefs of others.

A student from Focus Group One shared *“When I post something on my status, I think about who will see it if it is motivational, it's to inspire but also to show that I am serious about my goals.”* Similarly, the education lecturer commented *“I look at the statuses as part of a public image. Even if students think its casual, it still says something about their values and personality.”*

In this context, WhatsApp status acts as a front stage, where students manage raids by displaying select content that resonates with their desired identity. For example, posting inspiring quotes is ambition and flexibility, while confidence-based posts strengthen their affiliation with the institute's Christian values. This dual representation of itself both aspiring and value oriented, echoes Boyd's (2010) concept of network public, in which online spaces blur the boundaries between individual, institutional and social fields.

Academic Identity and Peer Accountability

An important discovery was that some students use WhatsApp status for academic

reinforcement. Lecture notes, study group invitations, or assignment reminders act as both individual signals and community signals. Ellison et al. (2007) supports the argument that social media increases bonding and bridges social capital, able to learn a colleague beyond the classroom.

A student explained *"If I post my timetable, my friends know when I am busy.*

Sometimes they also send me notes if they see that I have missed a lecture."

(Student, focus group two). The lecturer of journalism also accepted this value *"I have seen students posting about the time limit and assignment."* This is the positive use of the platform because it motivates others to stay up to date. However, both lecturers and students recognized a negative aspect. Social science lecturer expressed concern *"Posting is getting distracted during class time. It shows that the student's attention is divided."*

This tension shows Junco's (2012) conclusions that multitasking on social media reduces cognitive focus and educational performance during classroom.

Social Related and Emotional Expression

The study also found that WhatsApp status acts as a subtle form of emotional communication. Students often expressed mood, achievements or challenges indirectly through music songs, memes and symbolic images an event is described by Turkle (2015) as environment awareness.

In the focus group discussion, a female student said, *"Sometimes I don't want to talk about how I feel, but my situation says to me. My friends who know me will understand them."* This form of indirect communication maintained a connection without the need for direct interaction, so that there can be a sense of related and shared experience. This was further supported by an education lecturer who said, *"It's interesting how one post can get a whole group talking."* It fosters a sense of

community without in-person contact. This shows the idea of dynamic Castells' (2009) that digital platforms create locations, where mutual interactions cross the physical boundaries.

4.5 Conclusion

The findings on WhatsApp status usage among UCU-BBUC, Kabale students and the opinions of lecturers were presented and discussed in this chapter. According to data, students' statuses reveal a complex identity influenced by peer relationships, institutional culture, and individual goals. The platform presents risks of distraction even though it provides chances for community development and academic collaboration.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter ends with major findings, areas for further studies and recommendations, and limitations of the study.

5.2 Summary of Major Findings.

The major discovery of the study is that there is a complex relationship between students' digital identities and lecturers' perceptions; To highlighting the need for fine understanding and effective communication. Additionally, the study suggests that as far as decoding digital identities and exploration of WhatsApp status content and lecturers' perceptions of university college students' academic and social identity are concerned, the following are true:

Digital identification construction

Students create their digital identity through WhatsApp status updates, showing their interests, personalities and values. For example, a student said that he uses WhatsApp status updates to share his thoughts and feelings with friends, which is a kind to express himself and connect with others.

Some students have used WhatsApp status updates to share their academic achievements and struggles, which is as a way to show their academic identity.

Lecturers' Perceptions

The view of lecturers about the academic and social identity of the student is influenced by online behaviour and interaction affecting students' engagement, inspiration and overall learning experience.

During an interview with a Journalism Lecturer, he said that the students' WhatsApp status updates gives him a feeling of their interests and personality, which helps him to understand the students better.

Impact on learning

Education Lecturer said that when he considers the engagement and inspiration based on their WhatsApp status updates, he is encouraged to support them if needed. This emphasizes the importance of effective communication and fine communication.

5.3 Practical Recommendations

The following practical recommendations were made based on the findings:

- Students should know about their online appearance. Students should take care of the content that they share online and its potential impact on their academic and social identity.
- Lecturers should receive training to effectively use social media to support student learning and connect.
- **Universities should develop social media policies.** Universities should develop policies and guidelines for online attendance of students' and media use.

5.4 Areas for future studies.

Further investigation is required to detect the relationship between social media use and academic performance. Studies can check:

Effect of social media on student motivation and engagement.

- Online attendance of student and development of guidelines for social media use.

- Role of lecturers in shaping students' online identity.
- Conduct Comparative analysis in various Universities to highlight the variation in digital identity and lecturer perceptions.

5.5 Study Limitations.

The study was limited in the realm as the respondents were only students who were active on WhatsApp status updates, I only reduced it using respondents who were active on WhatsApp. This indicates that many reactions were abandoned. Therefore, it is difficult for all students of Bishop Barham University College to normalize the results. This research was also limited by the availability of easy access to respondents who were very busy and not easily available. It was overcome by receiving feedback from available people. It justifies the need for other researches about the use of social networks sites, including WhatsApp status updates for educational purposes in terms of individual symptoms, demographic characteristics and social and cultural references.

5.6 Conclusion

The study contributes to understanding the complex relationship between digital identities and lecturer perceptions, which highlights the need for effective communication, digital literacy and fine understanding in academic settings.

By providing practical recommendations and fields for further studies, the purpose of this study is to promote positive online behaviours and improve in student's experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Focus group guide

A. WhatsApp status updates.

- How often do you post WhatsApp status updates and what motivates you to post?
- What kind of content do you typically share on your WhatsApp status e.g. personal thoughts, quotes, memes or updates about your academic life?
- Do you consider your WhatsApp status updates as a reflection of your personality, interests or academic life?

B. Digital identity and self-presentation.s

- How do you think your WhatsApp status updates reflect your digital identity?
- Do you intentionally curate your WhatsApp status updates to present a specific image or persona? why or why not?
- How do you think online presence affects your relationship with the lecturers?

C. Lecture's Perception.

- Do you think your lecturers pay attention to your WhatsApp status updates?

Why or why not.

- How do you think your lecturers perceive you based on your WhatsApp status updates?

- Do you think your WhatsApp status updates influence how lecturers interact with you or perceive your academic abilities?

D. Reflection and implications.

- Do you think there is a difference between your online person and offline persona? Why or why not?
- Have you ever considered how your WhatsApp status updates might impact your academic relationships?
- Are there any changes you would like to make to your WhatsApp status updates or presence based on this discussion?

Appendix 2: Interview guide

A. Observations and perceptions.

- Have you ever noticed your students' WhatsApp status updates? If so, what kind of content have you observed.
- Do you think WhatsApp status updates provide insight into students' personalities, interests or academic abilities? Why or why not?
- Have you ever made assumptions about a students' academic performance or behaviour based on their WhatsApp status updates?

B. Digital identity and expectations.

- How do you think students' WhatsApp status updates reflect their academic identities or social lives?
- Do you believe students' online presence influences your expectations of their academic performance in class? Why or why not?
- Have you ever adjusted your teaching approach or interaction with a student based on their online presence?

C. Challenges and opportunities.

- Do you think students' digital identities as expressed through WhatsApp status updates present any challenges or opportunities for teaching and learning?
- Are there any strategies you use to engage with students about their online presence or digital identities?

D. Reflections and Implications.

- Do you think your perceptions of students' digital identities influence

your relationships with them? If so, how?

- Are there any implications of students' digital identities for academic advising or mentorship services?
- Is there anything you would like to share about your experiences with students' digital identities.

Appendix 3. Map Showing Uganda Christian University-Bishop Barham University College



UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

School of Research and Postgraduate Studies

7.3.8 Form for Submission of dissertation/thesis for examination

The Dean,
Faculty of JOURNALISM, MEDIA & COMMUNICATION
Uganda Christian University,
Thru:
The Supervisor

Dear Sir / Madam,

SUBMISSION OF DISSERTATION/THESIS FOR EXAMINATION

I hereby submit my dissertation/thesis entitled: DECODING DIGITAL IDENTITIES AND EXPLORATION OF WHATSAPP STATUS CONTENT & LECTURERS PERCEPTIONS OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY-BISHOP BARHAM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE KABALE STUDENTS ACADEMIC & SOCIAL IDENTITY.
for examination for the award of the degree of BA in IDENTITY
JOURNALISM & COMMUNICATION of Uganda Christian University.

Name of Candidate: ARINBA IVONE Reg No 2522/BSK/SATG/002

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 15/8/2025

Name of Supervisor: Morris Jaki

Signature: [Signature] Date: 15/8/2025

(TO BE FILLED AND SUBMITTED IN TRIPLICATE)