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The dissemination of news on WhatsApp: a study of undergraduate students in South Africa and their motivations for sharing news on WhatsApp

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2023
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/36878

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Abstract

WhatsApp has become an integral communication tool in the everyday lives of people worldwide (Dean, 2021). But, while WhatsApp has made it extremely simple to share information with individuals on a global level, it has also become increasingly difficult to track and analyse the spread of news, including fake news, as only you and the person you're communicating with can see what is sent, and nobody in between. With the rise of fake news, it has become critical to consider the motivations and impact of the messages that travel between connections on WhatsApp, as well as the individuals who are now in a position to have a significant influence on other people's awareness and interpretation of issues. Who are they and what are they sharing? Young people’s news-sharing habits, in particular, have shifted from open networks towards closed messaging applications such as WhatsApp. This qualitative study, therefore, explores the internal processes and external forces that influence young, undergraduate students in Johannesburg, South Africa and their news-sharing habits on WhatsApp.