

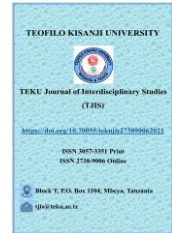


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### Research Paper


## WhatsApp Usage in Promoting Islam in Tanzania: A Case of Samanga and Hidayah Masjids

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 15-Sep-24 Revised: 20-Jan-25 Accepted: 20-Feb-25 Published online: 30-Mar-25</p> <p>DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.70055/TJISV4I2A03">10.70055/TJISV4I2A03</a></p> <p>Copyright: The Author(s) (2025) Publisher: Teofilo Kisanji University License: This is an open access article under the <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/">CC BY 4.0</a></p> 	<p>This study explores the use of WhatsApp groups to propagate Islam in Tanzania, with a specific focus on Masjid Samanga and Hidayah mosques in the Marangu, Kilimanjaro area. The study examined the shared material within these groups, delved into the members' perspectives on their role in advancing Islam, and evaluated the impact of WhatsApp groups in promoting Islam. The study used a case study research design and a qualitative approach. The researchers used purposive and quota sampling techniques to gather a sample of 34 respondents, including sheikhs. The researchers collected data from content analysis, focused group discussions, and interviews. The findings revealed that WhatsApp groups provided a wealth of educational content on the core principles of Islam, significantly enhancing the spiritual, social, and economic well-being of Muslims. Members reported that WhatsApp provided a free exchange of text, photo, audio, and video messages with others across the globe, which profoundly influenced them. It offered valuable teachings that facilitated their spiritual growth and enriched their lives. Over a decade, WhatsApp has successfully contributed to developing the Muslim population in Marangu, constructing three more mosques in different wards of the Marangu division. The study concluded that WhatsApp has been instrumental in promoting Islamic beliefs in the Marangu division.</p>

**Keywords:** Islamic Promotion; Muslim WhatsApp Groups; Users' Perspectives

### 1. Introduction

The study sought to investigate the use of social media in advancing Islam. The researchers conducted their study in the Marangu division on Mount Kilimanjaro's slope, where the Mongi family established the Muslim community. The clan adopted the Islamic faith in the late 1500s after coming into contact with people living along the coast. However, they did not openly practice the religion until the mid-19th century, when they constructed a tiny mosque, Samanga Ward, in Marangu, which also functioned as a madrasa. This historical timeline of their adoption and practice of the Islamic faith provides a deep context for the study. More communication tools would have helped the growth of the community. However, over two decades, Kilimanjaro inhabitants began using various media forms. Over the past several decades, online communication has been widespread among people who share the same religious beliefs, including email, SMS, Facebook groups, Twitter, and, more recently, WhatsApp (Ibahrine, 2014). However, there has been a notable surge in WhatsApp users in Tanzania, and mosques have

embraced this platform for religious activities. Despite this, there have been limited scientific studies conducted to assess the use of social media by the Marangu Muslim community for the promotion of Islam. Therefore, the researcher's objective was to investigate the use of WhatsApp to spread Islam in Tanzania, particularly in the Samanga and Hidayah Mosques in the Marangu division. According to Horwitz (2020), WhatsApp is a social networking site (SNS) that enables users to communicate text and voice messages, make audio and video conversations, and share various materials such as photographs, documents, user locations, and more. A WhatsApp group is a virtual space within the WhatsApp platform where individuals from diverse backgrounds may communicate, exchange information, and work together.

### 2. Theoretical Framework

The research describes and assesses the efficacy of communication channels inside institutions using the Media Rich Theory, first proposed by Richard Daft and Robert Lengel in 1984 (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Other scholars have used this approach to study

communication, including Ishii et al. (2019) and Mammadov (2022). The Theory is pivotal in this research, elucidating how WhatsApp is used in communications within Muslim organisations. Academics argue that the dissemination of information, such as news, lectures, da'wa, and fatwas, is a crucial function that bridges the gap between what individuals believe and/or know about a subject and what should be understood in reality, thereby preventing misconceptions (Shehu et al., 2017). The theory was selected because it would assist in identifying elements of good communication to evaluate the potential of Samanga and Hiyada Mosque Whatsapp Groups, such as various signals, instant feedback, and a diversity of languages. Rich media, a powerful tool, is suitable for communicating when there are many possible interpretations of the same information.

The study utilised the agenda-setting theory, a potent framework that explains the impact of social media on the Islamic agenda. This theory, pioneered by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw during the 1968 US presidential election, establishes a link between media coverage and public perceptions of significant issues. Wohn (2016) suggests that members of social networks, particularly those in religious WhatsApp groups, are evolving into 'micro agenda setters' due to the frequent and prominent posting of similar messages by trusted individuals. This theory is instrumental in dissecting the contents of Masjid Samanga Islamic WhatsApp Groups in the Marangu Division, aligning with the study's objective of understanding the media's influence on public perception. The social media users' role in this study is crucial, as their insights and perspectives contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

### 3. Methods

This research utilised a case study research design and a qualitative approach to explore the usage of WhatsApp in promoting Islam. Wimmer and Dominick (2014) suggest using a case study research design to conduct a detailed unit assessment. The sample size was derived from Samanga and Hidayat mosque's WhatsApp group members who were actively involved in the group between March 22 and April 23, 2025. The researchers engaged 34 respondents, including two sheikhs and 32 members of WhatsApp groups from Samanga and Hidayat mosques. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the sheikhs and quota sampling, as per Wimmer and Dominick (2014), to ensure a diverse representation of male and female WhatsApp user respondents from both mosques.

The researcher employed a rigorous approach to data collection and analysis. Content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) was used to examine WhatsApp content, while interviews and focused group discussions were conducted to gather data from sheikhs and WhatsApp users, respectively. Then, the researchers used thematic data analysis to code, define themes, and interpret them, which ensured a meticulous understanding of perceptions toward WhatsApp groups that promote Islam.

Regarding ethical consideration, the researchers secured a clearance letter from the Open University of Tanzania, facilitating their request for permission to conduct research in the Moshi district. They also sought authority from the leaders of Samanga and Hidayat mosques, with the sheikhs advocating voluntary involvement in the study. Subsequently, the researchers formed focus groups,

moderated the interviews, and meticulously documented the findings, all while maintaining the anonymity of the participants.

## 4. Findings and discussion

While WhatsApp is a valuable platform for Muslims to access various information, it's essential to recognise its limitations. For instance, the device's memory and processing speed determine the storage capacity, and only smartphone users can access this information. This means that devices with smaller storage may struggle to receive large files, such as educational videos. The initial cost of acquiring a smartphone can also be a significant barrier, particularly for those with limited financial resources.

### 4.1 Examination of the Contents of Masjid Samanga and Hidayat WhatsApp Groups in Promoting Islamic Practices in Marangu Division

The primary objective was to highlight the unique features of Masjid Samanga and Hidayat WhatsApp Groups that distinguish them in promoting Islamic practices in Marangu, Kilimanjaro. The content analysis revealed that both groups are rich in content that supports Islamic teachings. The study categorised the messages into four main themes: the faith teachings of Prophet Mohamed, social life, economic well-being, and culture. According to the statistics, mosque leaders play a significant role in providing Islamic education by utilising various media formats, such as videos, audio, infographics, and text messages. The Swahili language was widely spoken, in addition to English and Arabic, which is significant in Islamic education due to its role as the language of the Quran. The video footage showcased Arabic with English subtitles, while the audio used Swahili. We provided the majority of infographics in Swahili and offered the audio in English. We composed the majority of text messages in Swahili, with a few in English and Arabic. The findings align with Haque's (2020, 2012) study of multilingualism for understanding Islam.

The Five Pillars of Islam are the fundamental principles and practices that form the foundation of the Islamic faith. The same theme is present in both WhatsApp groups: the historical development of the five essential principles of Islam. The profession of faith (shahada) was a key focus of both WhatsApp groups. The core tenet of Islam, the belief in the statement 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God,' was discussed in 34 messages and several instances, illustrating its importance. The groups strongly advocated for Muslims to refrain from adhering to old faiths or engaging in superstitious practices while firmly believing in the oneness of Allah. Both groups possessed a digital copy of the English translation of the Quran, and several daily posts included messages from the Quran and interpretations. These findings are consistent with the prior research conducted by Hidayati and Samingan (2020) regarding the role played by social media in improving the understanding of the Quran and religious Proselytizing. Notably, the groups have also empowered women, providing them a platform to express their views and contribute to the discussions, thereby improving societal perceptions of Muslims and promoting gender equality in Islamic practices.

People commonly refer to the act of praying as salat. Both groups have YouTube videos demonstrating the rituals and practices of Muslim men and women as they prepare for prayer and do their prayers towards Mecca five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-

afternoon, sunset, and after nightfall. Additionally, several audio options are available for Arab, English, and Swahili prayers. Most individuals appreciate this area, and several comments express gratitude to Sheikh for sharing prayers in the group. Both groups discussed enhancing prayer practices at home and when visiting family and neighbours. This finding aligns with those of Sule & Abdulkareem (2020). Nisa (2018) and Blaker (2015) explained the opportunity and usage of social media in Islamic activities.

Both groups presented diverse teachings on the importance of alms (zakat). Some movies showcased lessons from different communities worldwide, where sheikhs instructed on the practice, comprehension, significance, and consequences of omitting to offer zakat. Several responses from group members indicated that they found the lecture enjoyable, and several expressed a strong commitment to enhancing their practice of delivering Zakat, inspiring others with their dedication. These findings are consistent with studies of Nuuyoma, Mhlope, and Chihururu (2020), Nisa (2018), and Blaker (2015), which explained that social media has become an educational tool for learning Islam.

The user was intensely interested in receiving messages and learning about fasting (sawm). A video depicts Muslims worldwide engaging in prayer before breaking their fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Additionally, there were teachings on the significance of fasting and the proper techniques for fasting. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Hidayati and Samingan (2020), which concluded that social media is an excellent medium for communication in Islamic education.

The pilgrimage (hajj) was another topic that featured various informative content, particularly videos showcasing Muslims from around the world in Mecca. These videos profoundly inspired individuals to uphold the Five Pillars of Islam, allowing them to visit Mecca. This finding is supported by the study of Al-Ajarma and Buitelaar (2021) about social media representations of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Also, the findings are consistent with studies of Gershon (2017), which discuss examples of how media technologies have played a significant role in the hajj, showcasing both their moral importance and tangible outcomes.

#### **4.2 The Perception of the Members of Masjid Samanga and Hidayata on the Role of WhatsApp Groups in Promoting Islam in Marangu Division**

The second discussion in both WhatsApp groups was centred around the role of social media in promoting Islamic practices, particularly in achieving spiritual fulfilment in both worldly life and the hereafter. These included marriage protocols, naming conventions for children, and burial rituals. The findings are consistent with those of Hidayati and Samingan (2020), who studied the role of social media in improving the understanding of the Quran and religious proselytizing. Sule and Abdulkareem (2020) stated that the efficiency of social media in engaging with religious communities and Islam (2019) suggests that Muslims use social media to fulfil the essential duty of Islam, which is to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, as Allah (SWT) says. This emphasis on the role of social media in promoting Islamic practices will leave the audience feeling enlightened and appreciative of the platform's potential, fostering a sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the future of Islamic education and outreach. In the groups, there were video clips that explained how a Muslim man may effectively care for himself

and be innocent in sexual relations, as he can marry up to four women, provided he can fulfil their needs satisfactorily. One of the messages said, "He is the one who formed you from a single soul and its mate from it so that he could live in safety with her." (Quran 7:189). Young individuals can undergo instruction to cultivate self-care, develop a sense of respect, and be informed about early marriage as a means to prevent engaging in adultery. Gulzar & Massiha (2021) assert that Islam provides comprehensive guidelines for the rights, responsibilities, and strategies for maintaining a healthy married life, particularly for believers.

All individuals can access training on love through YouTube. These teachings emphasise that the Prophet Mohammed lived with inclusive, non-discriminatory love for everyone. The teachings of Prophet Muhammad emphasise the need for forgiveness; providing assistance to those in need; and maintaining honesty and faithfulness at all times. This study is comparable to the survey by Sazali, Siregar, and Putri (2020), which indicates that the use of social media in religious matters influences people to change their behaviour.

Economic principles promote hard work, ethical corporate conduct, and professional integrity. Islamic economics, rooted in Islam, is considered ethical because it emphasises applying moral principles to all aspects of human existence (Hassan et al., 2024). It also promotes ethical corporate conduct, reassuring and instilling confidence in all stakeholders. Through an engaging WhatsApp video clip, the Muslim leadership underscores the importance of studying Surah Al-Maidah verse 55. In cultural contexts, confident educators support the discontinuation of harmful practices, the renunciation of deity worship, and the encouragement of virtuous behaviour among Muslims. The movies include instruction on food preparation during Ramadan, etiquette in speech, and appropriate attire in line with Islamic beliefs. The findings align with Sazali, Siregar, and Putri (2020).

The study used focus group discussion to examine the viewpoint of Masjid Samanga and Hidayata members about the impact of WhatsApp groups in advancing Islam in the Marangu Division. The study used two distinct user groups, men and women, to gather data from each mosque. The researchers posed questions to gain perceptions about the four WhatsApp group content themes. All respondent categories unanimously acknowledged the WhatsApp group's role in deepening their understanding of Islamic teachings and clarifying spiritual concepts. The diverse range of content, including voice, video, and still images, provides a comprehensive understanding of the five pillars and other teachings. The findings are supported by Nisa (2018), who conducted a study titled "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement in Contemporary Indonesia." The study revealed that social media has helped to improve Muslim youths' capability of reciting the Qur'an and helped solve the crises of morality. Participant number 10 stated:

*During my childhood, I heard on the radio that Muslims consider it a sin to have close relationships with non-Muslims. As a result, I avoided collaborating with relatives and neighbours who weren't Muslims for many years. However, through WhatsApp, I discovered that Mohamed loves all people and that Muslims in other countries help non-Muslims. Upon learning this, I tried*

*to improve my relationships with everyone, and they were pleased to see the positive changes in my behaviour.*

These findings are consistent with those of various media scholars, such as Sazali, Siregar, and Putri (2020), who have revealed that social media is powerfully influencing behavioural change. This positive impact of social media on behaviour change is a beacon of hope for our community, showing that positive change is possible and within our reach.

WhatsApp has played a significant role in empowering women from the Samanga Mosque. Traditionally, they had fewer religious responsibilities, but the platform has enabled them to learn about Hazrat Khadijah alKubra, a courageous woman who propagated Islam and supported Prophet Mohamed. This knowledge has inspired them to actively contribute to the propagation of Islam in the Kilimanjaro region. The empowerment of these women, as found in the studies by Buckley & Carland (2023) and Abdelgelil et al. (2018), is a testament to the transformative power of social media in promoting gender equality in the Muslim community.

Both women groups stated that the lessons conducted over WhatsApp helped them acquire the skills to produce excellent food, dress appropriately as Muslims, maintain a clean house, and behave professionally as Muslim individuals. These findings are related to Buckley & Carland (2023), who studied Triple Roles, Worship, and "Period Shaming": How Muslim Women Maintain Belonging and Connection in Ramadan. Hatab (2016) conducted another study, "Islam and Social Media: Attitudes and Views." The study revealed that social media has influenced how people address each other when discussing Islamic topics. Despite some opposing views, positive attitudes toward social media in promoting Islam prevailed. The respondents' age, gender, and education influenced their views.

*A few years ago, I only wore a hijab on Fridays because I was embarrassed to appear different from the people around me, as most of them were Christians, and the young Chagga women did not cover their heads. "Ever since I learnt through WhatsApp, I have consistently covered my head and recited the three," stated Participant #6.*

The study is in line with Islam (2019) and suggests that Muslims use social media to fulfil the essential duty of Islam, which is to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, as Allah (SWT) says. Overall, the participants expressed that WhatsApp is instrumental in disseminating Islamic teachings and persuading individuals to convert to lead a morally upright life following the teachings of Prophet Mohamed. They are also incorporating social and economic lessons to such an extent that others have begun to admire their Muslim community and enquire about the process of conversion. This assertion is corroborated by other Islamic scholars, including Keerioetal et al. (2024), Ali et al. (2021), Fuadia (2020), and Nisa (2018), who have affirmed that social media plays a substantial role in the promotion of Islam.

Research indicates that using WhatsApp for religious dissemination is advantageous because it can efficiently convey information to a large audience in a brief timeframe without limitations. While information is limited to reach the members within a group, each individual from the group can send that information to other groups

or individuals without constraints. In Islamic Mosque groups, leaders implement strict control measures to prevent disseminating false or fake news, ensuring that information is rapidly deleted before it reaches group members. Leaders may remove the sender of such information from the group or issue a warning, thereby reinforcing the security and protection within the group. This control limits individuals' freedom to transmit information. It also diminishes the opportunity to pose questions within the group. Findings from the Hidaya Mosque group indicate that members of the Marangu Mosque send enquiries directly to the individual Hidaya members' inboxes for clarification.

#### **4.3 Impact of Masjid Samanga and Hidaya WhatsApp Groups on Promoting Islam in Marangu Division**

The researcher interviewed sheikhs from both mosques about the significant outcomes of using WhatsApp. The findings revealed that WhatsApp has been of tremendous help in educating people about Islam. Users learn about big cities and Islamic countries' five pillars of knowledge and practicality. It serves as a substitute for a teacher, allowing individuals to join a group and learn from others. Additionally, WhatsApp has been used as a moderator, with users initiating discussions on religious topics, sharing their insights, and disseminating the knowledge to a broader audience. The results align with the research conducted by Fuadia (2020) and Nisa (2018), which elucidated the function of social media as both a communication medium and a catalyst for spreading Islamic values. The Sheikh has also used WhatsApp as a teaching tool, as it allows him to deliver sermons and instruct others to view videos or images. The results show that WhatsApp has had positive results in all four themes; regarding religion, they have clearly understood the five pillars of Islam and used the correct practical procedures. They have understood the correctness of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad about a pure Muslim.

Also, the teachings have been able to attract non-Muslims to enter Islam, and in five years, there has been a tremendous increase in the construction of five mosques in other wards of Marangu, Mamba, and Mwika, where there was no Islam. This result is consistent with Nisa's (2018) research on the relationship between social media and the emergence of an Islamic social movement. On the social side, right now, society respects Muslims because they have been a good example of good behavior—helping people who are having difficulties and living with love—compared to previous years. "In the past, it was difficult to marry from behind the Christians, but now the parents themselves ask their children to marry Muslims because they have understood that Islam is not terrorism or the religion of miscreants but a pure religion without blemishes," says Shekhe. Hatab's (2016) research, which demonstrated the influence of social media on Muslims when discussing Islamic topics, aligns with these results. Despite some opposing stands, positive attitudes towards social media in promoting Islam prevailed. Sheikh, originally a Christian, says WhatsApp sends information quickly and without limits. In alignment with the study by Kaale and Bazira (2023), it was demonstrated that Christian leaders recognised social media's speed and limitless boundaries when promoting Christianity.

One day, my Muslim cousin shared a video on the five pillars of Islam with me on WhatsApp. I shared it with my father, and he found it insightful. This sparked a family gathering, and we all watched the

video together, learning and growing as a unit. The next day, I asked my cousin for more instructional materials to aid our conversion journey. Thanks to our collective efforts, I have become an Islamic leader—address: Sheikh No. 2, Marangu. Date: 12 June 2024.

We anticipate a significant transformation in Kilimanjaro's religious landscape in the coming decade. The remarkable impact of social media is projected to empower many Christian youths, enabling them to learn about Islam in a language accessible to the local population. This empowerment is a stark contrast to the previous reluctance among people to engage with their Muslim counterparts, a reluctance fuelled by the influence of misleading speeches delivered by sheikhs and the barrier of the Arabic language. However, with the advent of social media, particularly platforms like WhatsApp, Christian youths now have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with Islam. We anticipate a surge in Christian conversion to Islam due to this change.

The study aims to evaluate the usage of WhatsApp in promoting Islam, a global phenomenon, in Tanzania, specifically in the Marangu Division of Kilimanjaro, where a single family states Islam. The results showed that because of the educational materials exchanged inside the groups, WhatsApp groups significantly impact both within and outside mosques. Consequently, Muslims augmented their knowledge, refined their manners, and enticed others to embrace Islam. The results are in line with those of Fuadia (2020), Sazali, Siregar, and Putri (2020), and Nisa's study (2018). They all show that social media has become an effective way to spread and promote Islamic teachings worldwide.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that WhatsApp groups in Samanga and Hidaya successfully fostered Islamic ideas in the Kilimanjaro Region. The group participants said visual illustrations enhance their understanding of Islamic fundamentals and overall quality of life. In a spirit of inclusivity, the organization's members distributed Islamic materials to individuals in the non-Christian population, leading to conversions. Consequently, three mosques have been established in communities that previously had no Muslim presence. The study observed that, despite the unrestricted availability of information via WhatsApp, many individuals from low-income families remain hesitant to access Islamic details due to a lack of digital devices and financial resources to recharge data bundles.

The findings of this study can be a powerful resource for religious institutions, including Christian organisations, to enrich Bible studies, disseminate Christian cultural practices, and explore the worship and celebration of religious holidays in international communities. These findings can be effectively shared and discussed in WhatsApp groups, making them a key platform for educational efforts and developmental initiatives in diverse institutions and communities.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author (s) certify that they have No Conflict of Interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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