



Understanding WhatsApp Disengagement: A Communication Privacy Management Perspective on Group Exit

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigated why individuals leave WhatsApp groups, drawing on Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory through a quantitative research design. Using questionnaires and SPSS Version 31, data were analysed via chi-square tests, independent samples t-tests, and logistic regression. The most frequently cited reasons for leaving groups were information overload (68%), excessive voice messages (54%), and motivational or quotation content (49%). Communication style also played a notable role, with harsh, offensive, or emotionally hurtful language reported as damaging to participants' well-being and a contributing factor to group exit. Statistical analyses revealed several significant findings. Chi-square results demonstrated a significant association between age and privacy concerns ($\chi^2 = 12.34, p < .01$), while independent samples t-tests showed that females reported greater privacy concerns than males ($t = 2.15, p < .05$). Logistic regression confirmed that both privacy concerns ($\beta = 0.42, p < .01$) and interpersonal conflict ($\beta = 0.37, p < .05$) meaningfully increased the likelihood of departure. Overall, the study found that privacy boundary violations, intensified conflict, personal attacks, and inappropriate language were strong drivers of disengagement. The findings underscore the importance of respectful communication, clearly defined group purposes, and effective moderation. Platform-level features supporting user autonomy were also highlighted as essential. Future research directions include cross-platform comparisons,

intervention strategies to minimise unnecessary exits, and exploration of cultural differences in digital privacy management. The study contributes valuable insights into the social and psychological dynamics shaping participation in digital group communication.

Contribution/Originality: The paper contributed the first logical analysis of WhatsApp group exit behaviour through the lens of Communication Privacy Management Theory, revealing that privacy boundary violations, interpersonal conflict, and communication style were significant predictors of disengagement, thereby advancing scholarly understanding of digital group dynamics and user autonomy in mobile messaging platforms.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital communication landscape, instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp have become integral to maintaining interpersonal connections, coordinating group activities, and fostering community interaction (Agarwal et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025). Among the features offered, WhatsApp groups provide a private yet collective environment for members to exchange information and sustain relationships. Despite their popularity, however, participation within such groups is not always consistent or enduring. Many users disengage or exit groups altogether, reflecting complex social, psychological, and privacy-related dynamics. Recent research has noted that users often experience message overload, social pressure to remain responsive, or discomfort regarding the extent of personal information being shared (Shahid, Agarwal, & Vashistha, 2024). These dynamics highlight the need to examine group exit not as a trivial digital action, but as a significant communicative choice that speaks to broader concerns about autonomy and digital well-being.

Although WhatsApp groups are designed to enhance social connectivity, they simultaneously generate tensions that can undermine members' psychological comfort and privacy. For instance, while 70% of Malaysian WhatsApp users express concern over digital privacy, only 30% actively use privacy-enhancing tools, indicating a gap between awareness and protective action (Malay Mail, 2023). Similar patterns have been observed globally, where constant notifications, privacy overload, and surveillance anxieties lead to disengagement or intentions to exit WhatsApp (Vishwanath & Chen, 2022). Moreover, research suggests that boundary management within mobile messaging apps remains inconsistent, with users struggling to balance disclosure, relational expectations, and autonomy (Tazreiter & Nguyen, 2023). Psychological fatigue further compounds this challenge, as excessive group interaction has been linked to stress, intrusion, and burnout (Marques, Silva, & Cunha, 2024). Despite the growing scholarship on social media disengagement, limited attention has been directed toward the specific phenomenon of WhatsApp group exit, leaving the nuanced interplay between privacy negotiation, social expectations, and psychological well-being insufficiently addressed (Shahid, Agarwal, & Vashistha, 2024).

In light of these gaps, the present study seeks to investigate the reasons why individuals leave WhatsApp groups, with particular emphasis on the interplay of social, psychological, and privacy-related factors. To achieve this, Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002) provides a robust conceptual framework, as it explains how individuals regulate boundaries of disclosure and concealment when

navigating communicative interactions. By applying this lens, the study aims not only to reveal the underlying motivations for group disengagement, but also to contribute to a deeper understanding of privacy management in private digital communities. Ultimately, such insights are expected to advance scholarly discourse on digital communication practices while also offering practical implications for platform design and user well-being.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM)

Several theoretical perspectives have been employed in prior research to explain user behaviors in digital group communication. For instance, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) has been widely applied to investigate why individuals engage with social media and messaging platforms, emphasizing motivations such as entertainment, information, and social connection (Koçak & Vergiveren, 2019). While UGT offers valuable insights into initial adoption and engagement, it is less effective in capturing the tensions and relational dilemmas that arise when individuals consider disengagement or group exit. Similarly, the Stressor–Strain–Outcome (SSO) framework has been used to explain how information and communication overload generate strain, leading to withdrawal behaviors in workplace and social contexts (AlDossary et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). Although SSO highlights the psychological consequences of overload, it does not adequately account for the interpersonal and privacy-related negotiations that occur in group-based interactions. Other frameworks, such as Attachment Theory and Social Support Theory, have also been applied to explore relational dynamics in WhatsApp groups (Aharony & Gazit, 2016; Gazit & Aharony, 2018), yet these approaches primarily emphasize emotional bonds and support mechanisms rather than privacy boundaries or disclosure management.

Against this backdrop, Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory (thereafter CPM), developed by Petronio (2002), offers a more comprehensive and contextually relevant framework for understanding WhatsApp disengagement. CPM conceptualizes private information as a form of ownership, where individuals establish rules and boundaries to regulate its disclosure and concealment. This framework is particularly useful in group settings, as once information is shared, it often becomes co-owned, requiring collective responsibility and negotiation. Importantly, CPM emphasizes boundary turbulence moments when privacy rules are violated or misaligned which can directly trigger withdrawal, muting, or group exit (Child & Petronio, 2021).

The relevance of CPM to the present study is underscored by recent empirical findings. Although WhatsApp groups are designed to facilitate connection, they simultaneously generate tensions that undermine members' psychological comfort and privacy. For instance, while 70% of Malaysian WhatsApp users express concern about digital privacy, only 30% actively use privacy-enhancing tools, reflecting a persistent gap between awareness and action (Malay Mail, 2023). Similar global patterns show that surveillance anxieties, constant notifications, and privacy overload often lead to disengagement or exit intentions (Vishwanath & Chen, 2022). Users also struggle with inconsistent boundary management practices in mobile messaging, balancing disclosure with relational expectations and autonomy (Tazreiter & Nguyen, 2023). Furthermore, psychological fatigue from constant group interactions has been associated with stress, intrusion, and burnout (Marques, Silva, & Cunha, 2024). Despite this evidence, limited

research has specifically addressed WhatsApp group exit as a phenomenon, leaving a gap in understanding how privacy negotiation, social expectations, and psychological well-being intersect to influence disengagement (Shahid, Agarwal, & Vashistha, 2024), see Table 1, the theoretical perspectives.

Table 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Digital Group Communication and Their Relevance to WhatsApp Disengagement Existing

Theory / Framework	Focus / Contribution	Limitations in Explaining WhatsApp Disengagement	Relevance to Present Study (WhatsApp Exit)
Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Koçak & Vergiveren, 2019)	Explains why individuals engage with social media (e.g., entertainment, information, social connection).	Strong on adoption/engagement, but weak on explaining disengagement, tensions, or relational dilemmas.	Limited; does not capture withdrawal or boundary issues.
Stressor–Strain–Outcome Framework (AlDossary et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025)	Explains how communication/information overload → strain → withdrawal behaviors.	Focuses on psychological strain but overlooks interpersonal privacy negotiations in group contexts.	Partially useful; misses the role of privacy boundaries in disengagement.
Attachment Theory & Social Support Theory (Aharony & Gazit, 2016; Gazit & Aharony, 2018)	Explore relational bonds, emotional ties, and support mechanisms in group chats.	Emphasize emotional support, not privacy management or boundary conflicts.	Indirect relevance; useful for understanding group ties but not privacy dilemmas.
Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory (Petronio, 2002; Child & Petronio, 2021)	Views private info as <i>owned</i> ; disclosure managed via rules and boundaries; in groups → info becomes <i>co-owned</i> , requiring negotiation. Boundary turbulence (violated/misaligned privacy rules) → withdrawal, muting, or exit.	Strongly addresses disclosure, co-ownership, and conflict over boundaries.	Highly relevant; explains disengagement, exit, and psychological strain from boundary turbulence in WhatsApp groups.
Empirical Evidence Supporting CPM	- 70% Malaysians worry about privacy, but only 30% use privacy tools (Malay Mail, 2023). - Global users face surveillance anxieties, overload, inconsistent boundary practices (Vishwanath & Chen, 2022; Tazreiter & Nguyen, 2023). - Group fatigue linked to	Shows real-world tension between awareness vs. action and relational expectations.	Justifies applying CPM to study WhatsApp exit, addressing the gap in literature.

stress, intrusion, burnout
 (Marques et al., 2024).
 - Limited direct research on
 WhatsApp group exit
 (Shahid et al., 2024).

Table 2 shows that while theories like UGT, SSO, and Social Support highlight motivations, overload, and relationships, they overlook privacy negotiations. In contrast, CPM directly addresses boundary turbulence and co-ownership, making it highly relevant for explaining WhatsApp disengagement, group exit, and psychological strain.

Therefore, CPM is chosen as the guiding theoretical framework for this study, as it directly addresses the privacy management dilemmas, relational negotiations, and boundary turbulence that underline the decision to exit WhatsApp groups. By applying CPM, this research aims to provide a nuanced analysis of how individuals navigate competing pressures of disclosure, participation, and autonomy, thereby extending theoretical and practical understanding of group communication disengagement in digital contexts, see ee Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework diagram for Communication Privacy Management

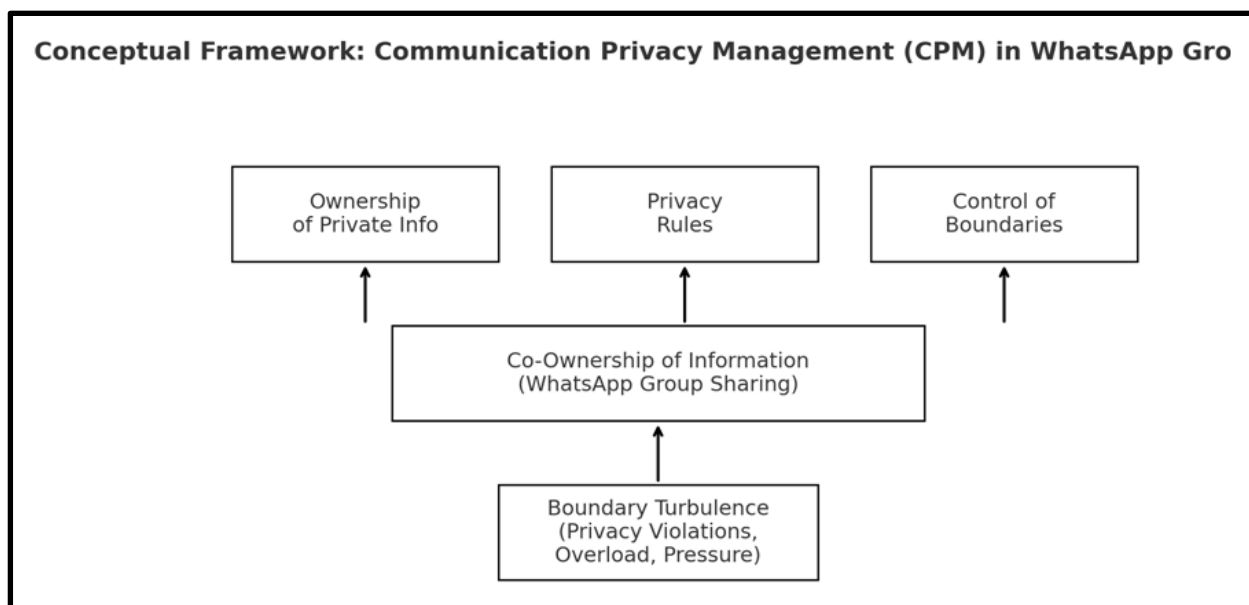


Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory applied to WhatsApp groups illustrates how individuals regulate private information within group communication. At the foundation of the model are three principles: ownership of private information, privacy rules, and control of boundaries. These principles reflect the initial stage where users view themselves as the rightful owners of their data, establish privacy rules that guide disclosure, and exercise control over how much they share with others (Petronio, 2002; Child & Petronio, 2021). When such information is communicated in a WhatsApp group, it transitions into a stage of co-ownership, in which multiple members share responsibility for managing the disclosed content. This dynamic is particularly complex in WhatsApp groups, where diverse participants may hold different expectations, relational roles, or cultural understandings of appropriate disclosure (Tazreiter & Nguyen, 2023).

The model further demonstrates that when privacy boundaries are not respected or rules are inconsistently applied, boundary turbulence emerges. In WhatsApp settings, turbulence can take the form of information oversharing, breaches of confidentiality, message overload, or perceived social pressure to engage (Vishwanath & Chen, 2022; Marques, Silva, & Cunha, 2024). Such disruptions often generate discomfort, strain in interpersonal relationships, and undermine psychological well-being. In response, individuals may renegotiate their boundaries or, in some cases, choose to exit the group altogether as a strategy to reassert ownership and regain a sense of autonomy over their communication practices (Shahid, Agarwal, & Vashista, 2024).

This framework is analytically significant because it aligns directly with the study's objective of investigating the social, psychological, and privacy-related reasons why individuals disengage from WhatsApp groups. Social aspects are evident in the co-ownership stage, where group norms and expectations shape behavior. Psychological dimensions, such as stress, fatigue, and intrusion, are most visible in boundary turbulence. Privacy-related concerns are present throughout, influencing ownership, disclosure control, and responses to violations. By applying this conceptual lens, the study can systematically interpret participants' motivations for disengagement, demonstrating how privacy management processes and boundary negotiations underpin the decision to leave WhatsApp groups (Petronio, 2002; Tazreiter & Nguyen, 2023).

2.2. Language Use in WhatsApp Group Communication

Language plays a crucial role in shaping interaction quality and relational outcomes in WhatsApp group communication, where words, phrases, and tone significantly influence users' emotional responses and willingness to remain in a group. In computer-mediated communication environments, the absence of non-verbal cues increases the likelihood of message misinterpretation, making linguistic choices even more important for maintaining social harmony (Walther, 1996). According to Communication Privacy Management Theory, individuals regulate interpersonal boundaries through communication, and inappropriate or offensive language can be perceived as a violation of these boundaries, leading to discomfort and disengagement (Petronio, 2002). Furthermore, politeness theory suggests that speakers are expected to use language that preserves the "face" or social dignity of others, and failure to do so through harsh or disrespectful wording may result in relational breakdowns (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In WhatsApp groups, where diverse participants interact simultaneously, careful use of language is essential to avoid emotional harm, conflict, and unintended offence. Research in computer-mediated discourse also highlights that online interactions can easily escalate when language is ambiguous, aggressive, or poorly framed (Herring, 2004). Therefore, respectful wording, supportive phrases, and considerate expression are critical for sustaining positive group dynamics. Digital communication studies further emphasise that individuals are more likely to disengage from online groups when they experience repeated exposure to negative or disrespectful language (boyd, 2014). Overall, maintaining appropriate linguistic behaviour is essential not only for effective communication but also for protecting psychological well-being and sustaining group cohesion in messaging platforms such as WhatsApp.

2.3. Past Studies

WhatsApp groups have become integral to contemporary social, educational, and professional communication, serving as platforms for rapid coordination, information exchange, and social support. However, despite their ubiquity, participation in such groups is not always sustained, with many users reporting fatigue, overload, or privacy concerns that ultimately lead to disengagement or exit. Understanding why individuals choose to leave WhatsApp groups is particularly significant given the interplay of social, psychological, and privacy-related factors that shape these decisions. Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory provides a useful lens for analyzing this phenomenon, as it conceptualizes how individuals establish ownership over private information, create rules for disclosure, and navigate co-ownership within group contexts, often leading to turbulence when boundaries are violated.

A substantial body of empirical research has explored participation, disengagement, and exit behaviors in WhatsApp groups. Early survey-based studies focused on the social and psychological foundations of group use. For instance, Aharony and Gazit (2016) demonstrated that openness to experience and perceived social support predicts the perceived importance of family groups, while low support is linked to disengagement. Similarly, Gazit and Aharony (2018) reported that group type and personality traits, including narcissism, shape participation levels, suggesting that relational benefits are central to sustaining engagement. Both studies provide valuable predictors of exit but are limited in scope, as they emphasize individual traits without sufficiently accounting for contextual triggers such as overload or group norms. In contrast, Nouwens, Griggio, and Mackay (2017), using a qualitative lens, argued that users allocate contacts across apps according to communication “places,” with norm violations prompting avoidance or exit. Their contribution lies in highlighting the social and normative dimensions of disengagement, though their study stops short of linking these dynamics to psychological outcomes.

Other research has turned to content, overload, and misinformation as drivers of group exit. Koçak and Vergiveren (2019) showed that generational and gendered content preferences shape WhatsApp use, with conflict over content pushing some toward disengagement, while Caetano et al. (2019) and Melo et al. (2019) used log analysis and diffusion modeling to demonstrate how political cascades and misinformation overload can lead to muting or leaving. These studies strengthen the argument that boundary turbulence manifested as overload or rule violation triggers exit behaviour. Yet, they are limited in their ability to capture users’ subjective reasoning about privacy and disclosure. Complementing these perspectives, AlDossary et al. (2022) applied the Stressor Strain Outcome model to show that technostress leads to withdrawal, while Zhang et al. (2025) confirmed through meta-analysis that overload robustly predicts discontinuous use across platforms. Together, these studies provide strong evidence of psychological strain as an antecedent of disengagement but often overlook how users actively negotiate boundaries in response.

More recent work has examined moderation and exclusion in WhatsApp groups, introducing structural and relational factors into the discussion. Garcia and Vivacqua (2021) found that reasons for leaving Brazilian groups included offense, threat, pornographic content, and overload, calling for improved admin tools and exit options. Shahid, Agarwal, and Vashistha (2024-2025) showed that moderation style strongly influences retention, with weak tools and permissive norms encouraging departure, while Shoal et al. (2024-2025) demonstrated that being removed from groups negatively affects adolescents’ well-being and academic performance through

mechanisms such as FOMO. Likewise, the Teacher–Parent study (2025) revealed that tensions around coordination and off-topic discussions push some members to mute or leave, suggesting that group purpose and relational expectations play a pivotal role. These findings align well with CPM’s focus on co-ownership and turbulence but tend to treat exit as a functional outcome without systematically connecting it to the privacy management processes users employ.

Taken together, the literature demonstrates that WhatsApp group exit is shaped by individual traits (Aharony & Gazit, 2016; Gazit & Aharony, 2018), group norms (Nouwens et al., 2017; Koçak & Vergiveren, 2019), content dynamics (Caetano et al., 2019; Melo et al., 2019), psychological strain (AlDossary et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025), and moderation practices (Garcia & Vivacqua, 2021; Shahid et al., 2024-2025). While these studies contribute critical insights, they remain fragmented: quantitative research tends to identify predictors without capturing lived boundary negotiations, while qualitative work richly describes norms and practices but lacks generalizability. Moreover, little research explicitly integrates the CPM framework to explain how ownership, privacy rules, co-ownership, and turbulence interact to produce disengagement. This gap highlights the need for a theory-driven investigation that links subjective accounts of privacy management with measurable outcomes of WhatsApp group exit. Addressing this gap will not only extend CPM to digital group contexts but also clarify the social, psychological, and privacy-related mechanisms underlying disengagement decisions.

2.4. Research Gap

Despite the expanding scholarship on WhatsApp use, disengagement, and exit behaviors, the current literature remains fragmented and limited in explanatory scope. Quantitative studies have successfully identified predictors such as personality traits, technostress, and overload (Aharony & Gazit, 2016; AlDossary et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025), while qualitative work has illuminated the importance of group norms, moderation practices, and relational tensions (Nouwens et al., 2017; Garcia & Vivacqua, 2021; Shahid et al., 2024-2025; (Traeger Soudry et al., 2025)). However, few studies explicitly integrate these social, psychological, and privacy-related dimensions into a unified explanatory model. More critically, existing work tends to treat disengagement as either a functional response to strain or a byproduct of conflict, without systematically examining how individuals actively negotiate privacy boundaries before making the decision to mute or exit.

This gap is particularly salient because WhatsApp groups are not only communication tools but also complex spaces of co-ownership, where private information is shared, rules are negotiated, and violations often generate turbulence. While CPM Theory provides a strong conceptual foundation for explaining how ownership, disclosure rules, and boundary turbulence shape disengagement, it has rarely been applied directly to WhatsApp group exists. Thus, the nuanced processes by which users balance the benefits of participation against the costs of intrusion, overload, or rule violation remain underexplored.

Therefore, the present study on the exciting *the group: a communication privacy management approach to WhatsApp disengagement*, seeks to address this gap by investigating the reasons why individuals leave WhatsApp groups, with particular emphasis on the interplay of social, psychological, and privacy-related factors. By

applying CPM as a guiding framework, this study will capture both subjective boundary negotiations and observable exit behaviors, thereby providing a more integrated understanding of disengagement. In doing so, it will contribute theoretically to privacy management scholarship and practically to strategies for designing healthier digital group environments.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design, underpinned by Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory (Petronio, 2002), to examine the social, psychological, and privacy-related factors influencing WhatsApp group exit. A structured questionnaire served as the main instrument for data collection, allowing for standardized responses that could be statistically analyzed in alignment with the study's objectives.

3.2. Sampling and Setting

The population of interest comprised active WhatsApp users in Klang Valley. Sampling was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, which suggested a minimum of 200 respondents for adequate representativeness. A stratified random sampling approach was used to ensure diversity in age, gender, and occupation. A total of 200 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis.

3.3. Instrumentation

The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments in prior studies. Items measuring privacy concerns and discontinuance intentions were adapted from Vishwanath and Chen (2022). Constructs on digital privacy and boundary management drew from Tazreiter and Nguyen (2023), while items related to psychological fatigue and burnout were based on Marques, Silva, and Cunha (2024). Questions were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 (strongly agree).

3.4. Data Collection

Data collected electronically via an online survey distributed across academic, professional, and social networks, targeting individuals who were members of at least one WhatsApp group. Participation took approximately 15 minutes, and all responses were screened for completeness before analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS Version 31 to assess the measurement and structural models. Reliability was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), while convergent validity was assessed via average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. In addition to PLS-SEM, inferential statistical tests were conducted in SPSS, including chi-square tests to examine associations between categorical variables, independent samples t-tests to compare mean differences across demographic groups, and logistic regression to predict

the likelihood of WhatsApp group exit based on psychological, social, and privacy-related predictors.

3.6. Theoretical Framework

CPM Theory provided the conceptual lens for interpreting findings. By focusing on privacy ownership, privacy rules, co-ownership, and boundary turbulence (Petronio, 2002; Child & Petronio, 2021), the study contextualised how privacy negotiations and violations translate into group disengagement behaviors. This framework guided both the construction of the questionnaire and the analytical focus of the study.

3.7. Ethical Clearance

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the participants ensuring that the study complied with established guidelines for human participant research. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and respondents were assured of anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

4. Results

The analysis explored social, psychological, and privacy-related factors influencing WhatsApp group exit. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, t-tests, and logistic regression revealed significant patterns, highlighting information overload, gendered privacy concerns, and interpersonal conflict as critical predictors shaping individuals' disengagement decisions.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Reasons for Leaving WhatsApp Groups

Reason for Leaving	Percentage (%)
Information overload	68
Excessive voice messages	54
Repeated motivational/quotation posts	49

Note. Percentages reflect the proportion of participants who selected each reason.

Table 1 highlighted the most frequently cited reasons for leaving WhatsApp groups, with information overload (68%) emerging as the dominant factor. This suggests that users have trouble processing the constant influx of messages, which aligns with existing scholarship on digital fatigue and overload (Zhang et al., 2025). The second most reported reason, excessive voice messages (54%), reflects the burden of engaging with communication modalities that are time-consuming and disruptive to multitasking contexts. Unlike text, voice messages require synchronous attention, thereby intensifying perceptions of intrusion and obligation. A substantial proportion of participants also identified repeated motivational or quotation posts (49%) as a significant annoyance. While intended to foster positivity, such repetitive and low-substance content often generates irritation, leading to muted participation or group exit.

From a CPM perspective, these findings illustrate how group communication can generate boundary turbulence. When the flow of content exceeds personal thresholds of manageability, individuals perceive their informational boundaries as violated. This turbulence motivates strategic disengagement, with group exit serving as a mechanism to reassert autonomy and regain control over personal communication boundaries.

Thus, descriptive evidence underscores how excessive and irrelevant content undermines the intended benefits of connectivity, making exit a rational boundary management choice.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test: Age × Privacy Concerns

Variable	χ^2	df	p
Age × Privacy concerns	12.34	3	< .01

Note. The chi-square test indicated a significant association between age and privacy concerns.

Table 3 presented the results of the chi-square test, which revealed a statistically significant association between age and privacy concerns ($\chi^2 = 12.34$, $df = 3$, $p < .01$). This finding indicates that privacy concerns are not uniformly distributed across age groups but vary significantly, suggesting that perceptions of privacy are shaped by generational differences. Younger users may exhibit higher concerns due to greater awareness of digital risks and frequent exposure to privacy debates in online discourse (Tazreiter & Nguyen, 2023). Conversely, older participants may prioritize group cohesion and relational utility over privacy management, perceiving group participation as an extension of social obligation rather than a risk to autonomy.

Through the CPM lens, these variations reflect differences in privacy rule development. Privacy rules are culturally and socially constructed, and age cohorts interpret disclosure risks differently. For example, younger users may impose stricter rules regarding information sharing in groups, while older users may adopt more flexible rules to sustain social ties. The significant age-based association highlights how demographic variables influence boundary regulation strategies, underscoring the necessity of tailoring group communication practices to respect heterogeneous privacy expectations. Practically, this suggests that WhatsApp group administrators should recognize age-sensitive differences when setting group norms, ensuring inclusivity without generating turbulence.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test: Gender Differences in Privacy Concerns

Group Comparison	t	df	p	Mean (Males)	Mean (Females)
Gender (Male vs Female) × Privacy concerns	2.15	198	< .05	3.45	3.89

Note. Females reported significantly higher privacy concern scores than males.

Table 4 reported that the results of an independent samples t-test comparing privacy concerns between male and female participants. The analysis revealed a significant difference ($t = 2.15$, $df = 198$, $p < .05$), with females ($M = 3.89$) reporting higher privacy concern scores than males ($M = 3.45$). This gendered difference aligns with prior research suggesting that women are more cautious and protective of their digital identities, often perceiving greater risks of surveillance, intrusion, or unwanted exposure (Liu et al., 2025).

From a CPM perspective, these findings demonstrate how privacy ownership and boundary regulation differ across genders. Female participants may establish stricter privacy rules and be more sensitive to violations, interpreting excessive group disclosure or monitoring as threatening to autonomy and psychological comfort. In

contrast, male participants, while still concerned, may perceive group communication as less intrusive, resulting in more relaxed privacy rules. The higher sensitivity among women suggests that privacy management dilemmas contribute disproportionately to their disengagement decisions, reinforcing the salience of gender as a mediating variable in group exit behavior.

The results underscored the importance of considering gender dynamics in group communication research. Practically, WhatsApp group administrators and designers should account for these differences by offering customizable privacy and participation controls. Such measures can reduce gendered privacy anxieties and mitigate premature disengagement from groups.

Table 5: Logistic Regression: Predictors of Group Exit

Predictor	B (Beta)	SE	Wald	p	Exp(B)
Privacy concerns	0.42	0.15	7.84	<.01	1.52
Interpersonal conflict	0.37	0.18	4.21	<.05	1.45

Note. Logistic regression indicated that privacy concerns and interpersonal conflict significantly predicted the likelihood of group exit.

Table 5 reports the logistic regression analysis examining predictors of WhatsApp group exit. Two significant predictors emerged: privacy concerns ($B = 0.42$, $p < .01$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.52$) and interpersonal conflict ($B = 0.37$, $p < .05$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.45$). This means that individuals with higher privacy concerns were 1.52 times more likely to exit a group, while those experiencing interpersonal conflict were 1.45 times more likely to disengage. Together, these predictors highlight the dual influence of psychological and relational factors in shaping exit behavior.

From a CPM standpoint, both findings can be interpreted as instances of boundary turbulence. Privacy concerns represent turbulence at the individual informational boundary, where individuals perceive threats to control and ownership of personal data. Interpersonal conflict, by contrast, reflects turbulence at the relational boundary, where group interactions strain social expectations and violate implicit or explicit privacy rules. The combined influence of these predictors illustrates how both psychological discomfort and relational discord converge to drive disengagement.

Importantly, these results emphasize that group exit is not merely a product of overload or fatigue, but a boundary management strategy that restores control over personal information and relational well-being. Practically, this suggests that interventions to reduce group exit must address both privacy management tools (e.g., stronger controls, granular settings) and conflict management strategies (e.g., clearer group norms, moderation practices). Theoretically, the findings reinforce CPM's explanatory power in digital contexts, demonstrating how multiple layers of boundary turbulence jointly predict disengagement.

5. Discussion

The present study set out to examine why individuals disengage from WhatsApp groups by integrating social, psychological, and privacy-related factors within the framework of CPM Theory. Overall, the findings not only align with but also extend prior research by

offering a more integrated explanation of disengagement as an active boundary management process rather than a purely behavioural outcome.

A key finding of the study is that information overload significantly contributes to group exit, particularly through excessive messages, repetitive content, and voice notes. This supports earlier work by Caetano et al. (2019) and Melo et al. (2019), who identified message cascades and misinformation as drivers of fatigue and withdrawal, as well as Zhang et al. (2025), who confirmed overload as a consistent predictor of discontinuance across platforms. However, while previous studies largely frame overload as a stressor leading to withdrawal, the present study extends this understanding by showing that overload also functions as a boundary turbulence condition, where users actively restore informational control through disengagement.

Similarly, the significant role of privacy concerns in predicting group exit aligns with Aldossary et al. (2022), who highlighted technostress as a precursor to withdrawal intentions, and Vishwanath and Chen (2022), who emphasized privacy fatigue in digital environments. The current findings extend this literature by demonstrating that privacy sensitivity is not merely an attitudinal response but a behavioural determinant of exit decisions. Within CPM theory, this reflects individuals' active enforcement of privacy rules when perceived risks of boundary intrusion increase.

The study also found that interpersonal conflict significantly predicts WhatsApp group exit, which is consistent with Garcia and Vivacqua (2021), who reported that offense and inappropriate content are key reasons for leaving groups, and Shahid et al. (2024-2025), who demonstrated that weak moderation intensifies relational tensions and encourages withdrawal. The present study strengthens these findings by quantifying the predictive power of conflict and positioning it as a relational boundary violation within CPM. This suggests that when co-ownership expectations are disrupted through conflict, users are more likely to disengage to restore emotional equilibrium.

In addition, demographic differences observed in the study provide further theoretical and empirical contributions. The finding that younger users report higher privacy concerns aligns with Tazreiter and Nguyen (2023), who argued that digital natives are more aware of surveillance risks, while the observed gender differences support Liu et al. (2025) and Aharony and Gazit (2016), who identified greater privacy sensitivity among females. The present study extends these works by confirming that such demographic variations are not only perceptual but also translate into actual exit behaviour, thereby strengthening the predictive value of CPM-based boundary rule differences across user groups.

Importantly, although prior research such as Nouwens et al. (2017) and Koçak and Vergiveren (2019) highlighted the role of norms, communication styles, and content preferences, they often treated disengagement as a response to norm violation without fully explaining the psychological mechanism behind exit decisions. The present study addresses this gap by demonstrating that disengagement is a structured response to boundary turbulence arising from overlapping informational, relational, and privacy pressures.

A significant contribution of this study is the integration of CPM Theory as a unifying explanatory framework. While earlier studies have applied stress-based models (e.g., Aldossary et al., 2022) or relational perspectives (e.g., Gazit & Aharony, 2018), they rarely connect these dimensions systematically. The current findings show that privacy

concerns (informational boundaries) and interpersonal conflict (relational boundaries) jointly shape exit behaviour, thereby extending CPM's explanatory scope in digital group communication contexts.

Across all findings, an additional and important implication emerges regarding language use within WhatsApp groups. Prior literature has largely overlooked the role of linguistic expression in shaping group dynamics. The present study suggests that the way messages are framed—particularly the choice of words, tone, and phrasing plays a crucial mediating role in either escalating or reducing boundary turbulence. Polite, respectful, and inclusive language helps maintain co-ownership harmony and reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation or emotional strain. In contrast, abrupt, dismissive, or emotionally charged language may unintentionally trigger conflict or perceived violations of relational boundaries, thereby increasing disengagement risk. Given the absence of non-verbal cues in text-based communication, language choice becomes a critical mechanism for sustaining psychological safety and group cohesion.

In summary, the present study advances the literature by moving beyond isolated predictors of WhatsApp group exit and instead offering a CPM-informed integrative model in which overload, privacy concerns, and interpersonal conflict operate as interconnected boundary disturbances. Unlike prior fragmented approaches, this study demonstrates that disengagement is not merely a passive reaction to stressors but an active strategy of boundary regulation. These findings therefore make a significant theoretical contribution by extending CPM Theory into digital group communication contexts and a practical contribution by highlighting the importance of respectful communication practices in maintaining sustainable online group participation.

6. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study carry important theoretical, practical, and policy implications for understanding WhatsApp group disengagement within the framework of CPM Theory.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study extends CPM into the context of digital group communication, demonstrating its applicability beyond face-to-face settings. The results show that boundary turbulence caused by information overload, privacy concerns, and interpersonal conflict directly influences exit behavior, confirming Petronio's (2002) propositions on the dynamic nature of privacy rules. Furthermore, age and gender differences reveal that boundary negotiation is not uniform but shaped by demographic factors, supporting earlier findings by Tazreiter and Nguyen (2023) and Liu et al. (2025). The study thus contributes theoretically by positioning group exit as a strategic boundary management decision, rather than merely a passive outcome of digital fatigue.

6.2. Practical Implications

The results highlight actionable strategies for WhatsApp group administrators, designers, and users. Since information overload and content redundancy are leading causes of exit, administrators should establish clear posting guidelines and encourage moderation to maintain content relevance. The finding that privacy concerns significantly predict disengagement underscores the need for enhanced in-app tools,

such as customizable privacy filters, silent exit options, and subgrouping features to reduce exposure. Additionally, given that interpersonal conflict was a strong predictor of exit, conflict management mechanisms such as reporting tools, mediation features, or rotating moderators could reduce tensions and encourage sustained participation.

6.3. Policy Implications

On a broader scale, the study underscores the importance of digital literacy and privacy education. The gap between awareness and protective action (Malay Mail, 2023) suggests that users often lack the skills or confidence to manage boundaries effectively. Policymakers and institutions should therefore design campaigns that not only raise awareness of digital privacy but also provide practical training on privacy-enhancing tools. Moreover, organizations using WhatsApp for workplace or educational purposes must recognize that unmanaged overload and conflict can undermine well-being and productivity. Policies encouraging voluntary participation and respecting exit decisions without stigma could help safeguard psychological health.

6.4. Implications of Language Use in WhatsApp Group Communication and Member Engagement

The study highlights that language use in WhatsApp groups has important implications for maintaining healthy communication and reducing disengagement. Polite, respectful, and inclusive wording helps foster positive relationships, build trust, and minimise misunderstandings among members. In contrast, harsh, insensitive, or emotionally charged language can create tension, conflict, and emotional discomfort, increasing the likelihood of group exit. Since WhatsApp communication lacks non-verbal cues, careful attention to tone and word choice is essential for clarity and emotional balance. Therefore, mindful and respectful language practices are crucial for sustaining group harmony, supporting psychological well-being, and ensuring effective and continuous engagement within digital group environments.

6.5. Implications for Future Research

Finally, this study highlights new avenues for research. While quantitative findings identified predictors of group exit, qualitative studies could further explore the lived experiences of users navigating privacy turbulence. Cross-cultural comparisons may also reveal how cultural norms shape privacy rules and disengagement behaviors. By combining CPM with other frameworks such as the Stressor-Strain-Outcome (SSO) model, future research could build a more holistic understanding of disengagement in digital group settings.

7. Conclusion

The present study examined the reasons why individuals disengage from WhatsApp groups, employing Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory as the guiding framework. Through descriptive analysis, chi-square tests, independent t-tests, and logistic regression, the findings revealed that information overload, excessive and irrelevant messaging, privacy concerns, and interpersonal conflict are significant predictors of group exit behavior. These results reinforce the relevance of CPM Theory by demonstrating how boundary ownership, co-ownership, and boundary turbulence

influence disengagement as a strategic response to protect autonomy, privacy, and psychological well-being.

The study further highlights those demographic factors, particularly age and gender, significantly influence levels of privacy concern, while regression analysis confirms that privacy sensitivity and interpersonal conflict are among the strongest predictors of WhatsApp group exit decisions.

An important additional consideration emerging from the findings is the role of language use within WhatsApp groups. The way individuals communicate particularly the choice of words, tone, and phrasing plays a critical role in maintaining group harmony and reducing emotional strain. Polite, respectful, and inclusive language helps prevent misunderstandings and minimizes the risk of emotional discomfort among members. Conversely, harsh, dismissive, or emotionally charged expressions may contribute to relational tension, perceived disrespect, and eventual disengagement from the group. Therefore, careful attention to language use is essential in sustaining positive group dynamics and supporting healthy digital communication environments.

While the study contributes both empirical evidence and theoretical insights, several limitations offer directions for future research. First, the sample size of 200, although adequate based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guideline, may not fully represent the diversity of cultural, generational, and contextual experiences across broader populations. Future research could extend sampling across different countries and group types, such as family, workplace, academic, and community-based WhatsApp groups, to improve generalizability.

Second, the reliance on quantitative survey data limits the depth of understanding regarding users' lived experiences of disengagement. Future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to explore deeper emotional, relational, and contextual factors shaping privacy management and group exit behavior.

Finally, longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how privacy concerns and disengagement behaviors evolve over time, particularly in response to evolving platform features such as silent exits, privacy controls, and disappearing messages. Overall, these future directions would further enrich the literature by situating WhatsApp group disengagement within broader social, psychological, communicative, and technological contexts, thereby extending the explanatory power of CPM Theory in digital communication research.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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