

## **Exploring the Impact of a WeChat Group and E-Learning Platform Use on the Academic Performance of Students Majoring in Communication**

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### **Abstract**

The study explores the use of a WeChat social media group and a Moodle-based, e-learning platform “iSpace” in relation to the academic performance of students majoring in Communication at a higher education institution in China. The constructivist learning approach and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) were used as a quantitative investigation model in a survey of 500 postgraduate students. Specifically, the study aims to investigate how students studying in the field of Communication use technological resources to achieve their desired level of academic performance. According to the course intended learning outcomes (CILOs) of Foundations of Communication Study and the programme intended learning outcomes (PILOs) for the graduate students the relevant aspects of students’ performance can be categorized as cognitive and affective. There are two kinds of learning tools employed by Communication students in their major courses, a messaging app, and an e-learning platform: a WeChat group and iSpace, a local version of the “Moodle” virtual learning environment. Previous studies of WeChat have generally investigated it as a social media application rather than as an educational resource. The present study complements the survey with qualitative in-depth interviews and focus groups to examine how both WeChat and iSpace impacted students’ academic performance. The findings of this study redefine WeChat’s role from a simple messaging app to a form of learning support.

*Keywords:* academic performance, WeChat, “Moodle” e-learning platform, technology acceptance model

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## **Introduction**

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2023, education was among the offline and brick-and-mortar industries and institutions that were adversely affected. In-class gatherings in schools and universities were prohibited on account of “social distancing” (Shukor et al., 2014). In the initial phase of the epidemic, people actively sought out ways to sustain industries and operations, and the education sector began to rely heavily on “new communication media” such as “live online” technology and online learning platform tools that had been developed in previous years (Salam & Farooq, 2020). Online classes and other interactions swiftly addressed the need for students to resume their schooling, and the global nature of the health crisis had the result of accelerating the general acceptance of distance and hybrid modes of learning, mediated by technology. Over time, however, positive and negative effects of the incorporation of online tools in education became evident, and educators have been prompted to respond to a perceived decline in the quality of instruction, and an instability in the learning progress of students, among various other shortcomings. Educators have thus been prompted to study the new paradigms of technologically mediated course delivery

to ensure the maintenance of educational quality.

In China, there is a particular category of colleges and universities—Sino-foreign joint colleges and universities—which use English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and adopt transcultural educational philosophies and traditions of instruction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these institutions were also forced to adapt their teaching and learning practices to new, technology-driven modes of course delivery. The present study focuses on a Sino-foreign joint university: Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC). UIC is a small liberal arts institution in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province. The study was conducted in 2022 with a group of graduate students taking the “Foundations of Communication Theory” course of the Master of Arts programme in Communication. As the higher education sector emerges from the pandemic phase, into a world in which technology maintains a greater role in course delivery, the object of the study was to determine how students’ use of two tools, the WeChat messaging app and the iSpace (Moodle) virtual learning environment (VLE), impacted on their learning. The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments to investigate students’ perceptions and usage