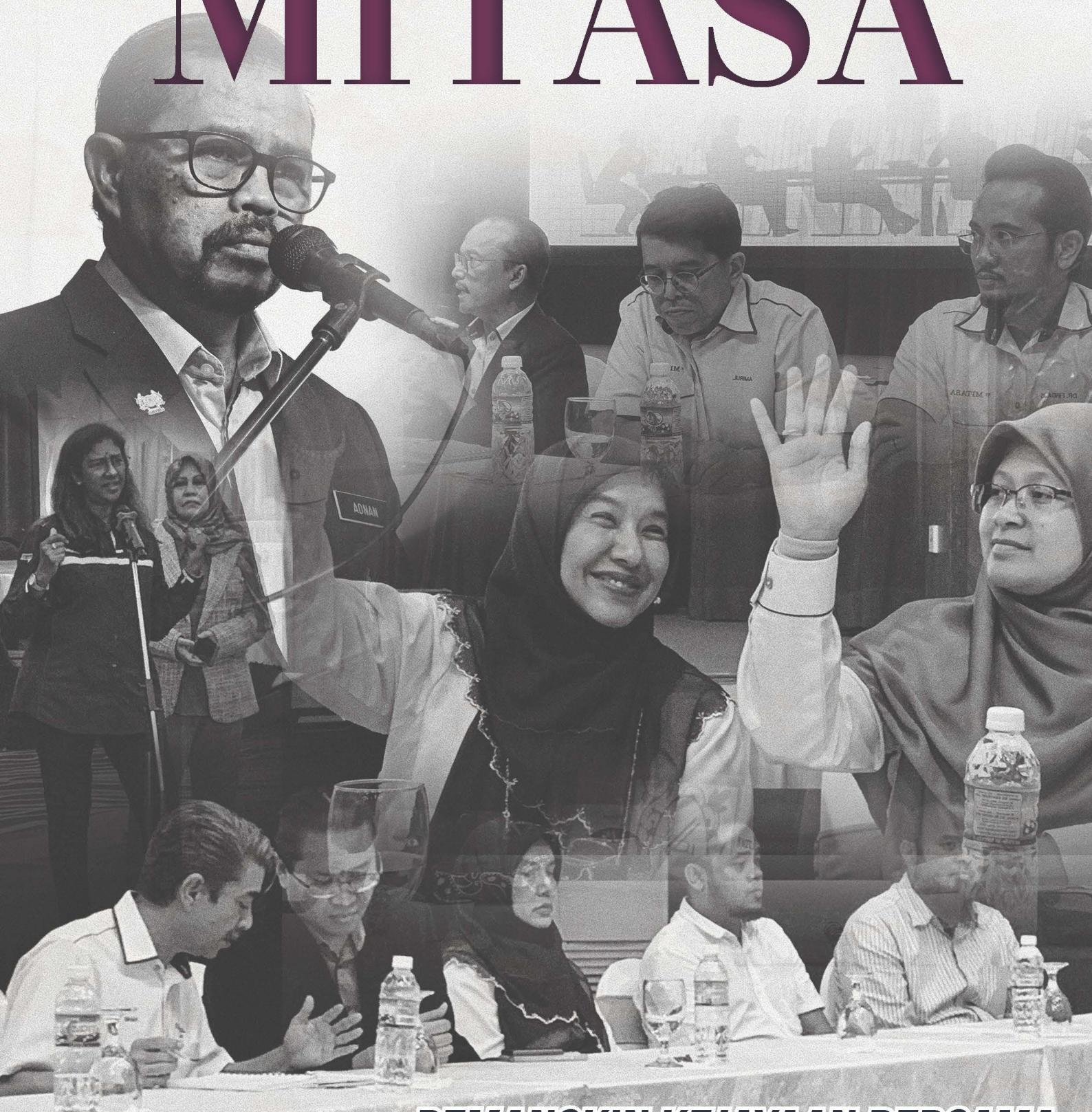


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KESETERAAN PENYELIAAN MELIBATKAN
KENAIKAN PANGKATWACANA TOKOH: BAHASA DAN JATI DIRI
BANGSA DI KONVENTSYEN 152 PERINGKAT
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Instant messaging applications have reshaped how colleagues communicate, coordinate, and collaborate. WhatsApp groups, in particular, have become routine in many Malaysian universities, handling announcements, logistics, and occasional solidarity. Specific WhatsApp groups for the departments, faculties, course teams, and administrative units now carry much of the campus's day-to-day pulse. As a senior lecturer in English language proficiency at the foundation and degree levels, as well as in content- and research-based language and communication at the postgraduate level, my views on this are ambivalent. The convenience of WhatsApp groups is indisputable, but at the same time, we should be concerned that they have eroded the standards of professional discourse among academics.

The crux of the problem is a mismatch between channel and purpose. WhatsApp's immediacy encourages snack-sized responses and emotional reactivity, while many academic and administrative matters require careful deliberation based on facts, verified documents, and expert opinions. Curriculum revisions, schedule changes, invigilation duties, student misconduct cases, and assessment procedures, to name a few, are frequently complex and institutional. When WhatsApp exchanges disregard contextual and audience suitability, they often deteriorate into impulsive commentary that undermines workplace harmony.

From a discourse perspective, the medium shapes the message. Register, the choice of vocabulary, level of formality, and rhetorical strategy, is fundamental in language

and communication. Participants typically adjust how messages are constructed according to their roles and contexts. In WhatsApp groups, register often collapses into the conversational: rapid replies, emotionally-laden phrases and structures, emojis, and rhetorical exaggeration. Conversational features are not inherently improper, but when applied to matters requiring specialized knowledge and experience, they can risk spreading misinformation, damaging professional credibility, and offending certain parties. This stems from the fact that an abrupt opinionated remark typed in haste is not equivalent to a considered critique grounded in evidence and procedure.

Scholars who study the relationship between discourse and power offer helpful lenses. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, Norman Fairclough emphasizes how everyday language reproduces and contests social relations. Short, performative messages on WhatsApp can enact power by asserting authority, even without substantiation.

In the context of universities, as one example of a workplace setting, malignant WhatsApp messages risk bringing the 'us-versus-them' discourse to the fore. It must be noted that Malaysian universities, in particular, host academics from varied demographic and educational backgrounds, with differing qualifications and experience levels. Unsubstantiated WhatsApp threads can amplify perceived hierarchies: colleagues from specific departments may be framed as more authoritative. In contrast, others may be perceived as unassertive and inferior. Such stereotyping fosters in-group and out-group mentalities, marginalizes

reserved academics, corrodes trust, and hampers camaraderie. Over time, sour relations hinder future interdisciplinary research collaborations, curriculum and cocurricular initiatives.

There is an epistemic and ethical dimension to this issue as well. Academics are custodians of knowledge and exemplars of critical inquiry. Intellectual humility, i.e., recognizing what we do not know and the willingness to defer to specialist expertise, is central to that role. When contributors broadcast confident but unsupported claims, they mislead colleagues and normalize a culture in which evidence is optional. Speaking beyond one's credibility does not make one appear insightful; instead, it makes one appear less judicious, especially to those with rightful expertise. None of us wishes to be remembered as one of the Karens or Kens of academia.

Beyond epistemic humility lies the question of professional identity. As lecturers, our linguistic choices reflect who we are as members of an academic community. Every comment, emoji, or forwarded message in a WhatsApp group contributes to the discursive construction of our professional identities as academics. In a digital space that feels private but leaves a permanent trail, words and

tones become public artefacts of our credibility. When we offer unsolicited, baseless opinions or speculate on institutional matters beyond our expertise, we risk eroding the very ethos of professionalism that our qualifications are meant to embody. Language does not merely convey information; it also signals one's constructed and perceived identities. As educators, we teach these principles to our students. However, the test of our authenticity lies in how consistently we practice them in our communicative behavior.

What is constructive and feasible in university contexts? I propose concise, practical measures that respect both the benefits of instant messaging and the demands of academic discourse. One easy way is to treat channels as purpose-specific. We should reserve WhatsApp for coordination and urgent notices. Professional academics must relearn to direct procedural, evaluative, or sensitive matters that require prudent judgment to email, formal meetings, committees, or private messages, like the good old days. If conveyed through more appropriate and private channels, many messages would benefit all parties, as speculation would no longer run rampant in endless WhatsApp threads.

It is also wise to model reflective practice. In other words, pause before posting. A simple routine of drafting, waiting several minutes, and rereading reduces impulsive replies. Additionally, it would be brilliant if WhatsApp groups consisting of academics could agree on group norms and etiquette. Departments can adopt succinct codes: do not publicly question other individuals or departments in group chats; escalate personnel matters to private channels; avoid discussing unverified information beyond one's expertise; and confine emojis and tone markers to social threads. Sometimes, silence speaks louder, carrying a dignity that relentless barking can never match. All of these need to be considered to enhance academicians' digital professionalism. Ultimately, communication and tactful skills shape institutional culture and professionalism. As academics from reputable institutions of higher learning, we should model reflective, knowledge-based, and respectful discourse. WhatsApp will not disappear from academic life, nor should it. But if immediacy replaces deliberation and superficial certainty replaces genuine expertise, we risk subverting the collegiality essential to effective teaching, research, and collaboration. Communicate as though your reputation depends on it – because it does.

Beyond the Bluetick: Rethinking Workplace Communication on WhatsApp

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PERFECTION IS NOT ATTAINABLE.

**BUT IF WE CHASE PERFECTION,
WE CAN CHASE**

EXCELLENCE.