A contrarian view on the mobile messaging application and networking option that has caught on among a wide cross-section of people

Coping with WhatsApp

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I could not say 'no' to anything my father wanted me to do since we were taught never to say 'no'. These days I can't say 'no' to my children because I have never learnt the art of saying 'no'.

The other day my son, himself the father of a son, brought me a new-fangled mobile phone and said: "Please start using this. Give away the old one to our maid." Seeing the clouds of protest on my face he added: "Come on dad, move with the times. Get connected with your colleagues all the time."

"What makes you think that I'm not connected? Well, I am connected even with the old mobile," I said.

But my words failed to have the desired effect.

Features galore

He persisted: "It has many added features. You can access your e-mails. You can listen to your favourite songs anytime and anywhere you wish to do so. Moreover you will have WhatsApp at your fingertips."

"I don't know what is WhatsApp, so what is the idea of having it at my finger-tips?" was my simple answer.

WhatsApp has introduced the most irritating nonsense in my life: that agonising ping of an incoming message

However, the chip-of-the-old-block would not let the matter rest at that and wanted the so-called latest fad in my life. He said: "It will enable you to exchange messages with any number of your friends and colleagues without having to pay for SMS. It can send images and videos as well. And you know dad, it is highly popular. The number of active users has gone up from 700 million to 800 million during the first three months of this year."

'Worse than a virus'

"If that is so, well, it is something worse than a deadly virus and I don't want to be a part of it," so went my cryptic refusal. "Just for my sake dad, try it out," he said. I had to give in since he had used the *brahmastra*, the ultimate weapon anyone could use in my family, by invoking the term, 'for my sake'. In no time he had transferred all my contacts to the new touchphone and activated god knows what-all apps.

The moment he handed over the mobile to me, there was a ping. And before I could even make an attempt to understand what it was, there was another and yet another one. The message in the first ping was from an eight-year-old grandson of my cousin asking: "Did you enjoy your breakfast, uncle?" The question was innocuous, but being asked by a toddler who had neither met me during the last three years nor had spoken to me was a bit difficult to fathom and digest. Needless to say, my instant reaction appalled my children.

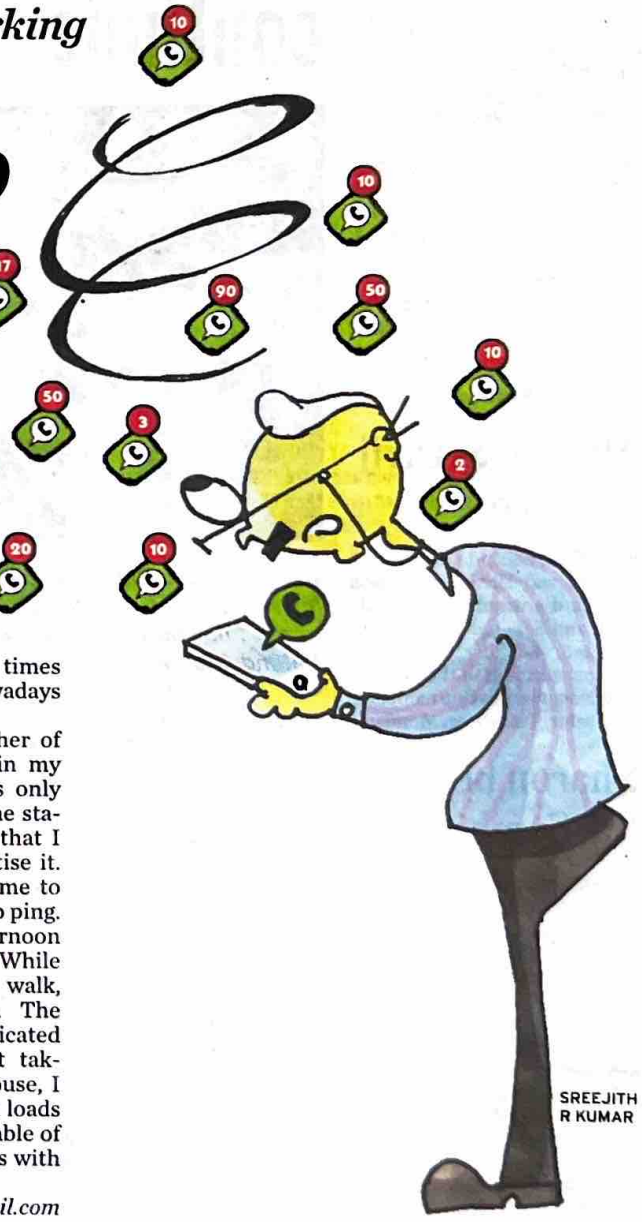
My circle of well-wishers has suddenly grown without any extra effort, like a cactus plant. Without my asking and without my consent, I have been included in six groups from various quarters such as schoolmates, college colleagues, air force network and the housing society where I live. In addition, various individuals have roped me in "to stay in touch with me". Mind you, they were never in touch with me when I had the simple mobile without WhatsApp!

The agony

WhatsApp has introduced the most irritating nonsense in my life: that agonising ping of an incoming message. To put it mildly, it is as agonising as was the ping (the beep) that hurt the Americans when they heard it emanating from the first satellite, Sputnik, launched by Russia. The Sputnik beat the Americans in the space race. The mobile that used to be silent for endless hours and at times even for a whole day nowadays 'pings' almost non-stop.

Necessity is the mother of invention, I had read in my school-days. But it was only now, having achieved the status of a senior citizen, that I had the chance to practise it. One day I put the volume to zero and lo, there was no ping. The morning and afternoon passed comfortably. While going for the evening walk, I picked up the mobile. The sign for WhatsApp indicated 272 messages. Without taking a step out of the house, I felt tired. I wish my son loads another App that is capable of deleting all the messages with a single touch!

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