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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND SOCIETY STUDIES

The 'socialness' of online social media: Conversations with selected Midlands State University students.

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
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R135133c

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Certificate of Supervision

I hereby certify that I personally supervised this dissertation in accordance with Department Regulations and the University General Regulations.

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Declaration

I, **Vanessa Yananiso Moyo (R135133C)** do hereby declare that the dissertation is my own original work that has not been previously submitted to any other university. In writing this work, I duly complied with ethical issues and laws governing intellectual property.

Dissertation Title: The 'socialness' of online social media: Conversations with selected Midlands State University students.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the socialness of online social media, specifically WhatsApp and Facebook. Literature (Papacharissi 2010, Bauman 2013), shows that online social media helps in creating communities, bonds, socializing and gatherings just like organic communities. Facebook users can claim to have hundreds of friends in their network, yet sometimes find it difficult to name half a dozen people that they have actually met in their local neighborhood. While social networks have helped people to meet like-minded contacts online, they have had a more limited role in developing face-to-face contact in communities.

Online social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp are not communities in any singular sense, but rather function as social venues in which many different communities may form (Papacharissi 2010). Moreover, these sites carry expectations of sociability, meaningful connection to others, empathy and support (Papacharissi 2010). These are all characteristics of organic communities. Whether the actual interaction on these venues reaches the level of a “virtual community” depends on how one sees it and definition. She further asserts that the rhetoric of social network platforms often valorizes communal language and imagery as well. Facebook’s log in page pronounces, “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life” describing itself as a place of connection and as a “community.” She further asserts that, the use of the internet, as a site of convergence with multiple technologies, becomes an asset depending on how it is used. The internet then serves as a instrument of communication, and does not affect social change. Students retain different levels of action, based on which they can use the internet to inconsistent ends uses and gratification.

Papacharissi offers an oversight on how online social media aids in the formation and not fragmentation of communities, depending on its varied uses across. The study explores the perceptions of selected Midlands State University students towards the socialness of WhatsApp and Facebook platforms. In fact, I examine to see whether the students see these platforms as strengthening or fragmenting day-to-day physical interactions in organic communities.

Background to the study

In Zimbabwe, just like other sub-Saharan African countries, online social platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have gained prominence. With a significant population having access to smartphones, the number of online media users has increased. According to a report by POTRAZ, Zimbabwe's mobile penetration increased in 2015 and currently stands at 95.4% whilst internet subscriptions increased to 6,575,591 and national internet penetration rose to 48.1% in December 2015. This increase was driven by WhatsApp and Facebook bundles which respectively contributed 34% and 3%. Data usage set up to 63% and in comparison this shows how the mobile Instant Messaging platform has redefined internet consumption patterns in Zimbabwe.

However, despite the increase in internet usage and popularity of online social platforms, there is a dearth in studies showing the 'socialness' of these platforms in Africa. Debates about whether people can find community or community-like experiences online continue to resonate in academic discourse. The concept of virtual communities is denied as a "confused oxymoron" (Lockard, 1997), while others support viewing online communities in terms of networks of personal relationships (Rheingold, 2000). Others draw on the impression that online social media may enhance communities by increasing participants' "social capital" (Ellison et al 2007). To most, the concept of a community is accepted (Chua, 2009).

Other scholars have studied and researched on the effects of online social media on college students. Hendricks and Noor Al-Deen (2014) assert that Facebook provides a platform of virtual reality where students can enact different identities. College life is focused on academic and social communities joining concern oriented groups on Facebook or WhatsApp (for example the Midlands State University Facebook page or WhatsApp groups like MSU Enactus, LEOs or Subwardens) provides students with a sense of belonging. As stated by Ellison et al (2007), friendships formed online supplement offline relationships. This however has been as far as scholars have gone in terms of researching the effects of online social media. This study goes in depth to research on selected MSU students' perception on the impact of WhatsApp and Facebook on interactions.

The idea of a community is grounded on commonness and common interest. However, these were disrupted due to industrialization and Bauman (2013) asserts that communities have now become symbolic in modern liquid times. He states that they are well-defined along interest. Social media has created virtual communities that are defined along interest that is Facebook and WhatsApp, leading to the death of organic communities. Students identify with these online media platforms and what they associate with online is what they shape their lives to be (performances). The study seeks to determine whether these virtual communities have led to a state of anti-socialism or in fact have created communities which most people are part of and the advent of the internet has just led to a migration from organic to virtual. Boyd and Ellison (2007) assert that online social media are designed within the personal community. This more accurately reflects how the world is made up of networks and not groups socially (Wellman, 1988). The introduction of online social media features has introduced a new organizational framework for online communities.

The study seeks to show whether virtual communities or offline relationships have been fragmented due to the advent of online social media. Although exceptions exist, the available research suggests that most online social media platforms primarily support pre-existing social relations. Ellison et al (2007) suggest that Facebook is used strengthen existing offline relationships other than making new ones. There is shared interest amongst people who friend each other. In their research, they found out that Facebook users search for people they know more than they browse for new people. Their argument is based on that social media platform relations or communities are an extension of the already existing organic communities and not a displacement. However, social media nurtures a false sense of online connection (Amedie 2015). He argues that social media sites make it difficult to differentiate between offline and online relationships. The study examines how WhatsApp and Facebook affect and influence day to day interactions among selected MSU students. The study is grounded in the cultural studies research paradigm (Hall 1973, Morley 1980), which has more interest in the audience interaction with media and texts.

Statement of the problem

The study explores attitudes and perceptions of selected Midlands State University students towards the “socialness” of online social media platforms, especially Facebook and WhatsApp. The study demonstrates how these platforms impact on day to day interactions of students at Midlands State University’s main campus.

Research Objectives

- Explore attitudes and perceptions of selected Midlands State University students towards the “socialness” of Facebook and WhatsApp.
- Explain similarities and differences in selected Midlands State University students towards socialness of social media platforms.
- Explore forces behind attitudes of selected Midlands State University students towards the “socialness” of Facebook and WhatsApp.

Research questions

- What are the attitudes of selected Midlands State University students towards online social media?

Sub Research questions

- What are the similarities and differences in selected MSU students towards socialness of social media platforms?
- Why are there forces behind the attitudes of selected MSU students towards online social media?

Justification of the study

Scholars such as Papacharissi (2010), Boyd (2007), Grossman (2006), Bauman (2013) and others have tackled the issue to social media before. However, the researcher has noted that there are no studies to justify the ‘socialness’ of social media in Africa at university set up. This is the

gap that the researcher intends to fill out by carrying out the study at Midlands State University, selecting a few students to participate. The study seeks to contribute to existing theories of identity (scholars Stuart Hall), communities (with scholars like Zygmunt Bauman) and social media (Papacharissi). These are important studies done that link with social media and its effects on people (communities and identities). These theories look into the effects of social media but not specifically in a university set up, how it affects human interactions amongst students and how in a way it has affected their identities. Zygmunt Bauman's theory of modern liquidity can also be applied to the university set up to see how virtual communities on online spectrum have affected or displaced organic communities.

Online social media is a broad term that consists of so many social media platforms that include Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr, IMO and many other platforms online. The study seeks to see the effects of online social media particularly those frequently used in a university community like MSU. The researcher purposefully chose Facebook and WhatsApp because most students are highly active and participate on these two. Other online platforms like Snapchat and Instagram require a lot of data and if possible Wi-Fi. Therefore, not every student has access to that whereas Facebook and WhatsApp are cheaper and do not require a lot of data. The bundles are cheaper across all network providers in Zimbabwe compared to those of other social media. There is high activity on these two and the possibility of the greatest impact from these.

The study is purposefully carried out at this time because according to statistics by POTRAZ, there is an astounding rise in the use of internet in Zimbabwe and high participation on social media platforms. With the introduction of daily, weekly and monthly bundles across all networks, social media has been gaining popularity even in the rural areas. Most people, either elite or not have access to Facebook and WhatsApp and it is only in such momentum that these social media platforms are expected to have effects on people particularly University students.

[Scope of the study](#)

The selected media platforms for this study are Facebook and WhatsApp. This is because these are the most frequently used social media platforms and are easily accessible with or without Wi-Fi. Other platforms like Instagram and Snapchat require Wi-Fi and are quite expensive when using data bundles therefore participation is only to a selected few. The study is gender sensitive

and interviews are conducted to both the male and female students to get a balanced result. Selected students are those from the main campus who stay both on and off campus. This is because those who stay on campus have access to Wi-Fi 24 hours a day and those who stay off campus use data bundles. There is need for the study to have a balanced result and get the views of the two groups. There is frequent use of online social media to those who use Wi-Fi as it is free. However, there is need to ascertain the extremes to which the other group will go so that they are always online and do not miss out on activity. The study will be carried out during the month of September 2017.

Limitations

The study is conducted at Midlands State University and not Zimbabwe as a whole for feasibility. Therefore, findings cannot be generalized to MSU as a whole and Zimbabwe as a whole. For feasibility, again the study is carried out at the University's main campus because the institution has a multi campus approach and the student body is dispersed around various cities in Zimbabwe. The study does not include the whole student body of the university's main campus as it is quite a huge number but focus only on a selected few. This means that the study gets an impartial result of the University and cannot ascertain that the findings of the study will represent the whole institution.

Delimitations

The researcher will choose a selected population of the MSU students because the institution has over 2000 students and this being a qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population.

The researcher assumes that online social media has led to the displacement and fragmentation of organic communities. The researcher also assumes that university students have abandoned the organic communities and relations existing thereof have been weakened. Social media has become more important than face to face interactions.

Structure of the study

The study consists of six chapters. Chapter one introduces the study, incorporating research questions, background and justification of study and research topics. Chapter two consists of the literature review and theoretical framework. Chapter three has the research methodology applied in the study. Chapter four consists of the organizational analysis of Facebook and WhatsApp.

Chapter five presents data gathered and the analysis. The last chapter is the conclusion of the study including recommendations to the problem

Conclusion

This chapter offers an insight of the arguments raised in the study and how the research is going to be conducted.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The issue of social media has been deliberated upon as well as its effects on its users. The study however seeks to fill the gap that has been left by scholars. Little research has focused on Social media in context of university students in Africa. This chapter reviews studies done by other scholars regarding online social media. It also discusses the theoretical framework through which the findings will be analyzed.

The post-online media society

All forms of media are social (Papacharissi 2015). They play a role of communication. Papacharissi (2015) argues that coining the term social media implies that there are other forms of media which are anti-social. It also allows a comparison between mediums. However, each media is unique in its own way. She goes on to say that people are social and even the act of rejection is social. Papacharissi (2009) asserts that online social media have given a new order as to how information flows and how people communicate. She asserts that they allow for adjusting of behaviors and identities to suit the audience.

The study examines that online social media specifically Facebook and WhatsApp have effects on the surrounding societies from which selected MSU students hail from. The assumption the study is addressing is that Facebook and WhatsApp as virtual societies, are leading to the fragmentation of organic societies. Students are seemingly spending more time on online social media and that has led to the death of real communities. Lindgren (2017) asserts that technological advancements have allowed online social media to change how people relate. McLuhan (1962) says that social and cultural change are theorized by looking at how people are interacting. Various aspects of society are being influenced by technology. Online social media and society have a relationship of influencing each other (Tomita 2016). The argument presented by these scholars which the study examines is that Facebook and WhatsApp as forms of media have a bearing on their societies. The study examines the bearings of these online platforms by evaluating the attitudes and perceptions of the students at MSU. Tomita (2016) argues that it is

not everyone is being influenced by the internet. Most people are using it to complement offline relationships.

Ellison et al (2007) suggest that Facebook is used to maintain offline relationships. These relationships might be weak but there is a common interest. Lampe et al (2006) discovered that Facebook users search for people they know more than those they do not know. Facebook has enable people from the same high schools, neighborhoods and even people who grew up together to stay in touch. Cases are rare whereby a Facebook user has more than 50 new friends that he/she has nothing in common with. The same can be said for WhatsApp. WhatsApp users usually interact with each other on a personal note. A student must share his/her phone number to be able to communicate with the other. In most cases on University campus, these are usually people around campus, friends, and team mates in sports, classmates, people at home or hostel mates. This strongly supports what Ellison et al (2007) asserted by saying that relationships on Facebook and WhatsApp often complement those offline. Online social media in this case does not interrupt or fragment organic relationships but cements them.

Organic societies now enjoy the privilege of being elastic. They can shift from being organic one minute to being virtual. Students can easily shift from one state to the other and this has been made possible by online social media. Virtual societies act as a compliment of organic societies creating a stronger bond. Tomita (2016) defines what is known as second offline. He describes it as the process where the virtual is intertwined with the organic. He talks of the complementation of one society with the other without being affected. The advent of online social media came about with smartphones and these smartphones have enabled people to move about freely and access online social media anytime and provide an entrance into cyberspace of which the physical world is gradually becoming a part (Tomita 2016). Online social media is leading us into a real that does not strictly consist of the dichotomy between 'real' space and cyberspace. Milgram and Colquhoun (1999) claim that the remaining difference between the two is whether reality is more virtual or more real. The virtual society of Facebook and WhatsApp has been intertwined with that of the real world. There has been convergence of spaces as both societies complement each other with the use of online social media. Often students share jokes on WhatsApp groups with the people they are familiar with and who are part of their organic

society. Post online social media has brought about a convergence of societies, the virtual and the real.

Kim et al (2015) in a study asserts that college students use online social media to maintain existing friendships. A relationship cannot be maintained if it does not exist. This implies that online social media works on relationships that already exist in the societies to build social relationships. The main reasons that college students use social media are to stay in touch with their family and friends, to know about social activities, and to feel connected. Mobile phones are used to generate and maintain social relationships (Kim et al 2015). Existing relationships in the organic society cannot be fragmented when there is maintenance involved. This is not to totally rule out new relationships which originate from Facebook and WhatsApp. These platforms according to Kim (2015) allow offline relationships to be maintained. Facebook and WhatsApp provide opportunities for students to participate in social activities in distant communities.

Kim et al (2015) goes to state that social media use affects the organic relationships by providing alternative means of communication. Students are more interested in the social activities of friends online. Students have various groups on WhatsApp on which they converge and share and discuss different things. These include class groups (Media 4.2), sport group (Tennis 10), clubs (MSU LEOs) and various other interests which bring them together.

Post-online social media societies focus on the relationship between virtual and organic communities. It focuses on the role and impact of Facebook and WhatsApp on existing societies. Literature shows that online social media relationships are a maintenance of offline relationships. Facebook and WhatsApp as social media platforms encourage strengthening of already existing relationships in the society. Individuals using Facebook and WhatsApp would be connecting with others outside their pre-existing social group or location, liberating them to form communities around shared interests, as opposed to shared geography (Wellman et al 1996).

Papacharissi (2009) states that users adjust their identities. She argues that the term social is not lost because a person has shifted a lot of attention from the organic community to the virtual. The internet is merely a tool that does not effect change. Students however, use and gratify online social media differently (Papacharissi 2002). Online technologies are capable of making or

breaking a public sphere. She asserts that the appropriation of the technologies is made possible by the discourse that surrounds them. Online social media according to Papacharissi offers audience participation without pacification. The extent to which a person uses social media is entirely up to him/her, but the power does not lie within the social media platforms. She does not regard the media as powerful and also does not pacify the users. To whichever end a student decides to utilize social media and which in every community s/he is participating from the concept of social is never lost.

However, this concept can be critiqued. Wellman et al (2001) argues that that online interactions can disrupt or enhance offline relations. The Internet allows new interaction by providing alternative communication (Ellison et al 1996). Not all Facebook and WhatsApp relationships are maintained, some are created during that process of maintain the existing ones. This weighs heavily on organic communities as attention will be shifted to the new companions. MSU has a large student body of approximately 24000 students and from first year to fourth year a student would have made more new friends. Students no longer find organic communities interesting and even during one on one interactions online social media will always take precedence. There is always uninterrupted time for WhatsApp and Facebook and the same is not true for one on one interactions. This includes in church services, lectures, during sports and even in leisure areas like bars. The organic community always suffers to the virtual and hence the online social media loses its aspect of socialness. Attention is drawn from what the lecturer is saying as there is need to concentrate on what is being said on the other side of the phone. The social aspect that Papacharissi refers to when she says all media are social is the general role of media in society which is to educate, entertain and inform. To educate, inform and entertain, social media has led to the fragmentation of organic communities.

[Facebook and WhatsApp, Communities in modern liquid times](#)

Bauman (2013) asserts that communities have become symbolic in modern liquid times.

Communities according to Bauman are elastic and can shift. Bauman says that despite the organic communities being lost, virtual communities still exist and are gaining prominence by day thereby still preserving the aspect of a community. For example, the people a person spends the day talking to on WhatsApp constitute his/her community despite the location or distance between. The aspect of being social also in Papacharissi (2015)'s context is not lost, it is just

moving from one spectrum to the other. Anderson (2006) whilst talking of nationalism describes a nation as an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. In this context, virtual communities (Facebook and WhatsApp) are imagined communities as well and they are imagined because some 'friends' will never know most of their 'friends', meet them or even hear from them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. This is because a person can have 500+ friends on Facebook and can only manage to be in contact constantly with less than 20. Media consumers as well as social media consumers are coined the term audiences or publics. Anderson (2006) as quoted by Papacharissi (2009) defines publics on any media spectrum as imagined communities.

Nancy Fraser (1992) asserts that publics are not only opinions (WhatsApp groups) but 'avenues for the formation and enactment of social identities'. Students get to create identities and enact them on various social media platforms. According to Anderson (2006), all communities larger than primordial villages of face to face contact are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined.

Bauman (2013) uses the term liquid modernity to better describe the condition of change that takes place in society. He writes of a transition from solid modernity to a more liquid form of social life.

For Bauman (2013), the shift is not due to self-identity. Liquid modernity talks of the construction of dual identities that are elastic (Bauman 2013). He says people have moved from a period where they understood themselves as searching and now view themselves as tourists. Bauman (2013) asserts that 'society' is increasingly viewed and treated as a 'network' rather than a 'structure' (let alone a solid totality): it is perceived and treated as a matrix of random connections and disconnections and of an essentially infinite volume of possible permutations. In modernity liquidity, communities are now viewed in terms of networks (Facebook and WhatsApp) and not structures or set ups as was previously. There has been a shift in definition with the advent of technology and Bauman asserts that with the times changing communities cease to become what people understood before.

In the context of Bauman's argument, students at MSU have shifted from organic communities and migrated to virtual communities. As he argues, the term community has shifted in meaning from what people traditionally or formerly defined as communities (Byrne 2001). Communities have gone beyond geography and are defined in the context of the new modern times with the advent of new technology. MSU goes beyond lecture rooms, the sports field, clubs and religious groups. A WhatsApp group that brings people with shared and common interests together is a community as communities are mainly defined along interest. Online space is now considered a community on its own and it is all about elective belongingness.

Social media provides opportunities for building community in traditional face-to-face classrooms (Hentges 2015). Hentges (2015) talks of the role of online social media in school communities. She further asserts that these social media communities connect students with new people, they also connect students with new ideas. Hentges (2015) identifies online social media as communities as also suggested by Bauman (2013). Participation of students on WhatsApp groups for different disciplines on its own is a contribution to the building of social media communities. The study examines whether the use of online social media in a university set up affects existing communities in any way. It examines the attitude and the perceptions of selected students at MSU towards online social media in their day to day lives. Facebook and WhatsApp are platforms used by students to enhance the already existing communities. This can be seen by the various causes that are formed online that better society. MSU has a charity club organisation called MSU LEOs and many others of like passion, which helps the needy and the disadvantaged in the community of Senga and Gweru. Campaigns are launched first on virtual communities before they are initiated Papacharissi (2010) and Bauman (2013) are giving power to the people that they change with the times and therefore in this context the social media does not become anti-social. It is just a shift in times, but the term social is not lost.

Bauman and Papacharissi's views are valid in the sense that times are changing, and organic communities have been displaced by virtual communities. Everyone is now glued to their mobile phones and making use of the virtual community at work, home, school. Lecturers are taking advantage of WhatsApp groups to announce important information to students. Those not on online social media are the ones regarded as anti-social. In true essence however, online social media can be anti-social in the sense that a student in class can choose to reply messages and

forgo listening to what the lecturer says. Boyd (2014) identified that the virtual community spaces created by social media can be understood as “networked publics” or the community spaces created by social technologies as well as the communities that arise out of the collective use of these technologies. A virtual community is an example of a networked public. Brown (2014) talks of affordances that are allowed in virtual communities that are not found in organic communities. He argues that these affordances provide a preference to students to choose which community to effectively and highly participate in. The unique properties found in digital networked publics are the “affordances” of technology—“the capabilities that allow individuals to act and interact with each other in novel ways that are difficult or were impossible to do in earlier online or offline settings” (Kane 2014).

An example of a new affordance provided by social media technologies is “spreadability” (Boyd, 2014). Spreadability is the easy sharing of content in the digital space. What sets this affordance apart from sharing information in the physical world is digital information’s ability to be shared nearly promptly and to multiple individuals, who themselves may be geographically distributed (Brown 2014). Social media’s networked publics, and the affordances these technologies allow, have changed the landscapes of relationships. The study examines the effect of these changes enacted by networked publics. It examines the perceptions of selected students on the impact of these publics on organic communities. In relation to Boyd (2014)’s argument, there is an issue of prefer ability in terms of communities. Virtual communities are offering easy methods of interaction which are not offered by organic communities and users are juxtaposing the two communities to complement each other. University students have always been in the middle of changes in digital media environment. They use social media to express their identity and opinions and to build social relationships both online and offline. University students use social media to stay in touch with their family and friends, to know about social activities, and to feel connected. Online social media is also used to generate and maintain social relationships (Kim et al 2016). University students through the use of digital media participate in what is called social engagement. Prohaska et al (2012) defines social engagement as individuals’ participation in formal and informal collective activities of social groups in communities. Engaging in social activities and belonging to a society are important issues for students at MSU given that their sense of being in a community could affect their social well-being and socialization (Albanesi et

al 2007). Students at MSU socially engage and establish social networks and get social support. Exploring daily uses of social media can help provide a foundation to more thoroughly explore the value of social media for engagement (Mihailidis 2014). Digital media, particularly social media, provide opportunities for individuals to participate in social activities in distant communities.

The study examines the impact which online social media effects on organic communities. Engagement in online social media is said to enhance the ties that already exist in organic communities giving birth to new ones that might not be in the same geography. Facebook and WhatsApp are the modern communities which offer students flexibility in connecting and networking. Online social media plays a role in the integration of online and offline communities for social participation. Individuals' networks on social media are based on interpersonal relationships, individuals may be more interested in information about social events that their friends share and be encouraged to get together through social media. New technology has rapidly emerged as a ubiquitous resource for connecting friends and family members along with coordinating daily life activities (Campbell 2011). Facebook and WhatsApp platforms are used for maintaining existing relationships (Ling 2008). Communities are elastic and can shift according to Bauman (2013). Organic communities have shifted and given birth to virtual communities with the advent of new technology.

[Online Social Media: Constructs of digital identity and belonging](#)

Identity is about oneness/sameness (Gripsrud 2002). It is also about differences. Hall (1990) asserts that identification is more important than identity. He further asserts that identity is about becoming more than being, it is more about routes and less about roots. The issue of identity is a power struggle which has to do with inclusion and exclusion. Students who are highly participative on online social media platforms identify as one because they converge and share on the same platforms. They are familiar with the issues discussed, jokes posted and important notices shared. Digital identities are the various presentations, personas, and constructions of an individual in the online space. Digital identity is the composite of images that individuals present, share, and promote for themselves in the digital domain (Dalton & Crosby 2013). Digital identities are constructed with others who may be interacting with or consuming the content of these identities (Brown 2016). When information is posted online it is intended for one audience

but is consumed and interpreted differently by a different audience (Boyd 2014). This is one example of digital identity. A student may post content intended for their specific WhatsApp group, but it is disseminated to different groups on WhatsApp.

The study examines the socialness of online social media, which is the impact it has on already existing communities. Facebook and WhatsApp create digital identities amongst students. Facebook operates with likes. Likes act as a form of external validation that one has worth, validation that what one is expressing is interesting, that one is important (Brown 2016). The more likes a student has on Facebook implies a positive identity on online social media. Seeking a large number of Likes also influences what students choose to post on social media. This often leads to individuals posting only the happy, exciting or extreme moments in their lives (Brown 2016). In such a scenario, the impact of competition and comparison are aroused. There is the feeling of belonging created and identity creation. The importance of receiving Likes parallels behaviours one would find in the physical world from students seeking external validation and relying on external formulas to define their self-worth. Brown (2016) asserts that college students move from being owned by social media to owning social media. Online social media creates identities in students. The relationships between a student's online life and identities and their offline life and identities are increasingly complex (Majchrzak 2009).

Online social media as a virtual space, creates a unique developmental environment with characteristics and opportunities that differ from the physical world that enables individuals to act and interact with each other in ways that are difficult or impossible to do in earlier online or offline settings (Kane et al., 2014). Facebook and WhatsApp allows students to enact identities that they cannot in already existing communities. Online social media gives a platform to have a community to which students enact their digitally acclaimed identities. Identities that are created online are only meant for online social media. Online social media allows digital identities which are desired in organic communities but cannot happen. It acts as a form of escape to students who can become whoever they want in the virtual space. Post modernists recognize an evolving self that is increasingly fragmented and fluid as a result of the interaction of self with technology (Seider and Gardner, 2009). Students use social media to express their identity and opinions and to build social relationships (Park 2014).

The study examines the perceptions of selected MSU students towards online social media specifically Facebook and WhatsApp. It examines their views in relation to the effects of Facebook and WhatsApp on already existing communities. Facebook and WhatsApp due to their characteristics offer students the chance of creating digital identities that can only be enacted on the digital platform. This creation of identity further creates the need to belong in the network public. Social media provide a space for conversation and information gathering, in which individuals can address their need to belong (Gangadharta 2008). Bianchi (2005) argues that students with low self-esteem are frequently involved in online social media activities in order to feel connected with social group members. Students who feel more need to belong are more likely to share their experiences with others on social media and to communicate with their friends using Facebook and WhatsApp. Self-identity is explicitly made a matter of one's assorted enthusiasms and fandoms. Online social media become the focus of students' lives and involve various aspects of social presence and this entails people to enact social roles in virtual communities as much as they do in organic communities. Their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours performed in these platforms, shape digital identity (Heivadi 2013).

Students who participate on Facebook and WhatsApp have what are described as identity performances. Klein et al (2007) asserts that identity performance refers to digital identities that are enacted with a particular audience in mind. It refers to the purposeful expression of actions relevant to those norms predictably associated with a relevant social identity. Digital identities can be expressed with reference to the offline community that is the associations and connections one has and who they know (Turkle 1995). Boyd (2008) asserts that online social media provide the option of a profile which can be seen as a digital body, where one can write themselves into being and express their identities for others to see and interpret. WhatsApp offers this platform by use of the status update. Students update their statuses when they are experiencing the 'good life'. Online activities can reflect offline relations. Facebook users convey their identities through a display of activities by utilizing the features and applications the site offers and these activities are engaged with in relation to their offline experiences (Chatora 2010).

Heivadi (2013) argues that the way in which identities are constructed online is not different from how identity operates offline. Ginger (2008) argues that the social identity does not change

but may be mediated to suit the digital space. Students are conscious of who is viewing their profiles therefore they construct the ideal social formation just the way they want to be perceived. The online construction of the self is influenced by the individual's offline social identities or subjective positions (Chatora 2010). Sprinthall and Collins (1984) outline that establishing an identity involves integration of one's past involvements, personal changes, and society's demands and expectations for the future. Digital identities enacted by Facebook and WhatsApp influence how students perceive online social media. They act as the forces behind their attitudes towards the online social platforms. Creation of digital identities allow students to gain popularity by the number of likes on Facebook and on WhatsApp, the number of status views. The more likes and views on online social media, the larger the following and the greater the popularity. The online popularity will strengthen the offline relationships. This alters the attitudes of selected students towards Facebook and WhatsApp.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Blumler et al (1974) pioneered the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) but according to McQuail (2010), the theory could be traced from the early 1940's when researchers started investigating why people listen to popular radio programs and why they read newspapers daily. Therefore, the theory emerged in response to the needs of explaining why people use certain media and the benefit they get from them (Musa et al 2015).

Musa et al (2015) argue that the emergence of online social media has revived the UGT and provided various areas of research. Ruggiero (2000) asserts that the internet allows individuals to have access to content from all media aspects, it has created a digital library. The convergence of mass media online has exposed consumers to many patterns of the media (Finn 1997). Online social media has given people the chance to explore the various uses and gratifications of media. It allows the validity of this theory, to focus not only on what media does to the people but also what the people do with media. It focuses on media consumers as active and not passive. Williams et al (1988) talks of the demassification of the masses in mass media. He defines demassification as the control a consumer has over the media and the choice to which medium to use. Online social media gives students the opportunity to choose which social platform to

participate on for example Facebook or WhatsApp. Ruggiero (2000) talks of asynchronicity which is the ability of a consumer to send, receive messages and participate on online social media and his/her own convenience. Digital media allows for manipulation of content and gives consumers control (Ruggiero 2000).

The uses and gratifications theory proceeds from the needs of users and the probable gratifications that they derive from media use (Fourie 2001). He notes that people use the media for three main reasons. Firstly media is used for diversion. It is used as an escape for daily work and other routines therefore it is used for emotional release. Secondly media according to Fourie (2001), is used for personal relations, sociability and companionship. People use media to keep them company and even experience media personalities as personal friends (following them on Facebook). Lastly Fourie argues that media is used to explore, challenge, adjust or confirm personal identities. People use media to compare themselves and their situations and values with those of others. The uses and gratification theory provides in depth analysis of the motivations to use social media platforms (Groucher 2015).

The uses of media theorized by Fourie also can be applied to online social media. Students use WhatsApp and Facebook to escape from their school pressure and other pressing matters, to socialize with other friends and follow big celebrities to see what they are up to and also to compare lifestyles with other friends and followers. Facebook offers standards to its users in a non-communicative way. The latest fashion trends are usually adapted from social media.

Whiting and William (2013) produce 7 uses of online social media by social media users which are:

1. Social interaction- Ko et al (2005) argues that people use online social media to communicate and interact with their friends and family. Students use Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with their families and friends as well as communicate with new friends.
2. Information seeking- Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) assert that online social media is used to educate and inform. Students at MSU use WhatsApp to form groups online where they discuss various assignments and school related work.

3. Passing time- this is derived from Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) who claim that media is used for passing time and as leisure. Online social media is used to relax the mind away from a busy day.
4. Entertainment- Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) talk of escapism, where social media users use social network platforms to escape from the real world.
5. Relaxation- Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) assert that relaxation and entertainment are different. Relaxation brings stress relief whereas entertainment provides fun.
6. Communicatory utility- online social media provides information to share with others.
7. Convenience utility- Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) assert that social media usage provides convenience or usefulness to the users.

Uses and gratifications theory is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. It seeks to find out what the people do with the media. Uses and gratification theory seeks to understand why people seek out the media that they do and what they use it for. UGT differs from other media effect theories in that it assumes that individuals have power over their media usage, rather than positioning individuals as passive consumers of media. UGT explores how individuals deliberately seek out media to fulfil certain needs or goals such as entertainment, relaxation, or socializing (David 2016).

The study seeks to analyse whether the uses of online social media by the people have effects on their existing organic communities. In an effort to relax, socialize and create new identities or alternative identities, online social media has great effects on the organic communities and on the students as individuals. Online social media has provided an escape for students to live in their own fantasy land where they can be whoever they want to be without society judging and not agreeing and talk to whoever they want to despite being in different time zones. In an attempt to use social media, students have merged worlds together and have become part of virtual communities. People turn to social media to assist them fulfil needs that need to be fulfilled just by talking to people (Kane 2015). In other words, Kane is arguing that organic communities have been replaced by online social media and substituted for what human interaction can offer. The

study explores whether there is a possibility that what online social media offers and what human interaction offers can go hand in hand or there is one which will suffer due to the rise of the other.

There is not enough knowledge on why people use online social media (Whiting and Williams 2013). Unlike old and traditional media, online social media has emerged with new options (Maitei 2010). The various uses and gratifications of online social media by students influence the perceptions and attitudes towards the social media platforms. Li (2005) asserts that online social media changes the relationship that exists between the mass media and the audiences. The application of the UGT to social media aids in explaining the various reasons why consumers use and like social media. This will also help in determining the attitudes towards online social media. Students use and gratify online social media differently and this will impact on their attitudes and perceptions towards Facebook and WhatsApp.

Theorizing Virtual communities

Rheingold (1999) defines virtual communities as social combinations of people involved in public discussion to form webs of personal relationships online. The study analyses attitudes and perceptions of selected MSU students towards online social media specifically Facebook and WhatsApp. This theory focuses on the participation of students in the virtual community and how this impacts organic communities.

Participating in a virtual communities often requires the participants to contribute and attain knowledge and information on a subject. It is viewed as sharing information and exchanging knowledge (Ridings et al 2002). Andrews (2002) asserts that the use of pseudonyms in the virtual communities encourages participation by users. It creates an online identity to which users can identify with which might be different from that of the organic community. Andrews (2002) further asserts that the recognition that users receive in the form of likes encourages the participation in virtual communities. The argument is that students have aspects they relate with in virtual communities that might lead to them favoring online social media communities other than organic communities. Andrews (2002) talks of identity creation in virtual communities. Students are given the platform to create and enact identities online which are different from their offline identities. This is an effort to create a different person, an identity coveted or desired

but cannot be acquired in organic communities. These encourage participation in virtual communities. Butler et al (2002) claims that recognition allows for self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Blanchard (2002) outlines that users participate in virtual communities because of the strong sense of community that online social media platforms offer and the ability to identify. Facebook and WhatsApp are regarded as communities where students interact with friends and family that constitute the virtual community. The building of a sense of community is aided online social media groups having similar demographics and the same areas of interest (Blanchard 2002).

McMillian and Chavis (1986) community members need the recognition and feeling of belonging in order to participate. Gradinaru (2000) defines a virtual community as imagined and a multi-layered experience. She further asserts that virtual communities epitomize five distinct factors. Their relevance is easy to be clasped. The presence of virtual communities disturbs the traditional accepting of community and challenges the mainstream devices of friendliness as well as the domesticated norms and rules of the community commitment.

Virtual communities have the power to bond people into one despite the different locations. The amount of time and money users invest in virtual communities is evidence that online social media has formed communities (Gradinaru 2001). Matei (2000) argues whether virtual communities should be categorized as *communitas*. He defines *communitas* as a term that suggests a new and conflicting type of sociability which infers the will to be together but also the desire to individualize and distance oneself from others. Anderson (1991) defines a nation as an imagined community. Gradinaru (2001) builds on that concepts and claims that the idea according to Anderson (1991) is that nations were imagined in the sense that people will exist within the same borders but are likely to never meet. Filchy (2003) talks of imagined technology and imagined audience.

Gradinaru (2000) views virtual communities as a cognitive, affective and symbolic construct which is subject to change. Castells (2001) argues that the difference between virtual communities and organic communities takes precedence from the concept of imagination in the community. Baym (2000) outlines that interpersonal interactions between people are the essential anchors of a community. The way people identify themselves and their norms and values are what constitute a community. Students share and enact different identities on

Facebook and WhatsApp and share beliefs and norms that are unique to each social media platform. These are what constitutes a community. Different kinds of ties are built on social media are they become effective and real. Fox (2004) defines virtual communities as the new imagined communities. Virtual communities provide a flexible imagined environment but also present opportunities for identity shifting and even deception because the identifying cues that define one's identity in the physical world – such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on are enacted in much more complex ways online (Fox 2004). The imagined perception of community includes the technology, the content and representation. (Fox 2004). Anderson's imagined community is characterised by common language, temporality (the presence of the homogenous time), and the decline of high centres. In the case of Facebook and WhatsApp, the dominant temporality is the presentism, while the high centres (celebrities, organizations) still play an important role in the dynamic of communication. The sense of community is alive and the community commitment supports its imaginary (Gradinura 2001). Brabazon (2008) however argues that when theorizing virtual communities from the perspectives of national imaginings, it is clear that these social organizations are on the same discursive bandwidth.

Theorizing virtual communities enables to understand the effects of online social media on organic communities. When students use Facebook and WhatsApp they belong to and incorporate themselves into online communities known as virtual communities. They participate in these virtual communities because they offer pitches that do not exist in the organic community. This theory further explains virtual spaces as communities. Participation and belonging to this community has impacts on the organic communities and on the users as well. The study seeks to analyse the attitudes of selected MSU students who belong to these virtual communities on Facebook and WhatsApp.

CONCLUSION

This chapter was a review of other literature by other scholars which supports the study. The study is not an entirely new topic, several literature exists and the researcher linked these reviews and frameworks to better explain the study.

Chapter three

Research Methods and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the methodologies of the study. The research design, sampling procedures, population of the study, data presentation and analysis procedures are discussed. I also discuss the strengths and limitations of the methods employed.

Research approach

This study utilizes the qualitative research approach. Research approach is a strategy and system that comprises of the steps of assumptions to full methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. It is based on the nature of the research problem being addressed.

Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to acquire an understanding of fundamental reasons, opinions and incentives. It provides understandings into the problem and helps to develop ideas or assumptions for possible quantitative research. Qualitative Research is also used to disclose trends in thought and opinions, and plunge deeper into the problem.

Qualitative data collection methods differ using unstructured or semi-structured techniques.

Common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations (Babbie 2010). The sample size is usually small, and defendants are selected to achieve a given allowance. The researcher uses individual in depth interviews and participant observation to conduct the study. The student population is large therefore the researcher narrows it down to a few selected. Qualitative approach to research deals with subjective valuation of attitudes, opinions and behavior (Kothari 2004). The research intends to assess the attitudes and views of selected MSU students towards the socialness of online social media specifically Facebook and WhatsApp. Research in such a situation is based on the researcher's insights and impressions.

The study employs qualitative research approach because the intention is to uncover the thoughts, opinions and attitudes of selected MSU students towards online social media. The one on one interaction with students will dive deeper into the problem at hand. The word qualitative suggests that there is an emphasis on the qualities of entities and meanings that are cannot be

experimentally examined and measured in terms of quantity. Attitudes and perceptions cannot be experimentally examined measured. The researcher intends to deduce the attitudes from the selected sample by use of qualitative approach. Qualitative research approach affords the researcher the perspective of the participants through absorption in a culture or situation and as a result of direct interaction with them getting a better understanding of where they are coming from.

Research design

The research uses an exploratory case study design. Explanatory case studies intend to answer 'what' and 'who' (Dudovskiy 2010). This focuses on issues within the contexts of real-life situations. Boyd et al (2004) states that a research design identifies the information required to address issues, design the method of collecting information, manages and implement the data collection measures, analyses the results and communicate the findings implications. The research design includes decisions such as where, what, which method data will be collected.

De Vaus (2001) defines a case study as the in-depth study of a specific research problem rather than an extensive statistical survey or comprehensive comparative review. It is often used to narrow down a broad field of research into one or a few simple researchable illustrations. The case study research design is useful for challenging whether a particular theory applies to phenomena in the real world. In reference to the previous chapter, several theories have been applied to the study to help understand the research problem well. A case study will allow for the applicability of these existing theories in our current world. It is a useful design little is known of an issue or phenomenon. The case study allows the research to define the behavior of the group as a whole, not individual behavior. The study focuses on a group of students at MSU purposefully selected. The researcher employs an exploratory case study on selected MSU students.

Strengths

The researcher employed an explanatory case study as it is one of the best ways to stimulate new research. The problem being addressed by the study leads to research as there has never been such a study in Africa and Zimbabwe. The findings were valuable and can lead to new and advanced research in the field. The effects of online social media have been researched before and studied but there has not been evident study in a university set up in Africa. The study brings out new research on this topic with the use of case studies. A case study also allows contradiction of existing theories and ideas. There are other theories that are applied in the study that may prove weak or inapplicable to our modern world or to a third world country in Africa as most of them originated in the West. The study is an addition to the many studies that have been conducted on social media. Case studies also give new insight to issues pertaining to the study. The researcher found out that social media was no longer used just for relaxing or connecting with friends and family out of reach but was used on a day to day routine for business transactions, education aid and even forums for families to discuss important matters.

Challenges

Case studies are time consuming. The data collection process was very intensive and long, and this is something the researcher was not familiar with as a first time researcher. It took a long time to develop a case study and develop a detailed analysis. The researcher formed a bias towards subjects as some were colleagues of her own and the way the data was interpreted. This is very common, since it is normal for humans to be subjective. This is also common because the researcher is an active participator of social media.

Research Population

The study focuses on a selected population of the MSU student body. According to William (2011), study does not necessarily refer to a number of people. Population is defined as the entire quality of cases of the type which are the study. Population refers to entire group of people that the researcher wishes to investigate. The researcher purposely selected students to carry out the research for practicality as the school has thousands of students and cannot be all involved in the research. MSU currently enrolls over 24 000 students on all six campuses and this is too large a figure for the researcher to work with. The researcher narrowed down the sample to focus on students at the main campus which is the largest campus. Students were chosen based on gender, class orientation, sex, culture and nationality. From these five classes, 6 students each were

chosen. This was done in order to have all classes on campuses represented. In total, 30 students were interviewed. Participant observation was done randomly and the researcher targeted students who will be converged in groups.

Reflexivity

The researcher, being an active social media user herself, was reflexive during the study. The researcher had to address herself as a participant in order to avoid a biased study. Reflexivity is an attitude of attending systematically to the framework of knowledge structure, especially to the effect of the researcher. Willig (2001) distinguishes two types of reflexivity which are personal and estimological reflexivity. Personal reflexivity contemplates how the research procedure may have transformed the researcher by remodeling his/her thoughts and beliefs (Willig 2001). Estimological reflexivity encompasses critically questioning the manner in which the research was done using research design and analysis of results. Willig (2001) asserts that reflexivity questions how things have been done and what the researcher has gained in the process. Reflexivity entails an alertness of the researcher's involvement to the structure of meanings through the research process (Nightingale, Cromby 1999). It urges how the researcher's involvement with a particular study influences the research.

Malterud (2001) as cited by Han Q (2010) states that a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle taken by the investigation, the methods considered most adequate for this purpose, the findings regarded most appropriate, and the framing of conclusions.

The perspective or position of the researcher shapes all research either quantitative or qualitative. Researchers approach a study position from different positions or perspectives. This can lead to the development of different understandings of a certain situation under study. Malterud (2001) argues that while some may see these different ways of significance as a reliability problem, others feel that these different ways of seeing provide a more developed understanding of composite phenomena.

Understanding the position, perspective, beliefs and values of the researcher is essential in all research, but particularly in qualitative research where researcher is portrayed as the human

research instrument. Reflexivity reduced bias in the study as the researcher is also an active user of online social media. The researcher put aside all feeling and personal attitudes towards online social media and its effects to be able to get desired result. During the process of data collection, the researcher was reflexive by allowing the different responses from the interview change her beliefs and thoughts. Having being an active user of Facebook and WhatsApp, the researcher tended to favor the social media platforms and turned a blind eye to the social strains it was effecting on societies. The result of the study was based upon findings and not personal feelings towards social media. The aim of the study is to show whether these social platforms are social or not and whether the researcher agrees or not does not contribute to the result of these findings. The researcher analyzed data which argues against social media being anti-social and that which agrees that it leads to fragmentation of organic communities. In the study, the researcher participated and observed and in that process conducted herself as a subject to the study and observed her own usage of social media platforms.

Sampling methods

The researcher uses non- probability sampling technique and employs purposive sampling. Sampling is done to guarantee that the data collected will be reflective of the entire population. It is not feasible for researchers to study the entire population hence the need to take a sample that represent the entire population. Keegan et al (2002) states that a sample is an illustration of larger selected population. Punch (2005) defines a sample as the sequent of the population selected for the research. The sample must accurately reflect the attitudes, interests, and behaviors of larger student body.

Non-probability sampling

Kumar et al (1999) states that they are two types of sampling which are probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Hair (1998) states that a probability sample takes the form of premium responses to provide answers that should be suggestive of the whole target audience. Babbie (2007) defines non-probability sampling as any method where samples are selected in a manner not suggested by probability technique. Non-probability sampling does not permit the researcher to evaluate the amount of error present in the study. It is frequently used in mass media researches. The study employs non-probability sampling because it is suitable where volunteers are present (sample). It gains control depending on the researcher's judgment. The

study being a qualitative study, does not require numbers as it is based on the judgment of the researcher. Probability sampling makes use of figures and measuring statistics.

Purposive Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling. Purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) is when the researcher relies on their own judgment to choose members of population to take part in the study. Purposive sampling occurs when components selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher (Dudovskiy 2000). Purposive or judgmental sampling enables the use of judgment to select cases that will best enable to answer research questions and objectives. It is often used when working with very small samples such as in case study research and when cases selected need to be particularly informative (Neuman 2005). Researchers often obtain a sample by using a sound judgment, which saves result in saving time and money.

Purposive sampling proved to be effective as only a limited number of people served as primary data sources due to the nature of research design and aims and objectives. The researcher selected students at MSU based on sound judgment and chose who is most suitable for the research taking note of gender, tribe and class orientation. Students selected were both male and female, Shona, Ndebele or Sudanese and those who reside on and off campus. In purposive sampling personal judgment needs to be used to choose cases that help answer research questions or achieve research objectives. Purposive sampling was cost-effective and time-effective for the researcher as the study sought to run on a very low budget if any and therefore it was suitable since there were no external parties funding the research and the researcher is a student.

Purposive sampling led to vulnerability to errors in judgment by researcher. The judgement of the researcher was not the best suitable for the study and in this case the researcher chose to interview the people in her social space. Purposive sampling had low levels of reliability and high levels of bias. The researcher was vulnerable to the inability to generalize research findings. Purposive sampling relies on intuition and hunch and this does not always give the best results. The researcher had to generalize the findings as some students were vague and did not really clearly bring out their views on the socialness of online social media. There were no strict yes on no answers as there seemed to be mixed feelings amongst them based on their personal feelings and attachments towards online social media.

Methods of data collection

The researcher makes use of in-depth interviews as a method of data collection as well as observance and participation as the researcher is also an active social media user. Data collection is the process of gathering important information about the subject from research participants. This allows the researcher to give detailed results without bias by paying attention to some of the things that she does as well as observe those around her. According to Martins, Lobster and Van Wyk (1999), the data gathering process differs from simple observation at a definite location to an extensive survey of large corporations in the world.

In-depth Interviews

The researcher conducted personal interviews with the students face to face so as to gain firsthand information from selected sample. In-depth interviews are a method of data collection in which participants are asked questions in order to find out their feelings (Hussey D et al 1997). This helped the researcher to collect adequate information and as well establish some of the facts. In-depth interviews helped to gather valid and reliable data relevant to the question. Interviews were vital as they helped to obtain certain information that can be reflected through body language such as frown, wink or change in sitting position. The researcher got to know the interviewees first before the interview and this enabled the interviewees to get comfortable while answering the questions. This also made it possible for the interviewees to answer objectively and express their exact views and portray their attitudes.

Interviews are used as they help to gather valid and reliable data relevant to the question. The technique helps to get a full understanding of the respondent's actions and discover more fundamental reason underlying the respondent's attitude. Furthermore, the researcher used interviews because they allowed personal contact and interaction between the researcher and the interviewee and this enriched the quality of information gained. Selected students were interviewed. The researcher structured questions as follows:

1. How frequent do students use social media?
2. In the given 24hours of the day, how long are they online?
3. What is the relevance of social media in their lives?
4. Does it enhance their personal lives in any way or disrupt their way of living?
5. Do they still have one on one

interactions with their friends and families? 6. Can one go a full week without online social media? 7. What is the significance of online social media in the day to day lives of students? 8. What is the idea of socializing in and around campus in the modern day of social media? 9. What is the main role being played by online social media in their lives? 10. Is online social media disrupting existing communities in your own view? These questions were administered to each interviewee in order to get their attitude towards online social media. The in-depth interviews were conducted in various places around campus such as the great hall, the sports gym, computer laboratories and halls of residence, Nehosho residential area and at Bowling club in Gweru. Each interview took approximately five minutes.

Participant observation

The study employed participant observation as a method. Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as the systematic narrative of events and behaviors in the social setting specifically for the study. Gold (1958) distinguishes four types of participant roles. The researcher was a complete observer in the study. This was done to maintain distance from the observed participants. The researcher employed this method at the bowling club where students relax and refresh and at the great hall where students are in groups waiting for lectures and socializing. The main aim was not to influence the act of the participants as they act more natural when they are not aware that they are being watched.

The researcher observed for a full five minutes for detail. Observations enabled the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing evidence of the situation under study. Participant observation enabled the researcher to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting by close observation and participation. The researcher is an active user of online social media and therefore participated as part of the study and observed how online social media has affected organic communities. The researcher observed her own social relations and see how social media has affected them.

Method of Data Analysis

The researcher employed the conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis as methods of analyzing her data. Rubin and Luck (1999) defined data analysis as enhancement and handling of data to prepare for application.

Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) is an approach to the study of social interaction which embraces verbal and non-verbal conduct. The researcher focused on casual conversation. The researcher collected data in the form of audio recorded conversations. The data was collected with or without researchers' involvement, often simply by recording where the conversation takes place. This helps the researcher in listening to the audio once the interviewees are not around so that she is able to analyze. The researcher also analyzed the gestures of the interviewees and be able to pick up their attitude based on that. Conversation analysis involves the study of talk and other forms of human contact in interaction. The researcher observed that most people would shift uncomfortably when asked if social media interferes in their school activities. These gestures also included looking away, scratching of heads of looking down. The researcher was able to conclude and make findings based on those gestures made by participants. Those who had a negative attitude towards social media being social would vehemently declare it with a firm tone that was 100%, whereas those who were positive towards online social media would be hesitant in a way and their answers were not firmly supported.

CA as a method yields results in precise findings. This is because most students might not be aware that their verbal and non-verbal conduct is being watched closely and monitored. This made it easy for the researcher to gather information even without paying much attention to what the participants are saying.

CA proved difficult when the participant's tone and gestures did not tally. It is not every time that this can be relied on as some people naturally change voice tone and display a lot of gestures because they are shy or uncomfortable.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The researcher employed critical discourse analysis. CDA as a method of data analysis focuses on language as a form of social practice. It examines power relations and principals involved in discourse. CDA analyses precise structures in text and talk. Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are endorsed, produced and resisted by text and talk in the social context (Van Dijk 1997). This is appropriate for the study because according to Fairclough and Wodak (1997),

CDA is important where discourse is a form of action and where discourse is concerned with society and culture. Van Dijk (1998) states that critical discourse analysis deals with the relation between discourse constructions and local and global context.

The researcher uses this method to analyze talk as interviews are being used. The researcher focused on discourse which guides certain ways of talking, defining appropriate ways of talking, writing or conducting oneself and that this can serve a range of social functions. CDA is not a qualitative or a quantitative research method, but it questions the assumptions of the qualitative research method. It reveals the hidden motivations behind a text or choice of a certain method of research to interpret the text. Critical Discourse Analysis is a deconstructive reading and understanding of a text. Each text is engraved within a given discourse. MSU is a society which is heavily endorsed in the 21st century era of technology. The discourse that surrounds the society is that of keeping up with the latest trends in the century and that goes for social media. The researcher applied CDA based on that discourse and found out that most participants had a positive image towards online social media. Emphasis was put on how times were changing and how inevitable it was for organic communities to remain in existence. Participants were hesitant to point bluntly that online social media had taken a toll on their social life. CDA does not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enables the understanding of conditions behind a problem and gives the realization that the essence of the problem and the resolution lie in its assumptions which enable the existence of the text. The real essence of the disruption of organic communities lies in the effects of social media on students at MSU. It aims at viewing the problem from a comprehensive point of view. CDA is meant to provide a higher alertness of the hidden motivations in others and ourselves enabling us to solve concrete problems.

Strengths

CDA remains a matter of interpretation and as there is no data provided through the reliability and the validity of the research findings depends on the logic of the participant's arguments. Constructed arguments are subject to their own deconstructive reading and interpretations. CDA provides a new perspective which can allow for personal growth in the researcher. The researcher was able to interpret the interviews differently and unlock hidden meaning by using CDA. No technology or funding was necessary making it cost effective.

Weaknesses

CDA did not provide definite answers as it is based on continuous debate and argumentation. Interpretation proved difficult for the researcher as it was the first time using CDA.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focuses on the methods employed in collecting data during the study. Critical discourse analysis was used as the researcher engaged immensely with the selected population. The researcher was able to get the attitudes and perceptions of the sample using interviews and participant observation.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the organisational analysis of Facebook and WhatsApp, the main social media platforms discussed in the study. This is an effort to understand how the ownership and funding trends affect the consumption of the social media platforms as products.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF FACEBOOK

Facebook is a social networking platform which was introduced in February 2004 (Carlson 2010). Mark Zuckerberg and his fellow Harvard University student Eduardo Saverin founded the social media platform. It was originally designed for college students on the same campus to connect and only catered for students with valid university e-mail addresses. The online social network spread quickly to most colleges around the United States and eventually included everyone (Phillips 2007).

Facebook expanded its membership eligibility to employees of several companies, including Apple Inc. and Microsoft. Facebook membership grew from 12 million users in December 2006 to 100 million less than two years later (August 2008).

FUNDING MECHANISM AND OWNERSHIP

Prior to its commencement, website operations were paid for by Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin, who had equity stakes in the company. The website also ran a few advertisements to meet its operating costs (Kirkpatrick 2010).

A \$500,000 investment was made to the social networking platform as the first investment for Facebook for 10.2% of the company. Kirkpatrick (2010) asserts that former Napster and Plaxo employee Sean Parker who had been instated as the president was looking for investors as they were running on low funds.

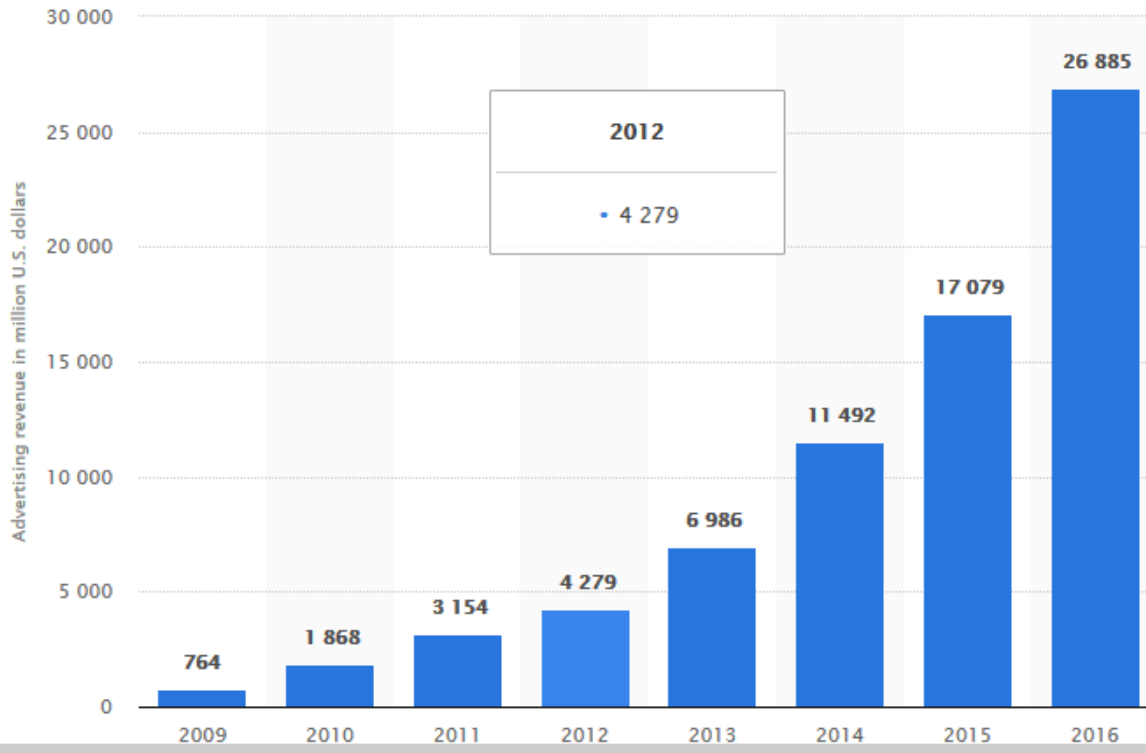
Accel Partners made a \$12.7 million capital investment in a deal that valued Facebook at \$98 million in 2005. Accel joined Facebook's board, and the board was expanded to five seats, with Zuckerberg, Thiel, and Breyer in shared ownership (Kirkpatrick 2010).

Facebook's organizational structure can be described as mixture and combines certain elements of hierarchical and divisional organizational structures. With more than 12600 employees worldwide, Facebook upholds commands from CEO Mark Zuckerberg to ordinary programmers and designers. Facebook consists of product-based divisions and global teams that focus specific products such as Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp and Oculus. Product-based teams also participate in the expansion and upgrading of a wide range of services accessible by the company. For example, services such as Profile, Newsfeed, Messenger, Groups and Events

offered within Facebook social networking site is the result of work done by product-based divisions. These are micro divisions of Facebook which are under its ownership.

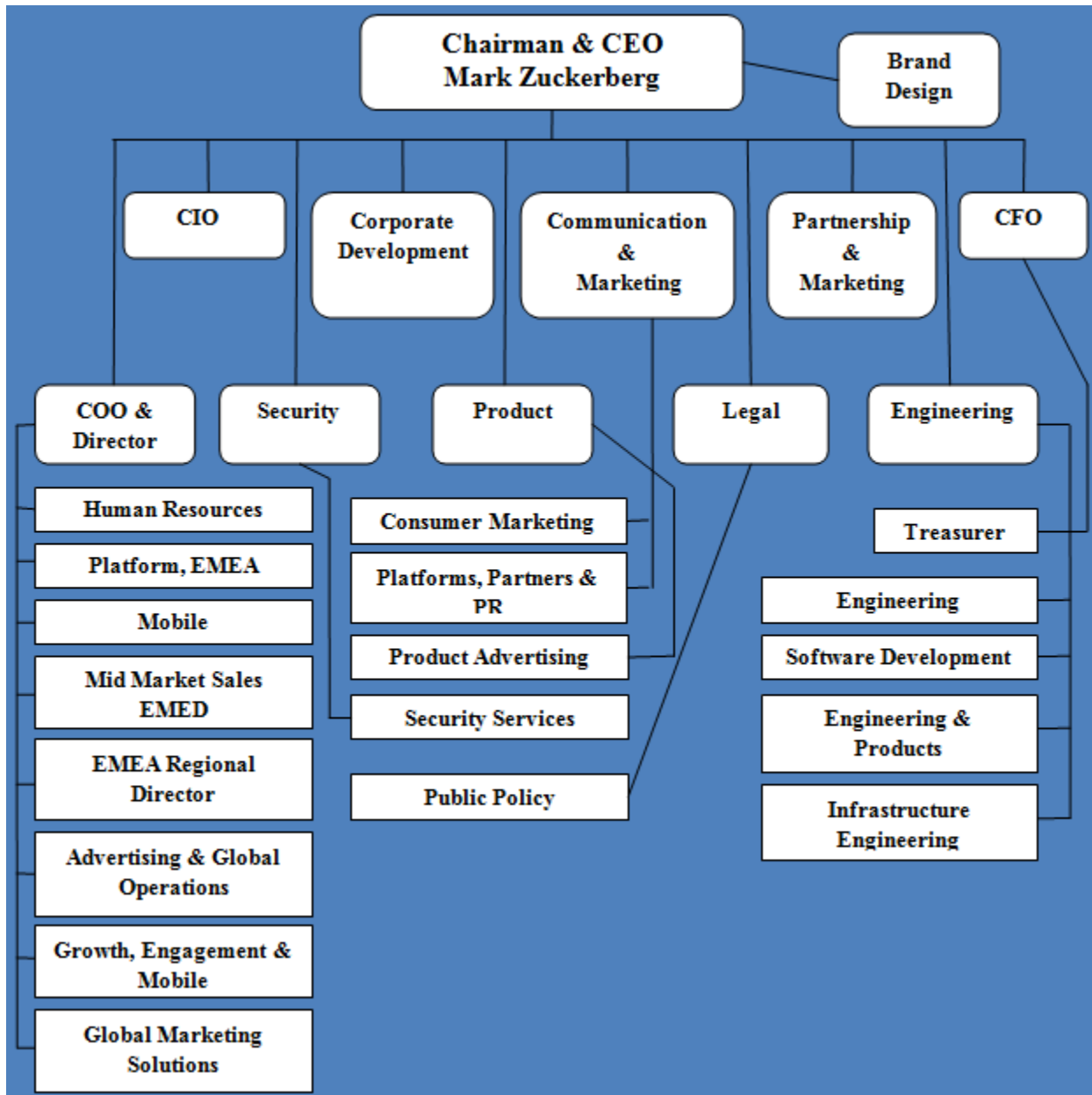
Since its commencement, Facebook was running on revenue generated from the company's day to day transactions and investments. However, in 2008 advertising was introduced for profit maximisation. The profits hiked from 65% (\$1 billion) to 90% (\$3.71 billion). 56% of the revenue was generated from the United States alone. Advertising now accounts for the vast majority of revenue for Facebook (The Statistics Portal). As of 2017, the advertising revenue has increased to \$9.16 billion (Swant 2017). From the statistics provided, Facebook has increased its advertising revenue mainly because of the increase in users. Constine (2017) asserts that Facebook reached 1.86 billion users as a results of the increase in advertising revenue. The content on Facebook increases the number of users as there is diversity and it attracts the number of advertisers who partner with Facebook. Being the social network platform with the highest activity and users most companies and individuals would want to advertise and sell their goods and products through Facebook. Content on Facebook is then designed in a way that there is continued and consistent engagement form its users. They have to create content constantly so as to attract a greater number of users which will in turn attract advertisers and revenue for the company.

The 'socialness' of online social media: Conversations with selected Midlands State University students.



FACEBOOK ADVERTISING REVENUE WORLDWIDE FROM 2009 TO 2016

ORGANOGRAM OF FACEBOOK



Facebook Inc. Organizational Structure

Facebook restructured its shares and gave Mark Zuckerberg ultimate control. Facebook engages in Corporate Social Responsibility activities notably charity fundraising. Mark Zuckerberg pledged to donate 99 per cent of his fortune to charitable efforts including combating various diseases and climate change via selling his Facebook stocks. Accordingly, the new share

structure to be introduced by Facebook Inc. is intended to ensure that Mr Zuckerberg retains his 60 per cent voting power even after he departs with 99 per cent of his Facebook shares.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF WHATSAPP

WhatsApp Messenger is a free and instant messaging service platform for smartphones which uses the Internet to make voice calls, video calls, send text messages, images, GIF, videos, documents, user location, audio files, phone contacts and voice notes using standard cellular mobile numbers (Metz 2016). Data is end-to-end encrypted which means that third parties cannot intervene and hack into conversations. It integrates a feature called Status, which allows users to upload photos and videos. WhatsApp had a user base of over one billion in 2016 making it the most popular messaging application (Albergotti 2014).

WhatsApp, was assimilated in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, who were both former Yahoo employees. Olsen (2014) asserts that in October 2009, five individuals invested \$250,000 in seed funding, and Acton became a co-founder and was given a stake.

Olsen (2014) asserts that WhatsApp was switched from a free to paid service to avoid growing too fast as it was becoming increasingly popular. In 2011, WhatsApp was one of the top 20 apps in Apple's U.S. App Store.

FUNDING MECHANISM AND OWNERSHIP

In April 2011, Sequoia Capital paid almost \$8 million for more than 15 percent of the company. WhatsApp had about 200 million active users and 50 staff members in 2014. Sequoia invested another \$50 million, and WhatsApp was valued at \$1.5 billion (McBride 2014).

On February 19, 2014, Facebook acquired WhatsApp for US\$19 billion, its largest acquisition to date. At \$19 billion, WhatsApp exceeded the value of acquisition for American Airlines and Marriot International. (Allen 2015). During that time, the acquisition was the largest purchase of a venture-backed company in history (Albergotti 2014). Neal(2014) states that Facebook, paid \$4 billion in cash, \$12 billion in Facebook shares, and an additional \$3 billion in restricted stock units granted to WhatsApp's founders, Koum and Acton. Employee stock was scheduled to vest over four years subsequent to closing.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that Facebook's acquisition of WhatsApp was closely related to the Internet.org vision which was also in line with his vision of the company (Lunden 2014). Zuckerberg's vision for Internet.org was to develop a group of basic internet services that would be free of charge to use – 'a 911 for the internet.' (Lunden 2014). The introduction of WhatsApp as a free social networking platform was initially devised to allow users to subscribe more. However, the membership of the social media platform grew extensively and this forced the application to switch from a free form to a pre-paid service. This would give them some context for why they are important, and that will lead them to paying for more services like this (Lunden 2014). This came shortly after WhatsApp's founder Jan Koum announced that the service would no longer charge their users a \$1 annual subscription fee in an effort to remove a barrier faced by some users who do not have a credit card to pay for the service.

WhatsApp introduced the two-step verification feature for users on Android in November 2016. The feature was meant to add more security to users. After enabling this feature, users will also get an option to add their email address for further protection. WhatsApp runs on peer to peer payment money transfers. This is a distributed application architecture that partitions tasks or workloads between peers. Peers are equally privileged, equipotent participants in the application. WhatsApp was created as an alternative to the pricey SMS services. Page (2017) asserts that WhatsApp had a subscription mode in some countries, where users would pay \$1 to download the application. With 700 million users under this model, the company made \$700 million in revenue. The subscription mode was phased out however and the application can be downloaded for free. This however, is only applicable to the US. The application download and operation in Zimbabwe is not free. It requires data or a Wi-Fi connection.

This is how WhatsApp sustains its operation and funding. Other countries still subscribe and pay in order to access WhatsApp through their service providers. The company is not running on advertising as yet but developments are underway to introduce business messaging and advertising for the users (Page 2017). As with the issue of Facebook, WhatsApp produces content which enables users to continuously engage in the application activities. WhatsApp recently introduced the video chat and the status update, features which entice continued use from old users and adoption of the application by non-users because of the innovations. This is

how the company keeps the audience engaged and encourages continued use. WhatsApp completely runs on the subscriptions by its users.

CRITICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FACEBOOK AND WHATSAPP

Facebook is now currently the owner of WhatsApp after having accumulated it for \$19 billion US dollars. The political economy of Facebook evidently becomes that of WhatsApp as they are under the same ownership. This section ventures on the Critical Political Economy (CPE) of Facebook and WhatsApp which is a Neo-Marxian approach.

Political economy is the study of the social relations, particularly power relations that mutually constitute of production, distribution and consumption of resources (Mosco 1966). A CPE of social media is particularly interested in the power relations that govern the production, distribution and use of information (Fuchs 2017). He goes on to say that Marx's political economy is not just a critique of the commodity form, it is also a critique of commodity fetishism, which is of ideologies associated with capitalist society. CPE focuses on power relations and is an interplay between economy and political, social and cultural life. CPE argues for markets to be regulated and is mainly concerned with human needs. The superstructure (Facebook and WhatsApp in this case) is generally speaking of the reflection of the interests of the class that owns the means of production or the economic forces in society (Karl Max 1847). The media, politics, culture and ideas are shaped and influenced by the rich capitalist classes in society. In general, the Neo-Marxists are arguing that the rich use Facebook and WhatsApp to produce dominant ideology in such a way that capitalist media will promote consumerism which will in turn lead to profit maximisation.

Those who control the economy, control the media and the world views. There is no relative autonomy from the grip of capitalism. Zimbabwe as a third world country is exploited in an effort to produce profits in the capitalist system. This class exploitation is motivated by profit maximisation to the few. 95% of the students at MSU are on Facebook and WhatsApp and they use these online social platforms on a daily basis. There is mass consumption of the two products and this encourages mass production of the services in the US for profit maximisation. This can be seen by the amount at which WhatsApp was sold, it cost more than an airline (Allen 2015). CPE argues that the media are economic industries that operate like other industries regardless of

their special roles in society (Garnham 2000). Hokheimer (2002) argues that they bear the characteristics of capitalistic production.

(Douglas and Guback 1984) assert that technologies work for capital, rearranging production and distribution to increase affluence and extend control over the labour. Cohen (2015) argues that while Douglas and Guback (2015) refer specifically to machine technology, their argument can be applied to new developments in communication technologies, including sites such as Facebook, which has a tendency toward capital accumulation and commodification rather than a innovative re-distribution of wealth and control. New technology offers opportunities to dominant classes to amalgamate their power and to justify their modes of operation as well as valorise capital efficiently (Douglas and Guback 1984). With the advent of new technologies, online social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp were introduced and gained prominence. CPE is characterised by industrialisation and commodification of culture (Facebook and WhatsApp) and mass production and consumption of the goods to a targeted market. In mass media models, the role of consumers has been only to consume or to watch and read the product. Web 2.0 (on which Facebook and WhatsApp runs) consumers, however become producers who fulfil a critical role without the producer-consumer or the "prosumer" (Lister et al. 2003), the sites would cease to exist.

Cohen (2015) argues that by uploading photos, posting links, and inputting detailed information about social and cultural tastes, producer-consumers provide content that is used to generate traffic, which is then leveraged into advertising sales. Advertising automatically qualifies Facebook and WhatsApp as capitalists. By providing a constant stream of content about the online activities and thoughts of people in one's social networks, Facebook hits into the members' productivity through the act of surveillance.

Facebook and WhatsApp profit from the unpaid labour time that producer-consumers spend working on their online identities and keeping track of friends (Cote and Pybus 2007). While these sites can offer participants entertainment and a way to socialize, the social relations present on a site like Facebook can obscure economic relations that reflect larger patterns of capitalist development in the digital age. Facebook and WhatsApp are engaging in extensive commodification. Extensive commodification refers to the way in which market forces shape

and re-shape life, entering spaces previously untouched, or mildly touched, by capitalist social relations (Mosco 1996). This process is facilitated through the valorisation of surveillance. Not only is surveillance the method by which Facebook aggregates user information for third-party use and specifically targets demographics for marketing purposes, but surveillance is the main strategy by which the company retains members and keeps them returning to the site (Cohen 2015).

Facebook is engaged in the commodification of what can be understood as free labour, can be situated within more general capitalist processes that follow familiar patterns of asymmetrical power relations between workers and owners, commodification, and the harnessing of audience power (Cohen 2015). Terranova (2004) defines free labour as "excessive activity" not viewed as work which is performed on the internet to create value for capital. The business models of Facebook and WhatsApp ventures depend on the performance of free labour; without it there would be no content and no profit. They rely on capital intensive technologies, labour cuts and market expansion. Just like the capitalist system in an economic world, Facebook and WhatsApp need free and cheap labour in order to make profit. Lazzarato (1996) coins it immaterial labour. Immaterial labour is defined as that which produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity (Lazzarato 1996). It has also been described as labour that produces affect or feelings (Hardt and Negri 2000), or which shapes tastes and opinion (Lazzarato 1996). This type of labour creates relationships and social lifestyles (Hardt and Negri 2004). This is the type of labour which Facebook and WhatsApp operates with in order to make profit.

The fusing of production and consumption and the increasing free labour, sustains Facebook and WhatsApp. It is a critical element of the digital economy (Terranova 2004) and must be situated in the broader political economic context of flexible, lean production of neoliberal capitalism, which increasingly aims to lower the cost of labour and capture value outside of direct productive processes (Terranova 2004).

Adding friends is also Facebook's main growth strategy. The site has not advertised itself, with the exception of wide and consistent mainstream media coverage. Facebook recruited its millions of users through adding friends (Cohen 2015). Facebook effectively utilizes the network effects from user contributions as a growth strategy while presenting the social platform as innocently

connecting one to his/her friends (O'Rielly 2005). Understanding Facebook's reliance on free or immaterial labour theoretically situates the site within the broader development of capitalism's ongoing attempts. In 2006, Facebook introduced the News Feed feature where text and graphic ads can be placed in members' feeds, appearing to be updates from friends (Morrissey 2006). This strategic form of advertising was developed as a response to online users' disdain for disruptive web-based advertising and is a powerful form of advertising because of its ability to become unobtrusively integrated. It is difficult to reconcile a strict Marxist definition of exploitation with the exchange that occurs on Facebook, exploitation in this case can be more broadly conceived as the expropriation of the common (Hardt and Negri 2004), which is to say, knowledge produced collectively or collaboratively becomes private property, which obscures the social dimension of wealth production (Lazzarato 2004).

Facebook may represent a break from mass media in some of the functions of its operation, a reconstitution of power relations has not occurred. Rather, there is the extension of processes of commodification; capitalist social relations and market forces extending into multiple aspects of social life (Cohen 2015). Fuchs (2015) asserts that WhatsApp declared free advertising before it was bought by Facebook in 2014. Facebook derives 89% of its revenue from advertising and because of this, WhatsApp was compelled to find a commodification approach to make profit through advertising (Fuchs 2015). Facebook and WhatsApp have two economies which are the advertising economy and the finance economy where shares are sold to investors in a bid to increase stock market value. These are definite characteristics of a capitalist system.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focuses on the political economy of Facebook and WhatsApp in order to understand the consumption trends at MSU and the influence that has on content.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses and presents findings of the study. As mentioned earlier the study examines the attitudes and perceptions of selected MSU students towards online social media specifically Facebook and WhatsApp. The findings are thematically presented.

Facebook and WhatsApp promote individualism

This study found out that selected MSU students perceive Facebook and WhatsApp as promoters of individualism. The lesser fraction of the sample believed that Facebook and WhatsApp alienate people from society. They argued that most offline relationships were slowly losing importance on social media. When in human interaction there is nothing more to say because of the constant communication on online social media. Students deny and reject that the main use of Facebook and WhatsApp are for interaction and socialisation. They argue that there is no interaction when everyone is buried in their phones laughing and not paying attention to what is around them.

The study found out that 10% of the students interviewed rejected Facebook and WhatsApp and blamed the functions to the fragmentation of existing communities. They argued that time spent on WhatsApp and Facebook was more than that spent in the organic communities. One student noted that since the beginning of the semester she never had a relationship with her roommate because she is a social media addict. She says that she never talks much in person but is always excited about a video chat or phone call on WhatsApp.

My roommate spends most of her time with earphones on and busy chatting on Facebook or WhatsApp. She sets time apart every day to interact with her friends abroad on Facebook. Sometimes she spends hours and never notices when time passes by. She then forgoes studying or doing assignments. We never had a relationship during the semester because of her addiction on online social media. I don't think it is worth losing friends over and time to do school work.
(September 2017)

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as alienators of the organic communities. They cause students to prioritise online relationships more than offline relationships.

This then leads to students not socialising and networking with people in the organic communities and giving importance to the virtual communities. In an interview with Claudine Muzuva, the study found out that Facebook and WhatsApp allowed for virtual friendships which thereby creation of individualism. Organic communities ceased to be of importance as long as one has someone to chat with

I am always updated and have plenty people to talk to on WhatsApp more than I do in person. I can never get lonely or bored when I have Facebook and WhatsApp with me. When my bundles expire that is when I get lonely even if my friends are around. There is always that feeling of something missing when I am offline. I can stay by myself, as long as I am online. I cannot afford not having Facebook and WhatsApp. (Interviewed September 2017)

Wellman (2001) asserts that online social media disrupts offline relationships. He argues that there is the creation of individualism, due to the participation in the virtual communities. The study found out that the higher the participation in the virtual communities, the lower the participation in the organic communities. Williams (2015) claims that there are no such things as societies anymore, there are men and women. Online social media has encouraged individual based social networking and individualism has grown at the expense of traditional groups and pre-existing offline communities.

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as having created individualism by posting of pictures on Facebook and updating statuses on WhatsApp. The study found out that it was an act of self- consideration and alienation of the rest of the community. Students argued that the expectations of a lot of likes on Facebook created individualism, where the student will only be concerned with popularity rather than communication with friends online.

Courtney Revai in an interview indicated that most students use Facebook and WhatsApp as channels to gain popularity and not interact.

When I was about to campaign for the Black Opal Face of Zimbabwe pageant, I used Facebook and WhatsApp to brand and market myself so that I get many votes. After that I have been using Facebook and WhatsApp in trying to make sure I maintain the followers that I have on Facebook. I participate mainly just to post my pictures and review the number of likes that I get from my friends. As a model that builds confidence in me more than anything else. I also utilise an application which allows you to have automatic likes on social media. The more likes one has, the more popular they become. So for me Facebook is more of maintaining my social status than communication. (Interviewed September 2017).

The study found out that Facebook and WhatsApp created individualism in students because of the different uses students require online social media for. Students use Facebook and WhatsApp not only for communication with their peers but for individual purposes. The study found out that through the different uses and gratification students develop a habit of individualism. They only care about what happens to them and becomes of them other than communicate and interact with others.

Facebook and WhatsApp are networks of solidarity

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as unifiers and complements of the virtual and organic communities. They viewed the online social media platforms as bringing each other together through interaction and socialisation. They perceived the Facebook and WhatsApp as social platforms that enabled communication from different geographical areas and made it easy as well. 90% of the sample study viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as being heroes to the modern day communication by allowing interaction and socialisation to be quick easy and fun. They viewed online social media as better alternatives to phone calls, emails and letters. Facebook and WhatsApp are perceived as social platforms that allow for the enactment of different identities under pseudonyms allowing students to communicate with different people from different backgrounds.

From the interviewed conducted students expressed their relief in regards to online social media. MacDonald Marufu noted that

Facebook and WhatsApp allow me to contact my family whilst I am at school without hustle. I am a participant in the family group on WhatsApp and I am in constant contact with my family who reside in South Africa. It brings out together and allows me not to miss home so much. I have an option of video calls some days and voice calls on other days (Interviewed September 2017)

Ellison et al (1996) asserts that online social media allow for new interaction by providing alternative communication. The study found out that students who have families who lie out of the country or in areas far from MSU where they cannot visit frequently take advantage of Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate. It brings their families together and they do not have to miss home as often as they would had they been writing letters to their parents. The new interaction has made communication for them easier.

The study also found out that Facebook and WhatsApp are networks of solidarity as they allow students to meet new people and interact with them widening the scope of their organic communities. MSU being a large institution with a multi campus approach has forced students to interact online due to proximity. The study found out that Facebook and WhatsApp have given students the opportunity to meet other new students who do not exist in their organic communities and interact with them.

Nyasha Zamani, a Basketball player from the school team noted that

Facebook and WhatsApp allowed me to be the basketball player that I am today. I played basketball for a while in high school and when I came here I just decide to stop because I knew no one and had no friends who played Basketball. I was then introduced to the coach by a fellow classmate of mine who then added me into the school team WhatsApp group. I started interacting with other basketball players from all walks of life and my mind was open to a lot of things basketball wise. I have also made new friends because of WhatsApp so I think the platforms help in making new friendships possible. (Interviewed September 2017).

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as networks of solidarity because they complement offline relationships. Ellison et al (2007) suggest that Facebook is used to maintain offline relationships. These relationships might be weak but there is a common interest. Lampe et al (2006) discovered that Facebook users search for people they know more than those they do not know. The study found out that most students at MSU had pre-existing offline relationships that were being strengthened by Facebook and WhatsApp. Students argued that Facebook and WhatsApp helped them to stay in touch with their childhood friends who were not at the same institution or walks of life. One student noted that

Most of my high school friends went to the University of Zimbabwe for their degree programs and I was the only one who came to MSU. As unfortunate as that was, I have managed to stay in touch with most of them and we are very close just like in high school. We talk on a daily basis and are friends on Facebook. When they share their pictures and posts I like them and they do so in return. Facebook and WhatsApp has made it possible to preserve our ten year friendship despite being so far away from each other. (Interviewed September 2017)

Facebook and WhatsApp maintain offline relationships and friendships. Students appreciated the existence of social media networks as they brought them together. Most relationships and friendships on Facebook came from pre-existing communities. The study found out that a few students had requests from new people on Facebook, most of them came from the people they knew.

Priscilla Madzore in an interview claimed that Facebook and WhatsApp had helped her remain with the same circle of friends since primary school

I am very shy and reserved and making new friends whom I can really trust and share every detail of my life is hard. I have managed to maintain my relationships with two of my best friends whom I grew up with in Masvingo. We learnt together at Vurombo Primary School and up until now, they are the people whom I share everything with despite having made friends at MSU. We can on the phone endlessly and communicate each and every day using Facebook and mostly WhatsApp. Our circle as friends has never been broken since 2004. (Interviewed September 2017)

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as networked solidarities because they brought students together when they converge online as well as further perpetuate relationships offline. Students highly recommended WhatsApp groups like Sub wardens group, LEOs Club group and various other groups on WhatsApp that are formed by MSU students. They claimed that these groups helped them to have a sense of belonging and being home away from home. The researcher found out that students felt a sense of belonging and had the feeling of having a family because of these groups that are found online

Simon Muvingi in an interview noted that

When I came to MSU, I had no idea I would be having as many friends as I have today. I am in my fourth year and ndawana shamwari dzakawanda (I have gained more friends than ever) ever since I joined the social groups on WhatsApp and Facebook. Handina kumbofunga kuti (I never thought that) one day I would know almost everyone the way I do now and I have wider network of friends because of Facebook and WhatsApp. I am a participant in the Peer Educators online group on WhatsApp, Sub wardens, Interact Club and the chess club. I have managed to meet a lot of students from different walks of life and I network with them as easily online and offline as well. (Interviewed September 2017)

Boyd and Ellison (2007) assert that online social media are designed within the personal community. The study found out that groups created online usually have individuals with common interests. The study found out that Facebook and WhatsApp allow them to interact with the people around them and within their area. Students claimed that they were taking advantage of Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with even their classmates or other students they live together with.

In an interview with Takudzwa Mawere who lives in Rufaro hostel, the researcher found out that WhatsApp was being used as a platform for networking in solidarity by Rufaro residents. They

have a WhatsApp group, where residents discuss issues of concern despite being in the same geographical area.

We discuss all issues from hostel queries, functions, jokes, important notices and other things.

This is to our advantage because during the course of the semester, we might get busy to the extent of not being able to meet in person the whole hostel. It also gave us an opportunity to know each other, something that was going to be impossible had the group had not been created. I know most of the people I co-habit with and approximately we are 144. WhatsApp allowed us to network as a hostel and I have already made friends whom I can interact with one on one, friends I did not have last semester. (Interviewed September 2017)

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as media which brought them together with former friends and with people surrounding them in society.

Social media platforms are cheaper forms of communication

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as cheaper alternatives to communication. Students favoured online social media because it was cheap as compared to call tariffs and communication with emails. The study found out that it was cheaper for students to communicate with Facebook and WhatsApp with the introduction of the daily, weekly and monthly data bundles. Students argued that buying \$1 worth of daily data bundle was better compared to buying a recharge card which is worth \$1 and can only last up to 4 minutes. Students found it cheaper as well to communicate using WhatsApp because \$1 worth of weekly bundles gives the student access to WhatsApp for a whole week and extra Twitter and Facebook bundles.

In an interview conducted, Crispen Mlangeni noted that as students, there was no source of income and it was inappropriate to ask for money continually from home. As students they were forced to compromise with what is available and what was cheaper.

When you purchase data bundle for WhatsApp for a week, it only costs a dollar and with careful use it lasts for a whole week. From that dollar, I can call my family back home at least twice a week using WhatsApp call, get notifications for lectures and important school stuff and also communicate with my friends. If I am to buy a dollar airtime, I will only use it for less than five minutes and its exhausted. (September 2017)

Facebook and WhatsApp were created as a means to increase social interaction within the audiences at a cheaper and faster rate. Initially, WhatsApp had yearly subscriptions but these were cut off due to the response it received from the audience globally. The study found out that the idea of using an online media platform which runs at low cost is ideal for students.

The study found out that students had developed a dependency on Facebook and WhatsApp as forms of communication with their friends and family. Their mobile phones mainly operated on Facebook and WhatsApp for communication rather than short message services or phone calls because Facebook and WhatsApp were cheaper. The study found out that most students would be not be able to communicate without the use of online social media platforms. One student noted that

WhatsApp and Facebook ndizvo zvakachipa sister. Sema UBA nema USA tingatoomerwa tikasaita WhatsApp. Ndopatonzwira nyaya dzese dzekuchikoro nesocial at a cheaper price. Kana usina WhatsApp unotonzwa kuty pane chisipo. I remember phone yangu yakamboita mayaz just last week. Zvakandiomera in terms of communication and ndakatosarira and ndaitadza kutaura nevanhu vekumba nekuti phone call handiisimudze. Hatingazoti hedu inokanganisa mugariro wedu because some of us depend on it for information plus its affordable. Kuudzwa nemuromo kutosimbisa zvenge zvataurwa paWhatsApp otherwise social nemaface tototita heavy. (WhatsApp and Facebook are the cheapest forms of communication. As university students life would be difficult if there is no Facebook and WhatsApp. That is where we get all social issues and stuff which relates to school at a cheaper price. At one time I lost my phone and life was very difficult because I could not communicate with people from home. I cannot afford phone calls every day.). (September 2017)

Students depended on Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate. Lindgren (2017) argues that the internet brought with it alternative means of communication which are interactive with the use of online social media. The content and applications of Facebook and WhatsApp allowed students to substitute their forms of communication to suit their affordability. Students argued that in an economic set up where cash was hard to come buy operating on low costs was essential as students.

The study found out that students viewed Facebook and WhatsApp as cheaper alternatives of communication as they could encompass anyone in any social class. One student argued that most products are designed to suit those who are rich and can afford side lining those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The study found out that not only is Facebook and WhatsApp affordable to any other person but even to those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. In an interview the student argued that

I cannot afford the latest and trendiest smartphone in the world but Facebook and WhatsApp access on a \$50 phone. I had to make a sacrifice and buy the phone because I calculated the daily expenses I would incur buy buying recharge cards to call my parents in Victoria Falls every day and they were more than the expenses I would incur when I purchase a sub-standard smartphone which supports WhatsApp and Facebook. The model that I have does not consume data at a faster rate as compared to other phones therefore, I can easily communicate at low cost.
(September 2017).

The interviews conducted pointed out that Facebook and WhatsApp had been adopted by most people more than other social media platforms. Students preferred the online social media platforms because they run on a low budget. This is the reason why most students favored the online social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is an analysis of the findings of the study. The researcher found out that students had different attitudes towards Facebook and WhatsApp, caused by different forces behind them. The findings have been presented thematically.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The study examined the attitudes and perceptions of selected MSU students towards online social media. It surveyed the attitudes towards Facebook and WhatsApp in a university set up. The intention of the study was to assess whether Facebook and WhatsApp had effects on already existing communities at MSU. It assessed whether online social media played a role in the fragmentation of organic communities. The study employed the uses and gratification theory in its execution. The uses and gratifications theory ensues from the needs of users and the possible gratifications that they derive from media use. The study examined how the uses and gratifications of Facebook and WhatsApp lead to the fragmentation of organic communities. The study analysed how students used the online social media platforms and how the need for the platforms affected the human interactions in their communities. Uses and gratifications theory is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. The study analysed whether the uses of online social media by the people in turn have effects on their existing organic communities. People turn to social media to assist them fulfil needs that need to be fulfilled just by talking to people

The study utilised the qualitative research approach because it is primarily exploratory research. It is used to acquire an understanding of fundamental reasons, opinions and incentives. It provides understandings into the problem and helps to develop ideas and discloses trends in thoughts and opinions. The researcher employed the exploratory case study. It focuses on issues within the contexts of real-life situations. . The case study research design is useful for challenging whether a particular theory applies to phenomena in the real world. The study had employed the Uses and gratifications theory and theorizing virtual communities in the previous chapter. The case study research design enabled the researcher to establish whether the theories are applicable to the real world especially in Africa since these theories were propounded in the West. Case study design was time consuming for the researcher as it was the first time conducting a study.

The researcher, being an active social media user herself, was reflexive during the study. The researcher had to address herself as a participant in order to avoid a biased study. Reflexivity questions how things have been done and what the researcher has gained in the process. The

concept of reflexivity allowed for minimising bias in the study. This was a possibility as the researcher is an active user of online social media as well. There was need to put all feelings aside and conduct the study as a participant as well.

The study employed non-probability sampling and utilised purposive sampling. Sampling is done to guarantee that the data collected will be reflective of the entire population. The study could not be conducted on the entire population of MSU as the school has approximately 24 000 students. Purposive sampling was ideal because the sample selected was based on the researcher's judgement. This was an advantage because the researcher knew exactly what she wanted for her study and having to choose on her own judgement gave her the opportunity to do what she thought was right for the research. This was also ideal because there was no cost accrued and it was time conscious.

Purposive sampling however, proved to be biased as the researcher would select students close to her social circles. The study made use of in-depth interviews and participant observation as methods of data collection. In-depth interviews helped to gather valid and reliable data relevant to the question. Interviews were vital as they helped to obtain certain information that can be reflected through body language such as frown, wink or change in sitting position. The researcher administered questions as follows:

1. How frequent do students use social media?
 2. In the given 24hours of the day, how long are they online?
 3. What is the relevance of social media in their lives?
 4. Does it enhance their personal lives in any way or disrupt their way of living?
 5. Do they still have one on one interactions with their friends and families?
 6. Can one go a full week without online social media?
 7. What is the significance of online social media in the day to day lives of students?
 8. What is the idea of socializing in and around campus in the modern day of social media?
 9. What is the main role being played by online social media in their lives?
 10. Is online social media disrupting existing communities in your own view?
- The questions dug deep in the personal lives of the participants so as to get their attitudes towards online social media.

The study also employed participant observation. The researcher conducted the research as part of the study as well in order to participate and observe other students and their trends in using Facebook and WhatsApp. . The main aim was not to influence the act of the participants as they

act more natural when they are not aware that they are being watched. Participant observation enabled the researcher to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting by close observation and participation. As a female researcher, the study was biased towards male students as they were more open to interacting with a female researcher. The researcher felt more comfortable and confident to approach male students other than female students.

The study found out that selected students at MSU had different views towards online social media. Students view Facebook and WhatsApp as creators of individualism. It does not allow interaction from both the offline and online communities. The study also found out that students view Facebook and WhatsApp as networks of solidarity. It allows people to converge and interact on the social network platforms and socialise. The study found out that students view Facebook and WhatsApp as cheaper alternatives of communication. This is the reason why most students favour the social media platforms

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends that there be a more extensive study on this topic which looks at various other universities in Africa or Zimbabwe in order for there to be an adequate representation of the effects of online social media on university communities. The study was specifically for MSU and other aspects or findings cannot be applied to Universities in other African countries or in the Zimbabwean economy. Different universities operate differently and in different economies. This study cannot be a general approach and assumption to all universities in Zimbabwe or Africa. The economy of Zimbabwe is different from that of South Africa and they had internet penetration at different periods in time. There is need for an extensive research on this topic to further expand the findings.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is a summary of the previous chapters in the study. It looks at the theoretical lenses applied in the study, the methodologies used in data collection and the findings of the study. It also gives recommendations on how the study can be improved and findings can be expanded in the course of the study.

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